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MASTER' S THESIS

Sadık Burak AKER



T.C.

ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND  
STRATEGIC RESEARCH

**THE IMPACT OF TÜRKİYE'S DEFENSE AND  
SECURITY POLICY AS A MIDDLE POWER STATE  
IN THE CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER: A CASE  
STUDY OF THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR**

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**Supervisor**  
**Assoc. Prof. MD. Nazmul ISLAM**

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## CONFIRMATION PAGE

The thesis study “The Impact of Türkiye’s Defense and Security Policy as a Middle Power State in The Changing Global Order: A Case Study of The Second Karabakh War,” prepared by Sadık Burak AKER is approved anonymously/by majority votes by the jury as Master’s thesis in Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Institute for International Relations and Strategic Research Department of Security Studies.

Jury Member	Institution	Signature
Assoc. Prof. MD. Nazmul ISLAM	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	
Approve <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reject <input type="checkbox"/>		
Asst. Prof. Kanan ASLANLI	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	
Approve <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reject <input type="checkbox"/>		
Assoc. Prof. Ülkü Nur ZENGİN	Police Academy	
Approve <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reject <input type="checkbox"/>		

Date of Thesis Defense: 07.02.2025

I approve that the thesis fulfills necessary terms as a Master’s thesis at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies.

Director of Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies

Assoc. Prof. İbrahim DEMİR

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work, that I have not had any unethical behavior infringing patent rights and copyright at any stage from the planning to the writing of the thesis, and that I have obtained all the information in this thesis within academic and ethical rules, and that I have cited all the information and comments used in this thesis.

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Sadık Burak AKER



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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Impact of Türkiye's Defense and Security Policy as a Middle Power State in The Changing Global Order: A Case Study of The Second Karabakh War**

This study focuses on Türkiye's defense and security priorities, policy, and Türkiye's middle power status. As an active regional and global actor, Türkiye has strategically placed its defense and security policy as the central area of Türkiye's foreign and domestic policies. Therefore, Türkiye has been on the stage, taking roles and direct or indirect actions during regionally and globally emerging conflicts and crises. Owning such an approach during conflicts and crises, Türkiye has been involved individually or as part of a coalition or alliance like NATO or the UN. The involvement of Türkiye in Libya, Syria, and the Balkans crises can be sorted under the parts of this policy. Due to their shared national background, Türkiye and Azerbaijan have forged a deep and robust bond throughout history. Türkiye's undeniable support, demonstrated through political, military, economic, and educational guidance, as well as the provision of arms and weapons to the Azerbaijan Armed Forces, has significantly fostered Azerbaijan's position. This robust security policy has underscored the strength of the Türkiye-Azerbaijan relationships and significantly strengthened Türkiye's middle power status. The most recent example of such support was witnessed in 2020 during the Second Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

This study will focus on Türkiye's active attitude in the defense and security policy area by using a neorealist (offensive realist) approach through a case study of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations and the Second Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia, including Türkiye's involvement as its middle power status.

**Keywords:** Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Defense and Security Policy, Middle Power, The Second Karabakh War.

## ÖZET

### **Değişen Küresel Düzendeki Orta Güç Bir Devlet Olarak Türkiye'nin Savunma ve Güvenlik Politikasının Etkisi: İkinci Karabağ Savaşı Örnek Olay Çalışması**

Bu çalışma Türkiye'nin savunma ve güvenlik önceliklerine, politikalarına ve Türkiye'nin orta güç statüsüne odaklanmaktadır. Aktif bir bölgesel ve küresel aktör olarak Türkiye, savunma ve güvenlik politikasını stratejik olarak dış ve iç politikasının merkezine yerleştirmiştir. Bu bağlamda Türkiye, bölgesel ve küresel ölçekte ortaya çıkan çatışma ve krizlerde doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak sahnede yer almış, rol üstlenmiştir. Çatışma ve krizlerde bu tür bir yaklaşımı benimseyen Türkiye, gerek bireysel olarak gerekse NATO veya BM gibi bir koalisyon veya ittifakın parçası olarak müdahil olmuştur. Türkiye'nin Libya, Suriye ve Balkanlar'daki krizlere müdahil olması bu politikanın parçaları olarak sıralanabilir. Ortak ulusal geçmişleri nedeniyle Türkiye ve Azerbaycan tarih boyunca derin ve sağlam bir bağ kurmuştur. Türkiye'nin siyasi, askeri, ekonomik ve eğitim alanındaki rehberliğinin yanı sıra Azerbaycan Silahlı Kuvvetlerine silah ve mühimmat sağlayarak gösterdiği yadsınamaz destek, Azerbaycan'ın konumunu önemli ölçüde güçlendirmiştir. Bu güçlü güvenlik politikası Türkiye-Azerbaycan ilişkilerinin gücünün altını çizmiş ve Türkiye'nin orta güç statüsünü önemli ölçüde sağlamlaştırmıştır. Bu desteğin en son örneği 2020 yılında Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan arasında yaşanan İkinci Karabağ Savaşı sırasında görülmüştür.

Bu çalışma, neorealist bir yaklaşım kullanarak Türkiye'nin savunma ve güvenlik politikası alanındaki aktif tutumunu, Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan arasındaki İkinci Karabağ Savaşı örnek olayı üzerinden ve Türkiye'nin orta güç statüsü ile müdahil oluşunu da kapsayacak şekilde ele alacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, Azerbaycan, Savunma ve Güvenlik Politikası, Orta Güç, İkinci Karabağ Savaşı.



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## ICONS AND ABBREVIATIONS INDEX

BRICS	: African Media Representatives Training Program
BSEC	: Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization
BTK	: Baku-Tbilisi-Kars
CONOPS	: Concept of Operations
ECO	: Economic Cooperation Organization
EW	: Electronic Warfare
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
GNP	: Gross National Product
IAW	: In Accordance With
IMF	: International Monetary Fund
IR	: International Relations
MFA	: Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIKTA	: Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SYS	: Samsun Yurt Savunma
TAI	: Turkish Aerospace Industries
THY	: Turkish Airlines
TIKA	: Türkiye's Cooperation and Coordination Agency
TRT	: Turkish Radio and Television Corporation
UAE	: United Arab Emirates
UAS	: Unmanned Aerial Systems
UAV	: Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
UN	: United Nations

US : United States of America

USSR : Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The middle power concept, first defined by Giovanni Botero in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, “as an actor with sufficient strength and authority to stand on its own without the need for help from others” and since then has inhabited a unique and vital position within international relations (IR) literature (Wight, 1978). Middle powers are characterized by their ability to influence regional dynamics without directly threatening the interests of great powers (Jordaan, 2003). Throughout history, the global order has been divided between great powers that dominate the international system and order and small powers that prefer or are forced to adopt the global order. Middle power states locate themselves between these two extremes, possessing and enhancing capabilities that enable them to utilize impact in regional or sometimes global events without directly or indirectly challenging great power states. With its strategic location, historical background, economic capability, military power, and ability to act as a regional power broker, Türkiye exemplifies this categorization.

Since the foundation of the state, security has taken a crucial place in Türkiye's foreign and domestic policies. Additionally, since the beginning of the 2000s, Türkiye has pursued to improve its influence through assertive and multidimensional foreign policy, taking place on stage in conflicts and crises in especially neighboring states or territories and globally emerging conflicts and crises, individually or as a part of a coalition or alliance like NATO or the UN in regions such as Syria in the Middle East, Libya in North Africa, Balkans in Europe, in the South Caucasus. This policy approach reflects prioritized Türkiye's security requirements stemming from the pressures in the anarchic international system which is defined by the realists as a system with no central authority above states, its aspirations to converge its middle power, and the ambition of maximizing its power in the actively involved regions. This thesis aims to find out how Türkiye operationalizes its middle power status in pursuit of regional stability and influence and examines The Second Karabakh War as a case study within that understanding.

This thesis initially analyzes Türkiye's middle power status and then focuses on the effects of Türkiye's middle power status and Türkiye's defense and security policy from an international security perspective over the Second Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which reoccurred in September 2020, one of the critical events in the South Caucasus region. Türkiye played a key role in taking place in the center of the conflict with

its active involvement in terms of political, military, and diplomatic support to its sister nation, Azerbaijan, against Armenia. Türkiye's role during the conflict highlighted its foreign policy and emphasized its success and importance as a middle-power state in the Caucasian region and a promising global actor in politics. By utilizing with the perspective of one of the mainstream international relations theories, neorealism, specifically offensive realism, this thesis aims to study Türkiye's foreign policy, its role as a middle power, and the broader implications of its involvement in the conflict as playing its middle power role.

This study aims to explain the relationship between Türkiye's middle power status and its defense and security policy during the Second Karabakh War. Specifically, the main research question of this thesis is: “By exploring Türkiye's role and support to Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War, whether and how did Türkiye hold the middle power status in the changing world order?” While answering the main research question, the paper also studies the following sub-questions:

1. By employing Mearsheimer's (2001) neorealism theoretical approach, whether and how Türkiye's material and diplomatic capabilities ensure the middle power status?
2. By looking at the middle power concept, why did Türkiye provide security and defense support to Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War, and how did Türkiye's involvement influence the dynamics and outcome of this conflict?

While Türkiye's middle power status or its defense and security policies in various situations and crises, such as Syria, Libya, or Türkiye-Armenia-Azerbaijan relations have been discussed in numerous studies in IR literature (Köse&Wakizaka, 2022; Süssler, 2019; Yalçın, 2012), its application to Türkiye's foreign policy — particularly in the context of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations from Türkiye's defense and security policy combined with its middle power status — remains underexplored. Using a neorealist approach, this thesis analyzes Türkiye's security and foreign policy preferences, situating it within broader theoretical debates about power, anarchy, and state behavior in the international system inside the borders of middle power status. This study's significance lies in Türkiye's contribution to understanding the impact of its middle power status as its preference for diplomacy and security policy in contemporary conflicts.



## **2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Methodology**

This thesis adopts a positivist methodology and uses the Second Karabakh War as a case study to show the effects of Türkiye's middle power status from a neorealist perspective. A case study is an in-depth examination of a limited number of cases based on observational data that offers insights into a broader population of cases. These studies concentrate on events, individuals, organizations, processes, and institutions to address questions regarding causation and mechanisms.

Case studies are highly concentrated, signifying that the researcher allocates substantial time to analyze and present the selected case or cases meticulously. The case is regarded as a significant source of evidence that substantiates the argument (Gerring, 2017). According to Yin, a preeminent figure in case study research, a case study is “an empirical research method that investigates a phenomenon in depth within its real-world context” (Yin, 2017, p. 15).

The casual factor in case-study research is primarily observation, thereby defining it as an observational form of analysis. Nonetheless, case studies can yield data that demonstrate an experiment's characteristics. The evidence constituting a case study may consist of either qualitative or quantitative data, and these studies can encompass a single case or multiple cases. This study embodies a single case study by presenting two hypotheses using the A causes B approach within the analysis framework.

H1: Türkiye has proven its middle power status by its material and diplomatic capabilities.

H2: By using Türkiye's material and diplomatic instruments in the Second Karabakh War, Türkiye held its middle power status.

This study accessed information through the discourses of leaders, academic articles and books, local and global news websites, the websites of governmental agencies and international organizations, and official reports. The main theoretical approach of this thesis is neorealism, and the analysis is done by assuming that Türkiye is a middle power and explaining the reasons.

## 2.2. Realism

Realism is one of the main theories of international relations with origins dating back to the 5th century BC Athenian Thucydides. In general, realists have formed the tradition of realist theory with common answers to the nature and characteristics of the international environment, who is the main actor in international relations, the primary goal of this actor, and the means used by the actor to achieve this goal. In this context, realists recognize that the essence of international relations is the struggle and competition between states, and states are accepted as main actors by realism. Hans J. Morgenthau, one of the pioneers of classic realist theory, defines international politics as a struggle for power (Morgenthau, 1948).

John Mearsheimer, a proponent of offensive realism, argues in essentially similar terms that there is constant competition and struggle for power in the international system. According to realists, the most important characteristic of the environment in which international relations occur is that there is no centralized power over sovereign states, which are the final decision-makers whose decisions are binding. Realists define this environment as “anarchy”. Thomas Hobbes bases anarchy on a totalitarian situation where everyone is against everyone else (Hobbes, 1998). Kenneth Waltz, the founder of neorealism or structural realism, also placed anarchy at the center of his theory. Realists argue that the international political environment, unlike the national political environment, is characterized by anarchy rather than hierarchy and that each actor must act in such a way that it can take care of itself if necessary because, in an anarchic order, there is no one to rely on but itself. Realists describe this situation with the concept of “self-help.”

Realists see states as the main actors in international relations and recognize that international relations are determined by these interstate relations. However, states are not the only international actors. According to this school of thought, what distinguishes states from other actors is that states have sovereignty.

Although there are differences in the understanding of the state within realism, realists argue that states are not equally effective in influencing international relations and that big states are the most influential actors. Realists believe that the primary goal of states, whether they are great powers or not, is to survive in what is defined as an anarchic environment. States and their leaders primarily want to preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of their countries, even if they act to achieve other political goals (Mearsheimer, 2001).

According to realists, the precondition for states to achieve all other goals is, first and foremost, their survival (Waltz, 1979). Another assumption about states is that they can never be sure of each other's intentions. Mearsheimer explains that states can face rapid consequences for their actions, either positive or negative and that states can adopt hostile or friendly attitudes over time (Mearsheimer, 2001). These changing attitudes of states led to the security dilemma concept, which was initially determined by Herbert Butterfield in 1949 and coined by John Herz in 1950. Basically, the security dilemma occurs when a security measure taken by a state is perceived as a threat by another actor, and this other actor, seeking to realize its goal of survival, takes countermeasures to protect itself, thus creating a cycle. As a result, states are more concerned with how much they gain compared to other states than how much they gain because of their policies or actions.

For realists, power is the tool states use in international relations to survive and achieve their goals in an anarchic order. However, while some realists see power as an end for the state, others see it as a tool that states use primarily to ensure their security or achieve other goals. Realists who also view international relations as power politics have developed the concept of power balancing in this context. As a result of the aforementioned security dilemma cycle, the state or states have attempted to restore the balance of power by forming alliances to maintain the status quo against countries that have become stronger or have taken measures against themselves in a way that threatens other states.

Although the concept of balance of power is accepted in realism, there are differences among realists in their assessment of the balance of power. These differences include whether the balance of power is a natural and inevitable condition independent of the intentions and purposes of states and politicians. The realism school of thought generally has three approaches (classical realism, structural realism, and neoclassical realism). Among them, classical realism tries to explain the theory based on human nature and human behavior, structural realism based on the international system, and neoclassical realism based on domestic factors. This thesis will initially explain classical realism and focus on the structural realism approach by employing neorealism as the main theoretical framework.

### **2.2.1. Classical Realism**

Classical realism examines the foreign policies of states and their relations with each other, it assumes that the most important factor determining international relations is human

nature, intentions, decisions, and behaviors. For this reason, classical realists view international relations from a holistic perspective and consider national and international policies as areas that affect each other. The foundations of realist theory were laid in Thucydides' "The Peloponnesian War," which he wrote after the war between the city-states of Athens and Sparta. In this work, Thucydides described events and policies that would form the basis of concepts such as alliances, balancing, deterrence, military power and arms race, balance of power, and diplomacy, using a specific cause and effect relationship. While explaining these policies, he emphasized the impact of the decisions and attitudes of statesmen on the beginning and development of war. Machiavelli, another famous thinker of classical realism, states in his work "The Prince" that in cases where the survival of the state is at stake, rulers may have to act against the general rules of morality and that this is acceptable (Machiavelli, 1998). In the management of international relations, when the survival of states is at stake, the moral rules for rulers are explained by realists with the concept of political morality as opposed to individual morality.

In his work *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes, another prominent figure in the field of classical realism, posited that the phenomenon of anarchy represents a pivotal aspect of both foreign and domestic policies at the state level. Hobbes posited that the essence of politics, akin to the nature of human beings, is a state of pervasive fear of death and an incessant struggle for survival in which all are pitted against all (Hobbes, 1998). He refers to this pre-civilization state as the state of nature. Given that human life is inherently cruel, short, and miserable, the only viable solution to the anarchic situation is the establishment of a centralized sovereign power, the Leviathan, which can effectively harness people's collective efforts through a combination of fear and coercion. In an international system lacking centralized power, Hobbes posits that there is an endless state of war based on competition, distrust, and glory, with all parties engaged in conflict with one another. The transition from this pre-civilized state of nature to a civilized state can only be achieved through the creation and maintenance of a sovereign, supreme state and the establishment of a security agreement. This agreement must guarantee the security of all parties involved and establish a commonality among them. It is accepted that through the establishment of a sovereign state with absolute authority, people will voluntarily carry out joint efforts in unity, as they will no longer be at the mercy of external threats. In a civilized state, that is to say, a state of peace and order, people are afforded the opportunity to engage in constructive and

productive activities without the constant threat and danger of death, with the assurance of state protection (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013).

The natural situation, which is believed to be resolved through the formation of a sovereign entity, namely the state, also gives rise to the emergence of an additional challenge. The establishment of a peaceful and civilized life is a possibility within the context of a single sovereign state. However, in the case of a plurality of states, the ideal peace and civilized state cannot be achieved.

The establishment of a sovereign state, created by people to escape the state of nature in which they are in fear, gives rise to a state of nature termed the 'security dilemma' in the literature of international politics between them and other states established for similar purposes. The security dilemma gives rise to a state of national and international insecurity, resulting from the coexistence of a state that provides internal security and the anarchy of the international system. The security dilemma cannot be eliminated due to the impossibility of establishing a global one-world state. In accordance with Hobbes's theory, the international state of nature is characterized by the absence of enduring or assured peace between sovereign states, with a prevailing state of actual or potential war. While domestic peace within the state can be attained, international peace remains a mere illusion, dangerous and unattainable (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013).

Morgenthau, the pioneer of realist theory in the 20th century, posits his theory on six fundamental principles:

1. Politics is governed by objective laws created by societies, rooted in human nature, which care for and pursue their own interests.

2. Political realism follows the road map in international politics by considering the concept of interest defined in terms of power. Politicians make decisions on the basis of interests defined in terms of power. In this sense, politics is an “autonomous sphere of action” that is governed independently by wealth, religion, and morality (Thompson, 1985, p.5).

3. In realism, self-interest is a fundamental fact of the human nature. International politics is a theater where the interests of states clash. However, interests can change over time. Realism has a structure that adapts to the changing political reality. In other words, the

concept of interest defined by power is a universal goal, but interest, like power, can be interpreted differently in different political and cultural conditions.

4. Political realism recognizes the moral significance of political action. International relations ethics is a political ethic with inherent tension between successful political action and moral judgment. Politicians have limited freedom to do the right thing because of their heavy responsibilities to ensure the security and welfare of their citizens, and they should try to do the right thing according to the circumstances of the time.

5. Nations should not accept their own ideologies as universal moral values and impose these rules or conceptions on other nations, nor should they use their power to do so in order to avoid creating a dangerous situation that threatens international peace and security.

6. Political realism recognizes that the political sphere has autonomy separate from the legal, economic, or moral sphere.

In contrast to the classical realists, the second realist movement, structural realism, emerged by claiming that universally valid and unchanging characteristics of international relations can be identified.

### **2.2.2. Neorealism (Structural Realism)**

Neorealism, also referred to as structural realism, is a theoretical framework within the discipline of International Relations (IR) that highlights the structure of the international system as the main factor influencing state behavior. Originally developed by Kenneth Waltz in his influential work, "Theory of International Politics," in 1979, neorealism expands upon classical realism by shifting the focus from human nature and the traits of individual states to the systemic forces that guide state interactions and providing a scientific and systematic approach to understanding state behavior and the structure of the international system. Unlike classical realism, which attributes state behavior to human nature and individual leadership, neorealism focuses on the structural limitations of the anarchic nature of the international system. According to Waltz, individuals such as statesmen or politicians do not play as important a theoretical role as the international structure that influences the behavior of states (Kauppi & Viotti, 2024). Similarly, Kissinger argues that foreign policymakers are not completely above external constraints and that their ability to maneuver within those constraints can be as effective as their diplomatic skills allow (Kauppi & Viotti, 2024). In

his work, Waltz is concerned with the dynamics in the system itself rather than the units that make up the system as a level of analysis. A system consists of two distinct elements: the structure and the interacting units. The arrangement of the parts defines the structure. With systematic theory, Waltz sought to show how this structure and the interacting elements work and interact. Waltz defines domestic political structures in three steps. "First, by the principle by which they are organized or ordered; second, by the differentiation of units and the specification of their functions; and third, by the distribution of capabilities across units" (Waltz, 1979, p.82).

Regarding the principles of order, Waltz argued that the parts of international political systems are in a relationship of coordination and that each is equal. "No one has the right to command, and no one is obliged to obey" (Waltz, 1979, p.88). While national political systems are centralized and hierarchical, international systems are decentralized and anarchic. The principles of order in the two structures are markedly different, even contradictory. While national political systems have institutions of government as their concrete counterparts, in international political systems, each part is formally equal to the other parts and is not obliged to obey. From this perspective, international systems have been described by William T.R. Fox as "politics in the absence of government," and anarchy has been adopted as the organizing principle of the international system (Fox, 1959, p.35). Although units act independently for their own interests within the international system, anarchy constitutes the international system as a force that affects the behavior of units by constraining their behavior and cannot be controlled by them. Anarchy is spontaneous and has an independent power to constrain the behavior of states. The main purpose of states is to survive within this structure by producing their own policies against the variable policies of states. According to Waltz, the anarchic structure of the international system without hierarchical relations ensures functional equality between the parts of the system. In other words, in international systems, states do not differentiate by the functions they perform, but they can cause the international structure to differentiate by the changes in the capabilities of the units within the international structure. Within the international system, states differ from each other in terms of their capabilities and functionality. Although capabilities are specific to units, the distribution of those capabilities is specific to the international system. This is because the structure of the international system changes through changes in the distribution of capabilities among the units of the system.

As the international structure changes, so does the degree of interdependence of the units, i.e., the states that are part of the system. Interdependence is a relationship between equal powers, and interdependence varies in proportion to the amount of change in the difference in the capabilities of the units. While explaining states' capabilities, Waltz remarks that states' characteristics such as population, geographical size, natural resources, economic and military power, political stability, and governance of power should be evaluated, and states will gain a place in the international system to the extent of these capabilities.

It was envisaged that it would be very difficult to calculate the exact capabilities of states because the security perceptions of states will change according to the area of emphasis and time. Although this suggests that the anarchic international system will be chaotic, the order within the system is ensured by the concept of "balance of power." In order to survive in the system and pursue their political goals, states try to achieve results through political moves by using their resources in the most economical way. These efforts are defined as internal efforts, such as increasing economic capacity and military power or making better strategic decisions, and external efforts, such as expanding and strengthening alliances or weakening opposing alliances.

### **2.2.3. Defensive and Offensive Realism**

Within structural realism, two different approaches have emerged in the debate over the amount of power that states wish to acquire in the international system. The first is defensive realism, pioneered by Waltz, which is the assumption that having too little or too much power puts states at greater risk in the international system, and therefore, states prefer maintaining their position in the system by having a reasonable amount of power rather than the maximum amount of power and that states maximize security rather than power. In explaining this issue, Waltz stated that having too little power would antagonize the enemy and, conversely, having too much power would cause other states to increase their power or form counter-alliances. Waltz defines power as a 'useful tool' and states that a reasonable use of this tool would be optimal. In situations where critical decisions have to be made, "the ultimate concern of states is not power but security" (Waltz, 1988, p.616).

The opposite view to defensive realism in structural realism is offensive realism, which argues that power is not a means to an end for states but an end to be achieved and that states primarily seek to maximize their power rather than security. Mearsheimer put forward this



approach in 2001 in his book “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.” Mearsheimer argues that the international system strongly shapes states' behavior; therefore, anarchy and the distribution of power are the most important structural factors in explaining international politics. According to offensive realism, the world is dangerous, and maximizing power is the only necessity for survival. According to Mearsheimer, the equivalent of money in economics is power in international politics. Although Mearsheimer has much in common with the ideas of Carr, Morgenthau, and Waltz, he states that he finds their theories lacking in answers to why states need power or how much power states desire.

Offensive realists believe that the international system provides strong incentives for states to seek opportunities to gain power over rival states and to exploit situations where “the benefits outweigh the costs” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.21). Ultimately, a state seeks to become the hegemonic power within the system because states believe that maximizing their comparative power is the optimal way to ensure their security.

Mearsheimer makes five basic assumptions in explaining his theory:

1. The international system is anarchic. However, anarchy does not mean chaos.
2. By their nature, great powers may possess some level of offensive military power, enabling them to eliminate or harm each other if necessary.
3. States can never be sure of other states' intentions or whether other states, even if they are not hostile, will use their military power to strike first.
4. The ultimate goal of great powers is survival. States especially want to preserve their territorial integrity and political sovereignty because security is the most important goal; without survival, it is impossible to realize other goals.
5. Great powers are rational actors, aware of their external environment and able to think strategically. In order to survive, they determine and implement their survival strategy by calculating their own and other states' actions and how these actions will affect both sides. As a result of these assumptions, states theoretically exhibit three basic patterns of behavior: fear, self-help, and power maximization.

In this context, when these patterns are analyzed, it can be stated that states are basically afraid of each other because the great powers have the ability and motivation to attack each other. Therefore, they approach each other with suspicion and distrust. Secondly,

states should aim to be able to protect themselves against potential threats due to the fact that there is no authority to save them when necessary in the anarchic international system, and other states cannot be trusted in this regard. States should determine their policies by evaluating themselves as danger-prone and isolated. In this case, alliances come to mind first, but according to theory, self-help behavior does not prevent states from forming alliances. However, since alliances are temporary and interest-oriented relations between states, today's friends may become tomorrow's enemies or vice versa. Mearsheimer explains the third behavior pattern as a conclusion drawn from the first two behavior patterns. In this context, in an international system where other states and their intentions cannot be trusted, and self-help is mandatory, the most logical conclusion for states is to maximize their power. In the international system, the hegemonic state is the state closest to security, and therefore, the desire to increase power continues until it becomes hegemonic. Based on the fact that it is not possible for a great power to become a global hegemon without clearly achieving its goals with nuclear power against a rival great power, it states that power maximization will be continuous and that the most optimal outcome for states is to become a regional hegemon and to establish control over geographically close and accessible regions that are accessible by land. States that achieve regional hegemony want the great powers in other regions to refrain from copying their success and want to prevent this. As a result, Mearsheimer argues that the ideal situation for a great power state is to be the only regional hegemon in the world, where the status quo can be maintained and the distribution of power can be preserved.

As a result, this thesis is theoretically founded on Mearsheimer's assertion that the most optimal outcome for states is to become a regional hegemon and establish control over geographically proximate and accessible regions that are accessible by land. Utilizing Mearsheimer's theoretical approach, this study examines the South Caucasus region, particularly the context of Azerbaijan and Armenia, while also considering Türkiye's role as a middle power within the South Caucasus. The objective of this study is to elucidate Türkiye's rationalism, autonomy in decision-making, and endeavors to maximize its power to establish regional hegemony. This endeavor is facilitated by its status as a middle power and its active engagement in defense and security policy. In this context, this thesis employs neorealism as the theoretical framework through analyzing the case study of the Second Karabakh War.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Glaser (1996), in his study, focuses on structural realism with a critical approach and aims to open a new perspective by expressing the cooperation factor in terms of self-help, which is used as one of the main arguments explaining the structural realist theory. Glaser, explaining his approach, dedicates that the pessimistic expectation from the international system is not warranted. On the contrary, strong propensity and conventional wisdom can utilize the conditions that adversaries cannot compete with. In his study, Glaser analyzes theoretically the states' peacetime military policies and unilateral military enhancements.

Wood (1987) defines middle powers and their importance in the international system. Wood advocates that superpowers are overfocused on their responsibilities, and the new states are in an unclear environment, making them poor and weak. Therefore, the middle powers are the states that stand in the right position to exploit the opportunity of ambiguity and foster its influence in the system. Wood defines middle powers using a realist perspective and focuses on the material capability ranking of the states within the international system. However, Wood also expresses the importance of non-material capabilities, such as the state's prestige. Wood also considers nuclear power capability while specifying the power level.

Schweller's advocacy of a realist perspective leads to the definition of middle power as a state with a ranking between major and minor (Schweller, 2017). However, Schweller also posits that mere categorization by ranking is insufficient for comprehending a state's authentic characteristics. Contrary to the prevailing categorization of middle powers, Schweller proposes a three-tiered classification system, distinguishing between small but highly developed countries (examples include Denmark and Singapore), medium-sized and developed countries (such as South Korea, Australia, and Canada), and large and developed countries (including Mexico, Iran, and Nigeria). Schweller further asserts that, in defining the states as middle powers, material capabilities such as GDP, population, or military capability should not be considered as objective criteria for initial analysis. In his study, Schweller proposes an approach that highlights the unique bridge role of middle powers within the international environment.

Müftüler and Yüksel (1997) define the middle power status as the power, hierarchically lower than great power, more robust and effective in problem-solving in the

international environment in their area of interest than regional powers. According to Müftüler and Yüksel (1997), although there are many similarities between regional and middle power status, the middle power is not obliged to ally with great powers. However, middle power states may be neutral or allied with smaller states. That brings independence to the middle powers for decision-making, notwithstanding great powers. Jordaan (2003) focuses on the analytical clarification of the middle power concept by pointing out the divergence between the traditional and emerging middle power states. Jordaan (2003) claims that the foreign policy of middle-power states utilizes stability and legitimacy for the world order through international and multilateral cooperation. Furthermore, the emerging middle power states' foreign policy course of action can vary and show different behavioral actions than traditional middle powers, characterized as “wealthy, stable, egalitarian, socially democratic and not regionally influential” (Jordaan, 2003, p.165). Nevertheless, Jordaan (2003) defines emerging middle power states as less egalitarian, newly democratized, and having regional influence than global and claims that emerging middle power states follow policies that will create a distinction of identity from the other states, which are weaker but located in the same region.

Ravenhill (1998) focuses on the middle power activism and expresses the behavior factor's influence on defining the middle powers by examining Canadian and Australian foreign policies. Ravenhill argues that diplomatic capacity and intellectual leadership can only be a useful starting point for defining middle power status, and that in some cases small powers can develop more aggressive policies than middle powers simply because of their geographic location.

Cooper, Higgot and Nossal (1993) examine in their book “Relocating Middle Powers” the middle powers definition of the middle power concept over Canada and Australia examples. They express that Canada and Australia are the first states to consider themselves middle powers. Cooper, Higgot, and Nossal indicate that instead of their material capabilities, Canada and Australia owe their power to diplomatic capabilities utilizing foreign policies and their solution-finding capability as a mediator role on global concerns. Cooper, Higgot, and Nossal then focus on the middle power concept from a behavioral perspective and analyze the changing requirements for defining middle power states.

Cooper (1997), in his book *Niche Diplomacy*, examines the activism of the middle power states after the Cold War era. Similar to his previous studies, Cooper focuses on

middle power states' policies from a behavioral approach while defining them. To explain his ideas, he uses Canadian foreign policy and its diplomatic capabilities and expresses that the complex and uncertain conditions of the international system provide various opportunities to middle powers to act fast and beneficially in cooperation with numerous actors and institutions.

Hidayatullah (2017) studies in his article the definitions of the middle power concept from different IR theory perspectives and provides brief information starting from the historical background of the middle power concept. The author focuses on three mainstream IR theories, realism, neoliberalism, and constructivism, by grouping certain states and defining them as middle powers based on their capabilities and roles in the international system. Hidayatullah focuses his study on the regional and multilateral roles of middle power regardless of the limitations of the defining debate.

Wang and French (2013) conducted a statistical study based on the comparison and evaluation of middle-power states' contribution to global initiatives and compared states' activism levels in international organizations and their behavior patterns. The authors summarize that middle powers vary on the activism level regarding global governance. The authors focus on six countries during the study. The countries chosen are the industrialized, former communist, emerging developing countries. Through their study, the authors aim to improve the understanding of the variation among middle powers regarding behavior patterns and the affecting factors.

In his study, Chapnick (1999) aims to develop an objective understanding of the middle power concept by explaining three different approaches: functional, behavioral, and hierarchical. Chapnick indicates that the functional and behavioral approaches are motivated by politics, and the hierarchical approach considers states' international standing based on material capability. Chapnick indicated that functional and behavioral approaches use the middle power label to increase state power; however, the hierarchical approach is solely a confirmation of the state's existing position within the system.

Türkiye's middle power status has been studied by numerous academicians (Parlar, 2014, 2016, 2018; Müftüler & Yüksel, 2017; Yalçın, 2012; Aliyev, 2022; Aydınta & Giragosian, 2022; Islam and Nyadera (2024); Öniş & Kutlay, 2016, 2021; Pusane, 2021). For example, in her study, Parlar (2018) focuses on the middle power concept in the literature

and analyzes Türkiye as a case study to question at what level defining Türkiye as a middle power fits the diplomacy requirements in regional and global order by examining the effecting policy mechanisms. Parlar (2018) examines Türkiye's foreign policy within the institutional and behavioral framework that would lead Türkiye to meet the requirements of the middle power concept. Moreover, Parlar (2018) indicates that Türkiye decided to conduct a proactive middle power diplomacy. However, it does not have a solid middle power due to its retrogressive relations with its allies, including the United States and the European Union. On the other hand, Parlar (2018) indicates that the emerging “middle power identity” and Türkiye's existing capabilities that fit a crucial player role in the area of interest may lead to new windows for a robust middle power figure. Parlar (2018) also expresses that Türkiye's solid commitment to universal values and democracy would eventually establish the figure as an influential middle power state capable of conducting a balanced foreign policy to reach its regional and global goals.

In another study, Parlar (2016) also examines Türkiye's middle power by testing and pointing out how much Türkiye's rising power status accords with the regional power categorization of Daniel Flesmes. Parlar (2016) conducts her study based on four essential conditions: asserting leadership, owning resources of material and conceptional power, asserting legal and policy instruments, and affirming leadership by other states. Parlar's study (2016) discusses Türkiye's policy influence in its neighboring regions, including the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Black Sea region. In addition to the material capability of Türkiye, the author also examines the soft power capability under ideational power. The result indicates that the influence of Türkiye's foreign policy, which is directly associated with its power in the test concept, varies depending on the geography and the periods. Additionally, the study points out that Türkiye's ideational power has an increasing trend in all three neighboring regions, contributing to increasing Türkiye's regional power.

In her article, Parlar (2014) also focuses on rising middle powers with the case study of Türkiye. Parlar (2014) examines the preferences, capabilities, and strategies of the rising middle powers that aim to pursue the goal of global governance. Parlar (2014) provides examples of academicians from different theoretical approaches while defining and specifying the middle powers, including liberal and neorealist perspectives. Therefore, the author addresses material power, behavioral power, dependence on the global economy, institutional power, and power of civil society. Regarding the strategy, Parlar (2014)

expresses that compared to other rising middle powers, Türkiye's strategy of global governance carries out both similarities and differences and the author explains Türkiye's strategy over Türkiye's activism in G20 example. Parlar (2014) also expresses that Türkiye's middle power preferences, capabilities, and strategies take a position between Western and non-traditional rising middle powers.

In his article, Yalçın (2012) examines the "middle power" concept and analyzes the coherence of Turkish foreign policy with the respective concept. Yalçın (2012) argues that Turkish foreign policy is considered using different strategies to match its policy within the middle power concept, and therefore, Türkiye has gained a central role in the international environment. Furthermore, Yalçın (2012) defines Türkiye as a pivotal state coherent with its regional role and activism in addition to its material power capabilities such as military, population, and economic capabilities. In his article, Yalçın (2012) explains his argument by utilizing both liberal and realist approaches depending on the dimension of the actions and exemplifies the creative alternative course of actions of Turkish foreign policy within the middle power framework. According to Yalçın (2012), Türkiye has been directing its foreign policy to the areas ignored by the great powers and increasing its effectiveness in the international environment.

In their article, Islam and Nyadera (2024) focus on the emerging middle powers, their transitions, and Türkiye's role in the international order from a liberal perspective. They also exemplify Türkiye's middle power by mentioning material capabilities from a realist perspective. In their study, Islam and Nyadera identify the power transition theory and express that it has become a framework while analyzing the trends and changes of actors in the international system. Islam and Nyadera also indicate that after 2000, Türkiye's policy interest moved to the Middle East, fostering its power and regional influence by ruling its foreign policy as a Turkish model approach. Islam and Nyadera also focus on the effects of Türkiye's regional diplomacy in African countries and the Ukraine-Russia war. Additionally, Islam and Nyadera express that Türkiye's military power has always been considered an important influence factor, and the presence of its military facilitates fostering its power in the respective region.

In another study, Baba and Önsoy (2016) focus on Türkiye's power status by analyzing and comparing the existing capabilities and Turkish foreign policy. The authors question the tangibility of the criteria provided by the International Relation literature for defining the

state rankings as a case study of Türkiye and the relationship between the status of power and the tendency to act more proactive in foreign policy by considering the condition of being externally imposed by the great powers. In their article, Baba and Önsoy (2016) combine Türkiye's foreign policy activism and national capabilities and express the complementariness of these two factors. Although their article focuses on the time frame between the 1930s and 2016, Baba and Önsoy (2016) provide excellent background information to understand Türkiye's development in terms of power status, Türkiye's foreign policy-capability relation and the pro-activeness of Türkiye playing the critical role in the region during the conflicts in today's international world order.

In their article Öniş and Kutlay (2016) focus on middle power activism on the global stage by examining Turkish foreign policy as a case study and aim to define middle power activism in a comprehensive conceptual framework. In their article, Öniş and Kutlay (2016) question the possible roles of an emerging middle power state, its dynamics, restrictions, and limitations in terms of regional and global domains. Öniş and Kutlay (2016) prefer critical language and define Türkiye's middle power activism as a paradoxical case. Öniş and Kutlay (2016) analyze Türkiye's regional foreign policy in three phases between 2002 and 2015. In the phases, the authors pay attention to the increase and the decrease of effectiveness in Türkiye's foreign policy. According to Öniş and Kutlay (2016), after the prosperous period between 2002 and 2007, Türkiye changed its political focus to the domestic domain and lost the influence gained during the former phase. Additionally, the authors claim that the decrease is accelerating due to the ruling party's performance regarding financial and foreign policy performance (2016).

Another study by Kutlay and Öniş (2021) focuses on Türkiye's foreign policy regarding middle power activism and the effects of domestic and external dynamics by utilizing a measurement of the effect of Türkiye's foreign policy during the Second Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict in which Türkiye played a significant role during and finalizing phases of it by using quantitative data set facilitating an assessment from the economic aspect of the policy. Kutlay and Öniş (2021) question the multi-dimensionally oscillations in Turkish foreign policy, including economics and international relations. Kutlay and Öniş (2021) advocate that Türkiye has produced an unusual middle-power behavior followed by aggressive diplomacy and military actions. The authors claim that although this policy has brought success or, in other words, popularity in domestic and areas of interest, it also led



Türkiye to find itself in an economic, political, and foreign political crisis which are the elements that depend on each other and affect gradually.

In her comprehensive study, Pusane (2021) focuses on Türkiye's foreign policy regarding its middle power country status. Pusane (2021) pays attention to the increase in military actions of Türkiye after 2016 and exemplifies Türkiye's involvement as taking an active role in Libya, Syria, Libya, Karabakh (Azerbaijan-Armenia), and the Mediterranean region. According to Pusane (2021), Türkiye has been considered a middle power state involved in international politics, assembling solid coalitions and playing a key player role as a bridge between all geographical axes. Pusane (2021) associates Türkiye's latest foreign policy activism, independence, and enlargement of its maneuver area with the US foreign policy change towards the Middle East and Caucasia region. That opportunity provided Türkiye with a significant perception of assessment of its efforts in international politics.

Moreover, Western powers' ignorance or silence during the developments in world affairs between 2014 and 2019, such as the Russian annexation of Crimea and the US recognition of Israel, led middle powers to act less normative and encourage involvement in global politics. Therefore, Türkiye directed its foreign policy to close its neighborhood, built its strategy over state security matters from a realist perspective, and concentrated on hard power tools instead of diplomatic approaches. Pusane (2021) argues that Türkiye's support to Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War and its success with its military engagement proves her claim. However, Pusane (2021) also indicates that Türkiye has a limit in using its middle power status, and it cannot follow a completely independent policy from the great powers such as the US and Russia.

In the literature, Türkiye's foreign policy influence and effectiveness during the Second Karabakh War has not been studied only by Turkish academicians but also by the academicians of the neighboring regions. For example, in her article, Khairunisa (2022) focuses on Türkiye's foreign policy and its support to Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War. Khairunisa (2022) studies the reasons for Türkiye's solid and increasing support of Azerbaijan, especially during the respective conflict and the effects of foreign policy. The author uses construction theory to explain the case based on the common, historical, and collective identity and exemplifies the similarities of the two states using a theoretical framework. The author underlines that the two Turkic states' common ethnicity, religion, and language led the way to the policy “One Nation, Two States,” which sets a solid

ground for Türkiye's support towards Azerbaijan. Khairunisa (2022) argues that covalent bonds as a “collective identity.”

As an example of the studies regarding the influence and the direct effects of Türkiye's foreign policy in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict region, in their article, Köse and Wakizaka (2022) focus on the changes in Türkiye's foreign policy in the Caucasus region between the 1990s and 2022 and the policy towards the Karabakh region. Köse and Wakizaka (2022) indicate that the victory of Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War carries solid indicators of proof of Türkiye's role and the influence of its foreign policy towards the region. Additionally, Köse and Wakizaka (2022) claim that the policy during the respective war indicates a ground policy alteration from “discursiveness to activism.” The authors explain the transition in cause-and-effect relation concerning the domestic political dynamics, the increase of capabilities in the defense industry, and the influences of the civil war in Syria. The authors claim that those three main reasons consecrate the Second Karabakh War for understanding Türkiye's active, operational, and specific course of action in the Caucasus and Azerbaijan region and contain powerful signs of the regional goals of Türkiye.

In her article, Chikhladze (2022) focuses on the rapprochement efforts of Türkiye and Armenia after the Second Karabakh conflict. The author refers to the existing problems between Türkiye and Armenia, such as the lack of diplomatic or economic relations after the 1990s and the disagreements over the issues with historical legacy. Chikhladze (2022) points out Türkiye's major support to Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh conflict and considers Türkiye as the closest and natural ally of Azerbaijan. Chickladze (2022) also indicates that although new normalization of the relations attempts was on the table by the end of 2020, no tangible success was reached then. Chickladze (2022) analyzes in her article whether the circumstances have changed, and she tries to figure out if the new attempt has been successful so far. Finally, Chikhladze (2022) expresses Türkiye and Armenia's interests and the critical challenges for normalization by considering Türkiye-Armenia and Azerbaijan relations.

In their book, Yavuz and Günter (2023) focus on the comprehensive review of the Second Karabakh War, which has stemmed from a long historical disagreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Their study points out the historical development of disagreement and examines the political and social influence of the conflict. Yavuz and Günter (2023) also fostered the analysis by examining the wars in history conducted in the same territory,

including the Second Karabakh War and the effects on the international environment. The authors indicate in their study that Türkiye, as a middle power, had a critical role in supporting Azerbaijan during the conflict, which gave Türkiye the natural capability to raise its voice in the region. Their study handles the historical background of undergoing disagreement, which has ended with war twice in history.

In his article, Erickson (2023) examines the Second Karabakh War through a realistic and tactical approach by focusing on the material capabilities of the sides. The author points out the significant advantage that was provided to Azerbaijan thanks to the strategic partnership agreement which was signed between Türkiye and Azerbaijan covering a wide area of support including military cooperation, guidance, providing high technology military equipment such as UAVs and executing joint exercises. The author indicates that the support of Türkiye increased the combat readiness of Azerbaijani forces and directly affected the consequences of the conflict in 2020. The author also mentions that the UAV capability was combined with Azerbaijani special forces tactics and that capability now turned into a much important tactical power factor. According to Erickson, the cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan and evident support provided Azerbaijan a significant superiority in terms of military power.

Considering the assessment of the Second Karabakh War's consequences and the role of Türkiye's foreign policy, in their article Göktaş, Tarakçı, and Baş (2022) focus on the brand value concept of the states and studies on Türkiye's brand value from the standpoint of Azerbaijan citizens. The authors define the brand value concept and express the importance and influence of brand value in the international environment. According to the authors, brand value can be considered parallel with reputation. Therefore, the authors claim that a state with solid brand value would have certain advantages from international politics to the economy, such as having a stronger voice and providing more opportunities for investors. Furthermore, Göktaş, Tarakçı, and Baş (2022) indicate that Türkiye and Azerbaijan have had robust ties and good relations due to shared history, religion, and language. Moreover, the authors analyzed and determined the level of change in Türkiye's brand value from the standpoint of Azerbaijan citizens due to Türkiye's support during the Second Karabakh War by conducting quantitative research by executing an online questionnaire and analyzing the results. Their research embodies two different periods, including September 2020 and December 2020-January 2021 periods, and the research

indicates a substantial increase in Türkiye's brand value and the appreciation of Azerbaijan citizens.

In his article Khalilzada (2022) focuses on the effectiveness and importance of new-generation drone technology on the battlefields and studies Türkiye's increased military capability regarding the production of combat drones. Furthermore, Khalilzada (2022) analyzes Türkiye's foreign policy and strategy over equipping its sister country Azerbaijan with its game-changer asset Bayraktar TB2 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) from a realist theory perspective. In his article, Khalilzada (2022) points out the power and superiority of drone technology and claims that there is a substantial increase in the utilization of UAVs by the states for achieving military and political objectives. Defining as a small state, the author analyzes how Azerbaijan took advantage of TB2 and the reflections of the military victory in the press, promoting the strength of Türkiye as the middle power and increasing its influence in the region. On the other hand, Khalilzada (2022) argues that although the UAVs provide a significant military tactical advantage on the battlefield, over or misuse of the respective capability might make the region more vulnerable and open to instability and war due to the lack of ethical and legal restrictions regarding the usage of the UAVs. According to Khalilzada (2022), the Second Karabakh War might not have happened because Azerbaijan could not have attempted such a military operation due to the difficulties stemming from geographical disadvantages in favor of Armenia. Therefore, Khalilzada (2022) expresses that Türkiye, with its increased military power and foreign policy interests in the Caucasus region, has significantly set the tone of the Second Karabakh War. The achievement of Azerbaijan on the battlefield boosted Türkiye's power status and consolidated its steps of a global actor role instead of a regional actor.

In another study, Aliyev (2022) focuses on the results of the Second Karabakh War and, consequently, the geopolitical changes in the Transcaucasia region. Aliyev (2022) analyzes Türkiye's foreign policy towards Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War and compares the effectiveness of the policies of Türkiye and Russia. Aliyev expresses that the influence of Türkiye in the Karabakh region has increased and could be compared with the conditions during the 1920s. According to Aliyev (2022), Türkiye's increased prestige paved the way for having the right to raise a solid voice in problems and the conflicts of Caucasus. Moreover, Aliyev (2022) argues that Türkiye's successful foreign policy balanced and prevented Russia's military involvement in the Azerbaijan conflict. However, Aliyev (2022)

points out that in addition to Türkiye's success in Azerbaijan policy and involvement in Caucasian politics, Putin's diplomatic convincing ability also prevented Azerbaijan and Armenia from continuing the war and accepting the consequences provided a significant increase in Russia's authority in the region. In his article, Aliyev (2022) mentions that although Türkiye has promoted itself and its power in the region, Russia remains a non-negligible actor in Caucasian politics.

Javakhishvili (2022) points out the initiative named the “3+3 platform,” which aims to utilize regional cooperation after the Second Karabakh conflict between the three South Caucasian states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and three actor states which have regional influence (Iran, Russia, and Türkiye). The respective initiative has been initially proposed by the president of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and aims to foster trade and economic relations between the six states. The author indicates that all states except Georgia, which is not interested in accession to the platform due to the foreseen role of Russia, are willing to establish the platform. Nevertheless, the author also points out that Russia's invasion of Ukraine prevents all willing states from broadening cooperation with Russia. Javakhishvili (2022) also claims that the proposed format could be considered a threat to the West in terms of decreasing the influence over the region.

In their article, Aydınta and Giragosian (2022) analyze the relations between Türkiye and Armenia after the Second Karabakh War. The authors indicate that although the two states have had no diplomatic relations due to the ongoing problems throughout history, the Second Karabakh War surprisingly has significantly positive effects on the relations between Türkiye and Armenia. According to Aydınta and Giragosian (2022), Türkiye's policy and support to Azerbaijan during the conflict brought a victory to Azerbaijan; however, Türkiye's role as a middle power and combining its policy with Russia's policy based on convincing to end the war provided Türkiye a significant floor and increase of influence in the region. Furthermore, their study indicates that Türkiye's and Armenia's diplomatic meetings and leaders' discourses lead both states to a normalization policy. The authors also point out that the policy for the normalization is called “no preconditions policy,” which would provide ground for both states to take action rather than focusing on the problems coming from history. In their article, Aydınta and Giragosian (2022) prefer to handle the case from a positive point of view on both states' diplomacy and foreign policy by analyzing the politics without ignoring the other actors of the region.

In his book, Broers (2019) provides a wide perspective of the dispute and historical background of the conflicts regarding the Karabakh region. Broers, who also has other studies regarding the South Caucasian region, wrote his book before the Second Karabakh War, and it is possible to say that his assumptions regarding the preserved conflict did not last for so long. Broers examines the conflict from different aspects by comparing it with other rivalries around the world and analyzes the balance of power by focusing on the foreign policy activisms of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia.

In their study, Erarslan and Nur (2021) focus on Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations and provide historical background on the first and second Karabakh conflicts. The authors analyze the effects of Türkiye's support for Azerbaijan and point out the increase in the influence of Türkiye in the South Caucasus. The authors indicate that the victory of Azerbaijan and the success of Türkiye's foreign policy demolished the idea that advocating a solution without Russia's permission is impossible in the Karabakh dispute. The authors also express that Türkiye's key actor role significantly affects the balance of power in the Caucasus region and utilizes countries such as Ukraine and Georgia, which have started considering Türkiye a balancing power and strong ally against Russia.

In another study, Öztarsu (2012) focuses on the management of the conflict period and the mediator roles of the international actors, particularly the MINSK group, which was established after the First Karabakh conflict and could not have accomplished establishing peace in the region. The author provides a wide perspective analysis regarding peace establishment activities in the diplomatic-based domain and expresses the actors' and mediators' ambitions and policies. The author also examines the domestic and foreign factors behind the unsuccessful attempts at peace establishment activities.

In another study focuses on the First Karabakh War, Özçelik (2017) examines the historical background of the Karabakh dispute, focusing on the Khojaly Massacre, which occurred in 1992 when the Armenian forces slaughtered hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians, including elders, women, and kids. Özçelik, in his study, prefers to give a more historical approach to better point out the reasons for the actor's claims on the region since the Ottoman Empire era.

Akifoğlu (2017) examines in his article the effects of the Russian political decisions made during the Lenin-Stalin era regarding the Azerbaijani Turks and the history of Azerbaijani Turks. The author provides a brief historical background of Azerbaijan country

and Russia's intervention and pressure on the society in order to create a social change in Azerbaijani society and expel a nation from its historical culture and understanding. The author exemplifies the cases of governance pressure over Azerbaijani politicians and cases of exile and execution.

In another study, Çeliksoy (2021) examines the Second Karabakh War by focusing on territory regained after the conflict and the positive psychological effect of the establishment of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan by providing information about the historical background of the respective area in Azerbaijan's history. The author also expresses the significance of Türkiye's existence with its military forces for the Turkish-Russian joint center observing the situation and securing Turkish and Azerbaijani security interests.

In his profound study, Askerov (2020) examines the First Karabakh War and the consequences of the end of the Soviet Union on the respective dispute. The author analyzes the conflict from distinctive perspectives, from an undiscovered dispute to a full-scale war. The author explains the initial mediation efforts, the background of the establishment of the MINSK Group, and Russian policy over the region in favor of Armenia against Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Although the study does not cover the second conflict, it provides broad information to understand the political environment that created the conflict and possible solutions for the region.

In his study, Yeşiltaş (2024) examines Türkiye's defense industry companies' successes by focusing on the yearly defense export data. Yeşiltaş (2024) indicates that Türkiye has become a new pivotal player in the global defense market and is increasing its influence constantly. The author also points out the novelties of the Turkish Defense Industry, such as the first fighter jet of Türkiye, KAAN, and expresses that Türkiye followed a strategy that established a significant augmentation in military power that enabled Türkiye to possess its troops in distant regions and act as a partner in conflict areas without hesitation.

Özgen (2021), in his study, provides the readers with an analysis of military tactics and capabilities used during the Second Karabakh War. The author expresses the importance of the Turkish Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) game-changer role and the superiority gained by the Azerbaijan forces against Armenia. The author also indicates that Türkiye's provision of UAS represents a significant strategic military vision and shift and marked a transfer of military doctrine to Azerbaijan, which supports Turkish foreign policy in the region, creating bigger opportunities for Türkiye.

Kasapoğlu (2021) focuses on the military strategy and the combat force performance of Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War from a more technical and tactical perspective. After briefly summarizing the historical background of the Karabakh conflict chronologically, Kasapoğlu indicates that Azerbaijan, by embracing Türkiye's experience and lessons learned from the operation in Syria, Spring Shield, and created the concept of operations (CONOPS) and equipped its army with Turkish Defense Industry products, UAS's, rocket and missile systems which provided Azerbaijan a clear victory during the Second Karabakh War. The author defines the strategy of Azerbaijan as the "dronization of the army" and points out that, in conclusion, Azerbaijan's combat performance improved and facilitated victory through a successful combination of information, technological superiority, and solid political leadership. The author also expresses that Türkiye's defense industry production capability and capacity serve both Türkiye and Azerbaijan in creating a beneficial market and increasing global influence.

To create a better understanding of Türkiye's defensive and security policy by harmonizing with its foreign policy, Hamilton and Mikulska (2021) concentrate on the relations between Türkiye and Russia from the perspectives of cooperation, competition, and compartmentalization. Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach, the authors meticulously analyze the implications of these states for the West. The study methodically examines relations under four power instruments: informal interaction, diplomatic interaction, military interaction, and economic interaction, focusing on crises and conflicts in Libya, Syria, Ukraine, and Karabakh. The authors define the relationship between the power-pursuing two states as a composite combination of cooperation and rivalry across the instruments of power.

Sarikaya and Aslanlı (2024) provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the historical background of the Karabakh conflict by providing a perspective starting from the Kurakchay Treaty signed in 1805 until the end of 2023 covering the Shusha Declaration signed in 2021 following the Second Karabakh War and the results to the policies of the states in the South Caucasus. In their book, the authors focus on the historical facts based on the documents providing the original pictures of the treaties and declarations, the strategies of the actors, the security policies of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, and the strategy behind the cooperation and mutual support of Türkiye and Azerbaijan and the consequences on the Caucasus region.



## 4. ACTORS AND THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter endeavors to facilitate a more profound comprehension of the Second Karabakh War, which serves as the primary case study in this thesis. It thus provides a concise overview of the geographical, economic, demographic, and political characteristics of the conflict's principal actors, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Additionally, it sheds light on the historical evolution of the dispute and background of the conflict in the Karabakh region from the past to the present.

### 4.1. Azerbaijan

#### 4.1.1. Geographical and Demographical Features of Azerbaijan

The Republic of Azerbaijan is a country of great historical importance due to its location at the crossing point of the Caucasus, between the Greater Caucasus and the Lesser Caucasus, and on historical passages and trade routes. It is geographically bordered by Georgia (480 km) and the Autonomous Republic of Dagestan of the Russian Federation (390 km) to the north, the Islamic Republic of Iran (756 km) to the south, and Armenia. (1,007 km), and the Republic of Türkiye (with a common border of 11 km with the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic) to the west and the Caspian Sea (713 km) to the east. See Figure 1 for the Azerbaijan Map (UN Website, 2024a).



Figure 1. Map of Azerbaijan (UN Website, 2024a).

Azerbaijan's total land area is 86,600 km<sup>2</sup>, with 11.5% of the land covered by forests, 1.6% by watersheds, and 50% by arable land. The country's average altitude is 657 meters above sea level, but 50% of its terrain is mountainous, with some areas exceeding 3,000 meters. The mountainous terrain comprises the Greater Caucasus, Lesser Caucasus, and Talysh Mountains, with the highest point being Mount Bazarduzu at 4,466 meters. Azerbaijan experiences diverse climates, influenced by cold air masses originating from the Greater Caucasus Mountains in the north and warm tropical air currents emanating from the Lesser Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan's eastern and central regions are characterized by low-lying plains, with mild winters and very hot summers, while the south-eastern part features a humid subtropical climate. Other regions are classified as arid or semi-arid, with most agricultural activities concentrated along the Kura and Aras rivers.

Azerbaijan's population of 10.65 million places makes it the 88th most populous country worldwide. Notably, 95.1% of the population is under 70, and 73.9% falls within the 15-70 age range. The Azerbaijani population is predominantly comprised of Azerbaijani citizens, constituting 91.6% of the total demographic. This is followed by Lezghin (2%), Russian (1.3%), Armenian (1.3%), and other ethnic groups (3.8%). The ongoing Karabakh conflict has resulted in a substantial decline in the Armenian population of Baku and Sumgayit over the years (Britannica Website, 2024a).

#### **4.1.2. The Political and Administrative Structure of Azerbaijan**

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Parliament of Azerbaijan proclaimed the country's independence on August 31, 1991, and subsequently enacted the law on independence on October 18, 1991. Until the end of 1995, the nation was governed by the law on restoring the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which was adopted by the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan in 1991. The current governance of Azerbaijan is predicated on the constitution adopted by 91.9% of the Azerbaijani people on November 12, 1995. According to the constitution's provisions, the country's form of government is a republic. In a country with a dominant presidential system, presidential elections are held every five years. The capital city of Baku, which also serves as the largest port city on the Caspian Sea coast, is home to the country's government.

The Constitution stipulates that the Azerbaijani state is a democratic, law-based, secular, unitary republic, wherein the principle of separation of powers is upheld. Legislative

power is conferred upon the parliament, comprising 125 deputies, and is subject to renewal every five years. The President holds executive authority, while judicial power is vested in the courts. The parliament, endowed with circumscribed supervisory powers, is entrusted with the enactment of laws. The President serves as the head of both the state and the executive branch. In the context of Azerbaijan, the President is elected by the populace for a five-year term. The previous restriction limiting presidential terms to two consecutive terms was rescinded through a referendum held in 2009. The President, as the head of both the state and the executive, wields the authority to make all administrative decisions and to shape and direct the state organization. The Constitution underscores the people's role as the sole source of state sovereignty, a principle further reinforced by the document's modern approach to defining and regulating people and freedoms.

#### **4.1.3. Economy of Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan possesses a substantial abundance of subterranean and surface resources and agricultural production. The country's substantial natural gas and oil reserves play a pivotal role in its economy. Following the discovery of significant oil production fields in the country since 1995, the Azerbaijani economy has witnessed substantial development. As of 2023, Azerbaijan's position in the global economy is eighty third, with a Gross Domestic Product of 72.36 billion USD (World Bank Website, 2024a). The economic growth rate for 2024 is estimated at 3.17%. According to the official figures of the Ministry of Economic Development of Azerbaijan, the Gross Domestic Product in 2010 was 42.7 billion USD, which demonstrates the level of development in the economy. However, the contribution of business sectors other than the energy sector to the state economy is relatively weak (Ministry of Trade Website,2025).

## **4.2. Armenia**

### **4.2.1. Geographical and Demographical Features of Armenia**

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia declared its independence and emerged as a landlocked country in Transcaucasia. Geographically, it is situated in the Transcaucasian region, nestled between the formidable mountain ranges of the Caucasus to the south and the northwesternmost tip of Asia to the north. Armenia shares borders with

Georgia and Azerbaijan to the north and east, respectively, while Iran and Türkiye constitute its neighbors to the southeast and west. Notably, Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is in the southwesternmost corner of Armenia. The capital city of Armenia is Yerevan. See Figure 2 for the Armenia Map (UN Website, 2024b).



**Figure 2.** Map of Armenia (UN Website, 2024b).

Armenia's surface area is 29 743 km<sup>2</sup>, of which approximately 80% is mountainous. With a population of approximately 3 million as of 2024, Armenia ranks 139th globally and has a homogeneous demographic structure. In this context, 98.1% of the population is Armenian, 1.1% is Yazidi, 0.5% is Russian and 0.3% is others. A significant proportion of the population, 95.3%, is below 75, while 75.3% falls within the 15-75 age bracket (Britannica Website, 2024b). Notably, the population growth rate as of 2024 dropped from 4.2% to 2.7%, signifying a decline in population growth (BM Media Website, 2025).

#### **4.2.2. The Political and Administrative Structure of Armenia**

Following its first period of independence from 1918 to 1920, Armenia declared its independence once more on September 21, 1991, coinciding with the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Armenia, a parliamentary republic, elects its members of parliament and local governments through a democratic process, while the parliament elects the president. The constitution stipulates that a president cannot serve more than one term in office.

The Second Karabakh War, a pivotal element of this thesis, commenced on September 27, 2020, and persisted for 44 days, culminating in a defeat for Armenia. The country was compelled to relinquish a substantial portion of the Azerbaijani territories it had occupied. In the aftermath of this electoral defeat, the country held early elections on June 20, 2021, which, characterized by a relatively low voter turnout of 49.4%, resulted in Nikol Pashinyan, the leader of the Civil Contract Party, securing 53.9% of the votes and regaining the majority in parliament. Consequently, Pashinyan was re-elected as prime minister during the parliamentary session held on August 2, 2021.

Concurrently, President Armen Sarkissian, who had assumed the presidency on April 9, 2018, resigned on January 23, 2022. The results of the elections held in the Armenian Parliament on March 13, 2022, ushered in a new era, as Vahagn Khachaturyan, the ruling Civil Contract Party candidate, was elected President and sworn in (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, 2025a).

#### **4.2.3. Economy of Armenia**

Geographically landlocked, Armenia is a poor country regarding underground and surface resources. After declaring independence from the Soviet Union, Armenia sought to achieve economic development through privatization and transition to a free market economy instead of the Soviet-era central planning system. However, reform efforts were unsuccessful due to domestic problems.

Armenia's position in the global economy is indicated by its ranking of one hundred and sixteen, with a Gross National Product of \$24.086 billion USD (World Bank Website, 2024b). The World Bank estimates an economic growth rate of 3.3% for Armenia in 2024. The Armenian economy, which is already substandard in general terms, is further hindered by the ongoing Karabakh conflict.

A comparison of Azerbaijan and Armenia in a neorealist framework reveals notable disparities in geographical location, internal political stability, and economic and demographic indicators. Azerbaijan, with its natural wealth, energy resources, and military

power, has a clear advantage over Armenia, which is landlocked, has limited natural resources, and possesses a smaller population with comparatively lower manpower. Additionally, Armenia experiences less favorable economic indicators. However, when assessing the effectiveness of diplomatic capabilities, Armenia, given its historical and religious connections with Russia and Azerbaijan, considering its historical, cultural, and religious affiliations with Türkiye, along with its diplomatic relations that have undergone fluctuations, appears to have a comparatively weaker position, even though Azerbaijan possesses significant material capabilities. A notable aspect of the situation is Türkiye's stance in favor of Azerbaijan while advocating for negotiations with both parties to achieve a political resolution to the Karabakh conflict. A comprehensive understanding of the Karabakh conflict necessitates an examination of its historical progression. The subsequent section will thus analyze the historical development of the Karabakh conflict to provide a more nuanced perspective.

### **4.3. Historical Background of the Karabakh Conflict**

The Karabakh<sup>1</sup> region is of indispensable importance to the surrounding countries of the Caucasus due to its geostrategic features. Throughout history, the dominant states in the region have endeavored to ensure the spread of their sovereignty to the entire Caucasus by maintaining control over the Karabakh region (Öztarsu, 2012). The Karabakh region is of particular significance for the states of Azerbaijan and Armenia, which have been under the rule of the Soviet Union since 1920. Despite their inability to dominate the Caucasus, the Karabakh region plays a crucial role in the relations of the two countries.

A review of the history of the conflict reveals that it can be traced back to the Soviet Union Period. On July 5, 1921, Karabakh was officially accepted as a part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, a development that was subject to the regulations established by the Soviet Union. Subsequently, on July 24, 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was established, with the city of Khankendi designated as its capital. Despite Armenia's opposition to Azerbaijan's lawful retainment of Karabakh by the decision of July 5, 1921, its objections were not addressed. In 1963, during the tenure of Nikita Khrushchev,

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<sup>1</sup> On July 7, 2021, the Karabakh and East Zangezur economic regions were established based on the presidential decree on the new division of economic regions in Azerbaijan (President of Azerbaijan Republic Website, 2021).

Armenia reiterated its claims to the region's Armenian heritage. However, the Soviet administration declined to accept these claims.

The Karabakh conflict, also known as the Karabakh or Upper Karabakh conflict, began in 1988 as a subject of concern for the Soviet Union. This occurred three years before the gaining of independence by both Azerbaijan and Armenia (Askerov, 2020).

In 1989, the Soviet Union opted to revoke the autonomy status of Karabakh, directly affiliating it with the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. However, this decision was not endorsed by the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (Çeliksoy, 2021). Consequently, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was declared to have acceded to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. This development led to a nationalist public movement and support for Karabakh within Armenia. Azerbaijan, however, opposed this movement, insisting on adherence to the constitution of the Soviet Union. Since then, the region has witnessed numerous ethnic conflicts from Yerevan to Baku. In an effort to demonstrate its authority and resilience in the face of these challenges, the Soviet government declared a state of emergency in Baku. This decision was made with the intention of effectively managing the situation and reasserting its authority, particularly in light of the ongoing conflicts. However, on January 20, 1990, the Red Army's attacks on civilians resulted in significant casualties, including numerous injuries and deaths. This event precipitated the formation of a robust Popular Front in Azerbaijan, and consequently, the Karabakh issue evolved into a matter of international concern (Öztarsu, 2012).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Republic of Azerbaijan declared its independence in August of that year, and Armenia in September 1991. Following the declaration of Azerbaijan's independence, Armenians residing in Karabakh proclaimed the “Artsakh Armenian Republic” and adopted a strategy aimed at separating Karabakh from Azerbaijan. In response, the Azerbaijani parliament asserted that this action was unconstitutional. Armenia breached the border regions of its neighboring Azerbaijani territory and maintained its control over Karabakh, contending that the Soviet Union era had concluded and the accords established during that period had become invalid.

During this period, the region, which had been incorporated into Azerbaijan by Soviet Union regulations, became the epicenter of numerous conflicts. On September 23, 1991, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev facilitated the Zheleznovodsk Declaration, which was a crucial step in ensuring the territorial integrity of

Azerbaijan within the context of the ongoing negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite the issuance of this joint peace declaration, armed conflict persisted in the region (Broers, 2019).

In November of 1991, Armenian forces shot down a helicopter transporting foreign observers (Russian and Kazakh), Azerbaijani bureaucrats, and members of the press. This incident caused a significant international outcry. In the aftermath of the incident, Azerbaijan shut down the railway connecting it to Armenia and revoked the Autonomous Status of Nagorno-Karabakh, effectively integrating it into Baku. (De Waal, 2003).

In February 1992, the European Parliament convened in Strasbourg and resolved to deploy observers to Karabakh, recognizing the escalating international implications of the conflict. On February 20, 1992, the Russian Foreign Ministry convened a meeting in Moscow with the representatives of Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia. The participants announced their intention to cease fire, end the hostilities, and lift the blockade on the settlements (Özçelik, 2017).

However, despite these statements, the first effective attacks by Armenian forces in the region began in Khojaly, a strategically significant location due to its position along transportation routes. On February 25, 1992, Armenian forces, with the active support of the 366th Russian Regiment, initiated an attack on Khojaly. According to official reports, the attack resulted in the deaths of 613 Azerbaijani citizens, including 106 women, 70 elderly individuals, and 63 children. Additionally, 487 Azerbaijani Turks sustained serious injuries, and Armenian forces captured 1 275 prisoners. This attack is widely documented and has been recognized in historical annals as the Khojaly Massacre (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities Website, 2024). In the subsequent period, the cities of Shusha, Lachin, Khojavend, Kalbajar, Agdere, Agdam, Jabrayil, Fuzuli, Gubadli, and Zangilan were occupied by Armenian forces, resulting in the death of over 9,000 Azerbaijani citizens (Çeliksoy, 2021). In an effort to identify a suitable resolution to the Karabakh crisis, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) convened a conference in the capital city of Belarus, Minsk, on March 24, 1992. Despite the endeavors of the Minsk Group, Armenia persisted in its actions, attacks, and occupations. The actions of Armenia were neglected and indirectly reinforced by Russia due to Armenia's membership in the Russian-led organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Köse&Wakizaka, 2022). The intricacies of the situation, coupled



with Azerbaijan's subpar domestic governance during this period, created a conducive environment for Armenians to seize control of numerous locations in Azerbaijan by 1993. The domination of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast by Armenia, which is under Russian control, served Russia's interests in dominating the Caucasus region (Özçelik, 2017). Following a series of attacks and conflicts in 1993, Armenia occupied seven adjacent regions in addition to the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. On May 16, 1994, Russia facilitated the signing of the 'Bishkek Protocol' between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Moscow. However, the ongoing hostilities have not yet ceased in the region; numerous ceasefire violations and clashes occurred along the borders, leading both states to regard each other as archenemies (Askerov, 2020).

Following years of contention and numerous armed conflicts, the region once again became a theater of war on September 27, 2020, with the commencement of the second Karabakh War. In this instance, however, the balance of power in the Karabakh conflict, which has remained unresolved since 1990, shifted in favor of Azerbaijan, with the support of Türkiye, resulting in Azerbaijan's victory. Despite Türkiye's overt support for Azerbaijan, the Turkish Armed Forces did not engage in direct combat with Armenia.

Azerbaijan emerged victorious at the war's conclusion, successfully reclaiming its occupied territories. While the media focused on Azerbaijan's triumph and Türkiye's pivotal role in facilitating this victory, the intervention of Russia, which refrained from military engagement during the conflict, introduced an additional dynamic to the geopolitical landscape.

The peace agreement brokered by Russia stipulated the deployment of Russian military forces in the region to ensure absolute peace in Khankendi, and subsequently, Russia's full control of the region was ensured with the deployment of Russian troops (Köse&Wakizaka, 2022). Despite the criticism leveled by Armenia at the time of Russia's intervention, the strategic decision was made to act at the final stage to avoid relinquishing its power initiative and regional control while also maintaining a stake in the ongoing developments. Despite the evident criticism and dissatisfaction, Armenia recognized the potential for a complete cessation of Armenian presence in Karabakh if Russia did not intervene, albeit at a later stage. Conversely, although the situation appeared to have culminated in Azerbaijan's decisive victory, there was considerable uncertainty and apprehension regarding the future of the region, particularly in light of Russia's deployment

of military units (Ismailov, 2020; Dündar, 2020). However, although deploying Russian peacekeeper troops to the Karabakh region was planned for five years, it lasted less. After the Russian withdrawal in April 2024, Türkiye became the sole international actor in the region (Anadolu Agency, 2024a).



## **5. THE GENESIS OF THE MIDDLE POWER AND TÜRKİYE AS MIDDLE POWER**

After explaining the actors of the Karabakh conflict and the historical background of the crisis, in order to explain Türkiye's middle power status, which is the main argument of this thesis, this chapter discusses the emergence of the middle power concept, the definitions, and interpretations of the concept by scholars in the field of international relations. Subsequently, the evaluation of Türkiye as a middle power has been analyzed through the views of scholars and the interpretation of the information gathered and explained through the neorealist perspective.

### **5.1. The Genesis of the Middle Power**

The evaluation and comparison of states within the international system based on their power has been a recurring theme in the field of International Relations. A significant challenge in this area pertains to the challenge of operationalizing power, given its multifaceted nature and the influence of other factors beyond its material dimension. The concept of middle power has its origins in the 16th century. In 1589, Giovanni Botero, the mayor of Milan, classified states into three categories: city-states, which represent small power and must be governed by all of their citizens; states of medium power, which have territories too large to be governed by direct democracy and are best governed by the aristocracy; and finally, nations with great authority, i.e., empires, which can only be governed and united by monarchy. In defining middle powers as states that have the capacity to survive in the international system without foreign aid, Botero's work provides a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of global politics in the modern era. In his 1757 study, Mably categorized states as primary, secondary, and tertiary in terms of their power according to the manner in which they employ their policies, that is to say, the manner in which they exercise their power in different situations in international relations. In this context, he referred to middle power states as secondary powers that play the role of regional impediments against more powerful states in the balance of power period (Holbraad, 1984).

In the analysis of recent history, the power of states is evaluated within a comprehensive framework and from diverse vantage points, encompassing their military and

economic capabilities in relation to their resources, as well as their political policies that are cultural in nature and regarded as morally legitimate.

In contemporary international relations literature, myriad approaches exist to determine whether a state is a middle power. The traditionalist approach posits that a middle power is a country with fewer military and economic capabilities than the major powers but more than the small powers. This approach, however, lacks clear indicators to determine countries' power levels. Consequently, scholars such as Holbraad have employed economic data, including GDP, GNP, population, and military expenditures, to rank countries in terms of power.

Conversely, Cooper, Higgot, and Nossal opted to delineate middle power states through the lens of spatial, geographical, normative, and behavioral models. These are as follows: 1. Positional Model: A state that occupies a mid-ranking position in the international system, contingent on its material capacity. 2. Geographical Model: A state that wields influence by distinguishing itself from other states based on its geographical location or a state that, within an ideological framework, occupies a position among the great powers due to its geographical location. 3. Normative Model: A state that, while exhibiting its capabilities on the global stage, is unable to become a hegemonic power yet engages in activities such as mediation in international politics. 4. Behavioral Model: This state engages in diplomatic behaviors such as multilateral solutions to international problems, compromise in international disputes, and “Good International Citizenship” (Kumek, 2023, p.40).

Cooper, Higgot, and Nossal further delineate three evolving roles within the scope of middle power behaviors: Catalyst, Facilitator, and Manager. Accordingly, a middle power state first acts as a catalyst, providing intellectual and political energy to the international political environment through diplomatic efforts and influencing other countries that follow its policies. Subsequently, the middle power state adopts an agenda-setting role on issues that involve cooperative and coalition-based actions among actors. The final role played by the middle power state, according to Cooper, Higgot, and Nossal, is that of manager. In this role, middle power states establish and cultivate institutions and develop organizations and regimes, as well as conventions and norms (Cooper, Higgot & Nossal, 1993).

Alternatively, a behavioral perspective defines middle power states as those that demonstrate their influence by establishing coalitions within a multilateral cooperative environment, leveraging diplomacy as a behavioral instrument. These states pursue a distinct

identity that sets them apart and asserts their involvement in international political matters that do not garner the same level of attention from the predominant great powers. They endeavor to demonstrate their autonomy from the great powers' reliance on their diplomatic engagement (Hidayatullah, 2017).

Adam Chapnick (1999) has stated that the functional, hierarchical, and behavioral approaches that emerged with the definitions of the middle power concept include three different middle power models. Accordingly, the functional model is concerned with the ability of a state of middle power to exert influence and take responsibility for certain issues or functions in international politics. The hierarchical model emphasizes the material capabilities and capacities of states, positing that middle power states possess less power than great powers but more capabilities than most small powers. The behavioral model, in contrast, focuses on multilateralism in international politics, international conflict management, and states seeking to acquire international moral power. Chapnick (1999) asserts that both the functional and behavioral models are driven by political motivations. In this context, he elucidates the functional model as an endeavor to nominalize the status of states when their power is provisionally overestimated and the behavioral model as a cyclical form of political action, which is the actions of states currently regarded as middle powers. He expounds on the hierarchical structure as a translation of the position of states in the international ranking. To comprehend this structure, states should be evaluated by considering their power status at three stages: before, during, and after the establishment of the United Nations, as they assume mediating roles at these junctures. In essence, the functional and behavioral approaches utilize the middle power as a label to augment state power, while the hierarchical model is an affirmation of the ranked position of states in the international system. Chapnick (1999) has also criticized that some countries, such as Canada, Belgium, and Argentina, which are considered middle powers in the international system, may act as strong small powers rather than middle powers through their foreign policies (Chapnick,1999).

Andrew Carr's (2014) approach to defining middle power involves a categorization based on position, behavior, and identity. The positional category, particularly, is anchored in quantifiable material capabilities such as economic parameters, military strength, population, geographical location, strategic importance, and proximity. In elucidating the behavioral category, Carr (2014) draws upon the influence and power generated by states through their diplomatic conduct, aligning with the perspectives of Higgot and Nossal. The

identity category, as posited by Cooper, is defined as the inclusion of states within this category as a consequence of their utilization of the middle power label (Carr, 2014).

The concept of middle power was frequently employed, especially during the Cold War era, to describe states that did not yet meet the criteria to be considered great powers but whose attributes, influence, role, and importance in international relations were significant. The attributes frequently employed to delineate a middle power are diverse and are typically contingent on the theories of international relations espoused. However, they are often predicated on comparisons with states' economic power (e.g., Gross Domestic Product, Gross National Product), military strength, or persuasive influence in the international system.

Moreover, the first countries to define themselves as middle powers were Canada and Australia, which, leveraging their advantageous geographical location, sought to establish a presence in the post-World War II bipolar international system (Ravenhill, 1998). In the context of the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, Francis Forde, the deputy prime minister of Austria, articulated a notable assertion. He proposed the existence of entities other than the predominant global powers that possess the requisite resources and geographical significance to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of peace and international security in diverse regions worldwide. In essence, Forde served as the representative voice of the middle power states within the broader international system. In explaining the concept of middle power from the Canadian perspective, Canada defined itself as a junior partner in large and strong alliances but also as a state that can play an active and effective role in solving international problems outside its region (Yalçın, 2012).

The notion of middle power has been interpreted and defined in diverse ways in IR. This diversity can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, there is uncertainty about the level of qualifications or capabilities that countries possess and the extent to which they meet the meaning of the word middle. Secondly, there are differences in the interpretation of the concept of power within the social sciences. The combination of these two differently interpreted terms makes it difficult for academics to find common ground in the analysis and evaluation of countries' foreign policies. For instance, according to the liberal approach to international relations, the concept of state power is evaluated from a behavioral perspective. In this context, liberal scholars categorize middle powers based on their credibility and

influence in the international political arena and their ability to maintain the international order.

On the other hand, Holbraad and Wight, who are among the academics defending the English school doctrine, have generally emphasized the importance of material power from a realist perspective using a traditionalist approach (Holbraad, 1984; Wight, 1978). In this line of thought, it is argued that by taking into account the calculable material capabilities of countries in the international system, a power ranking can be used to determine which countries are at which level of power. In this regard, a comprehensive evaluation of various countries' geographical location, manpower (population), economic power, military power, and other pertinent factors has been conducted, resulting in the identification of countries as either great or small powers. It has been observed that within the hierarchical ranking, certain countries lack the current capabilities to be categorized as great powers, yet they possess a degree of power that surpasses that of small power. These countries have been designated as “middle powers” (Yalçın, 2012). The main criticism of this approach, which ignores non-material capabilities, is that the assessment is based solely on quantitative information.

Despite all the definitional differences, the IR literature also distinguishes between traditional and emerging middle powers. This is because traditional and emerging middle powers have different characteristics and spheres of influence in the international system. Structurally, traditional middle powers are wealthy, equity-oriented, politically democratic, and regionally ineffective; behaviorally, they often develop identities distinct from the powerful states in their region, although their regional policies are unstable and less effective. In contrast to traditional middle powers, emerging middle powers are wealthy, not fully global, and materially egalitarian, self-partnering states with recently democratized regional influence. Behaviorally, emerging middle powers have a strong regional orientation, advocating reformist global change in the international system and regional integration. They also seek to establish different identities from those of their region's weak rather than strong states (Jordaan, 2003).

According to Jordaan (2003), middle powers are states that, in terms of capacity and influence, tend to promote harmony and stability within the international system. In general, there is a consensus in the international literature that Canada, Australia, Norway, and Sweden are middle powers. However, given the dynamic nature of international politics and the evolving capabilities of nations, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, South Africa,

Türkiye, and Poland, which are also members of international organizations like BRICS or MIKTA, have begun to be classified as middle powers. In this regard, countries such as Canada and Australia are regarded as traditional middle powers, while Brazil and Türkiye are classified as emerging middle powers by some scholars and as developing middle powers by others. Cooper, Higgot, and Nossal contend that the term “niche diplomacy” is an apt characterization of the middle power status. They posit that the determination of a middle power's standing should be informed by its capacity to wield influence through a nuanced understanding of its behavioral dynamics in the international political arena. Furthermore, they contend that a middle power should aspire to play an active role in the identification of multilateral solutions to global challenges and demonstrate the ability to address international issues effectively.

Bernard Wood, a seminal figure in the field, has delineated five roles for middle powers (In Kumek, 2023): 1. assuming the role of a “regional power or sub-regional leader,” 2. functioning as a “functional leader” by assuming the initiative on a specific issue in international politics, 3. operating as a “stabilizer” in times of international turbulence, and 4. demonstrating the capacity to influence and shape global dynamics. destabilization by acting as a mediator between the actors causing this situation, 4. being a “status seeker” that seeks to increase its reputation by allying with great power, 5. being a good international citizen by supporting international action.

Emel Parlar (2018) offers a concise overview of the middle power concept, emphasizing its application in the early stages as contingent upon the explicit power capabilities of middle powers. These capabilities are derived from states' material resources and the legal status within global institutions and organizations that facilitate coordination among transnational and multinational actors, promote cooperation, address disputes, and address collective action challenges (Parlar, 2018). However, Parlar notes a shift in applying the middle power concept in the context of international relations (IR) after the 2000s. As Parlar (2018) indicates, this shift is characterized by an emphasis on the differentiative preferences of diplomatic foreign policy, such as activity, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. This emphasis is manifested through the leveraging of niche areas, the establishment of coalitions, and the contribution to the establishment of good international citizenship. Parlar also points out that the definitions of middle power concepts in IR differ until the 2000s and later. Prior to the 2000s, scholars such as Cooper, Chapnick, and Carr pioneered a conceptualization of middle powers under functional, positional, and behavioral



categories. Alternatively, Ravenhill's five C's concept, encompassing capacity, concentration, creativity, coalition building, and credibility, offers a post-2000s definition. After the 2000s, the middle power concept has been defined in traditional, intermingled (mixed), and newer terms.

The functional approach encompasses countries with special relations with post-WWII settlers, holding privileged positions in international institutions such as Canada, Australia, and South Africa, categorized as either balancers or pivotal in the international system (e.g., South Korea, Mexico, Türkiye, Poland) or owing geographical attributes or locating between two great powers (e.g., Türkiye).

On the other hand, the positional approach emphasizes the ranking of states within the international system, placing significant emphasis on quantifiable factors. These include GDP, GNP, population, military and industrial capability/capacity, defense expenditures, and material resources. Additionally, the power of leadership and the will of nations to follow can be considered among the numerous power sources.

The positional approach typifies the classification of states in terms of power, aligning more closely with the realist point of view. As previously mentioned, Holbraad's middle power definition, derived from the positional approach, characterizes middle powers as significantly stronger than small states but weaker than great powers. Consequently, the positional approach naturally establishes a hierarchical system for ranking states, a concept termed the "hierarchical model" by Adam Chapnick in 1999. Cooper, Nossal, and Higgot further emphasize the significance of a state's geographical preferences, such as size and location, in their positional approach. Conversely, the behavioral approach asserts that middle powers possess distinct diplomatic capabilities that can be utilized as a power factor.

The behavioral approach emphasizes the significance of active diplomacy, which is defined as innovative and creative engagement in diplomatic activities. It also highlights niche diplomacy, which involves the strategic focus on specific objectives through the harmonious utilization of economic, demographic, and network-based resources. Additionally, the approach underscores the role of coalition building and the concept of good international citizenship as political tools that can enhance the influential distinctive diplomatic capability of middle powers. Wood's research (1987) emphasizes the role factor in defining middle power states, including leadership (regional or interest-based leadership), counterbalancing, stabilizing, and mediating abilities. Finally, the behavioral approach

encompasses the notion of a state's role as a catalyst or an innovator, emphasizing regional and global concerns.

While the traditional approach, which was one of the approaches that established the concept of middle power after the 2000s, broadly refines positional definitions with an acceptance of a more systemic impact, the intermingled approach also refines functional, positional, and behavioral definitions, combining with eclectic definitions. Jordaan, who has studied within the intermingled approach, recognizes the types of middle powers as traditional and emerging. The newer definitions of middle power mainly aim to foster regional alliances or associations, focusing on security issues, global challenges, and enhancing trade capacity that largely involves technological novelties.

An examination of the extant literature, encompassing studies employing functional, positional, behavioral, traditional, emerging, or novel approaches, reveals that Türkiye has been operating as a middle power, particularly since the early 1990s (Hale, 2013). The subsequent section will address Türkiye's status as a middle power in this context.

## **5.2. Türkiye as Middle Power**

As previously mentioned, numerous scholars and researchers have employed a variety of traditional and novel approaches to elucidate the concept of middle power, identifying and interpreting Türkiye as a middle power. While many scholars have examined Türkiye's middle power status conceptually and theoretically through case studies, the most significant contributions are attributed to Gök (2014), Hale (1994&2013), Hess (2021), Jordaan (2003), Parlar (2018), Müftüler & Yüksel (1997), Baba & Önsoy (2016), Soyaltın-Collela & Demiryol (2023), Yavaş (2012), Islam & Nyadera (2024). The present chapter employs a neorealist perspective to analyze and explicate Türkiye's middle power status, exploring it through two distinct yet interconnected domains: material capabilities and diplomatic capabilities.

### **5.2.1. Material Capabilities**

The material capabilities of Türkiye will be examined under the following subtopics: geographic, economic, military, and demographic. These factors are the main consideration bullets staging a state's power status within the international system.

Geographically, Türkiye is a country located in the Europe-Asia-Africa triangle, where Eastern and Western cultures are integrated. It is located between the Black Sea, Mediterranean, and Caspian basins in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East regions. With an area of 783 562 sq km, it ranks 36th out of 223 countries in the world in terms of geographical area (Globalfirepower Website, 2024a). Surrounded on three sides by the sea, Türkiye has a 7200 km coastline, and 2816 km shared borders with its neighbor states, which makes security more than obligatory for Türkiye. See further geographical preference in Table 1.

Yalçın's analysis indicates that Türkiye's geopolitical position as a bridge between Europe and Asia has historically rendered it an influential actor on the global stage. Its strategic proximity to several pivotal regions has consistently positioned it as a significant asset in the context of great power competition (Yalçın, 2012). Furthermore, Türkiye's population of 84 million places makes it the 18th most populous country worldwide. Notably, 90 percent of the population is under 65, and 68.6 percent falls within the 15-65 age bracket. This demographic profile positions Türkiye as a youthful and potentially influential state regarding human capital (TUIK, 2022).

According to data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Türkiye, a member of both the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the G20, holds the 17th position in global economic rankings, with a GDP of \$1.024 trillion as of 2023 (World Bank Website, 2024c). Türkiye's economic ranking, as measured by its GDP of 2023, places it below Australia, Canada, and South Korea yet above Poland, Norway, and Argentina, which are regarded as middle powers within the international system. The evaluation of Türkiye's economy during and following the 2009 global financial crisis reveals that the nation's economic landscape remained relatively unscathed by the crisis, in contrast to the severe impacts experienced by numerous major Western economies. This resilience can be attributed to the effectiveness of Türkiye's financial regulations. A notable aspect of Türkiye's financial policy during this period was its substantial support for the advancement of innovative technologies, particularly within the defense industry and military sector. The development of advanced unmanned aerial systems (UAS) stands out as a significant achievement, underscoring Türkiye's technological prowess. The strategic importance of these UAS is exemplified by their deployment in various regions of the world, including the ongoing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as between

Ukraine and Russia. The deployment of these UAS has emerged as a pivotal factor in the dynamics of these conflict zones, potentially reshaping the geopolitical landscape.

Türkiye's unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), the TB-2, manufactured by the Bayraktar company, has gained global recognition and commercial traction. However, Türkiye's strategic vision for its defense and security policy extends far beyond the confines of this single asset. The country's comprehensive support for its defense industry is poised to catalyze a new era of technological innovation, with the anticipated outcome being a substantial enhancement in military capabilities. Türkiye's innovative approach has enhanced the relations between the Turkish army and defense industry companies, and the technologically improved and strengthened Turkish Armed Forces have provided new opportunities for Türkiye to act more independently following its defense and security policy. Improving military capability through innovation enables Türkiye to evolve its military power into a global brand and transform the defense industry into a catalyst for the country's expanding economy (Yeşiltaş, 2024).

Türkiye has given significant importance to the Defense Industry. Thirty-seven defense industry companies work in all domains (ten air domains, nine land domains, ten sea domains, and eight missile production) in Türkiye. By 2012, Türkiye had two defense companies: ASELSAN, in 78th place, and TAI, in 83rd place among the top 100 defense countries in the world. The number of Turkish Defense companies increased to seven by 2020 as ASELSAN 48th place, TAI 53rd place, BMC 89th place, ROKETSAN 91st place, STM 92nd place, FNSS 98th place, and HAVELSAN 99th place in the same list (Turkish Defense and Aerospace Industry Report, 2022). In 2024, the number of Turkish defense companies in the top 100 list noted as five, including ASELSAN (42nd), TAI (50th), ROKETSAN (71st), MKE (84th), and ASFAT (94th), respectively (Anadolu Agency, 2024b). See Table 2 for detailed information.

In addition to the defense companies that found a place in the top 100 list, one of the biggest UAS-producing companies, BAYKAR, is also expected to be on the respective list in the following year due to its high export contribution. BAYKAR, apart from the rest of the companies, reached to 1.7 billion USD of Türkiye's exports in 2023 (Yeşiltaş, 2024). In addition to BAYKAR, Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) occupies a significant position within the Turkish Defense Industry, offering a range of manned and unmanned platforms. TAI unveiled the KAAN fighter jet in 2024, a fifth-generation aircraft planned for upgrading

to sixth-generation, including artificial intelligence and full-scale integration with unmanned platforms, marking a significant milestone in Türkiye's aerospace endeavors (TRT World, 2025). This development underscores Türkiye's assertion of its capacity to possess tactical and operational military capabilities and strategic platforms, thereby demonstrating its commitment to self-sufficiency in defense matters.

Following its security policy, Türkiye has enormously increased its military production and commercialization capability in the last 10 years. While the export of Turkish Defense Industry volume in 2014 was 1.88 billion USD and the import volume was 1.35 billion USD, with the encouragement in industry because of Türkiye's security policy and aim to maximize its military power, the defense industry production has increased to the export volume of 5.5 billion USD and an import volume of 3.3 billion USD by 2023. The export volume of the Turkish Defense Industry by 2024 broke a record in its history, reaching 7.154 billion USD with a 29.5% increase compared to 2023 (Turkish Armed Forces Foundation Website, 2025). See Table 7 for a detailed comparison.

Türkiye also gives enormous significance, equipping its army with products from the Turkish defense industry. Although Türkiye's local content in defense procurement was 24% in 2002, that ratio has increased to 73% by 2022 and 80% by 2024, parallel with Türkiye's growing army size and military expenditures. (BHA News Agency, 2025). In the same year, the Turkish defense and aerospace industry companies' worldwide production order volume reached 17.88 billion USD. See Tables 3 and 7 for further insight.

Additionally, the Turkish defense industry accomplished significant success by breaking records and dominating certain areas of the global market. Apart from other Turkish Defense Companies, BAYKAR and Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) alone reached a 5.5 billion USD export volume in 2024. BAYKAR, undertaking 1.8 billion USD of the total defense industry exports, became the world's leader in unmanned aerial systems technology by realizing 90% of its sales to the international market and reached three times larger than the nearest US company in the same sector. This capability gave Türkiye dominance in the global UAV sector by controlling 65% of the market. By 2024, 35 countries, including NATO and European Union members, have bought UAVs (TB-2 and Akinci) from the BAYKAR company alone. In addition to BAYKAR's 1.831 billion USD export success, nine more Turkish Defense Industry companies contributed outstandingly to the defense industry exports in 2024, TAI 750 Million USD, ASFAT 644 Million USD,

MKE 610 Million USD, ARCA Defense 600 Million USD, TUSAS Engine Industries 390 Million USD, ASELSAN 217 Million USD, OTOKAR 193 Million USD, ROKETSAN 179 Million USD and Samsun Yurt Savunma 166 Million USD (TRT World, 2025).

Furthermore, Türkiye took 11th place in the top 25 global largest arms exporters list in 2023 by doubling its production capacity and capability comparing the time periods 2014-2018 and 2019-2023 (SIPRI, 2024). Regarding the arms export volume, by its development attack in its defense industry, Türkiye owns 1.6% of the total global arms export, which puts Türkiye above most of the middle power states recognized in the international environment, including Canada, Australia, Poland, and Brazil (SIPRI Fact Sheet 2024). See Table 9 for further insight.

Concerning military strength, by 2025, the estimated total active military personnel amount is 481 000 in terms of manpower (Nato Website, 2024). Including reserves, the total manpower with 883 900 and more than 1 000 air assets, 66 000 land forces assets (tanks, vehicles, artillery, MLRS), and 182 naval assets, Türkiye is ranked as the eighth-largest army in the world and the second-largest army in NATO after the United States (Globalfirepower Website, 2024b). See Tables 1 and 4 for further insight.

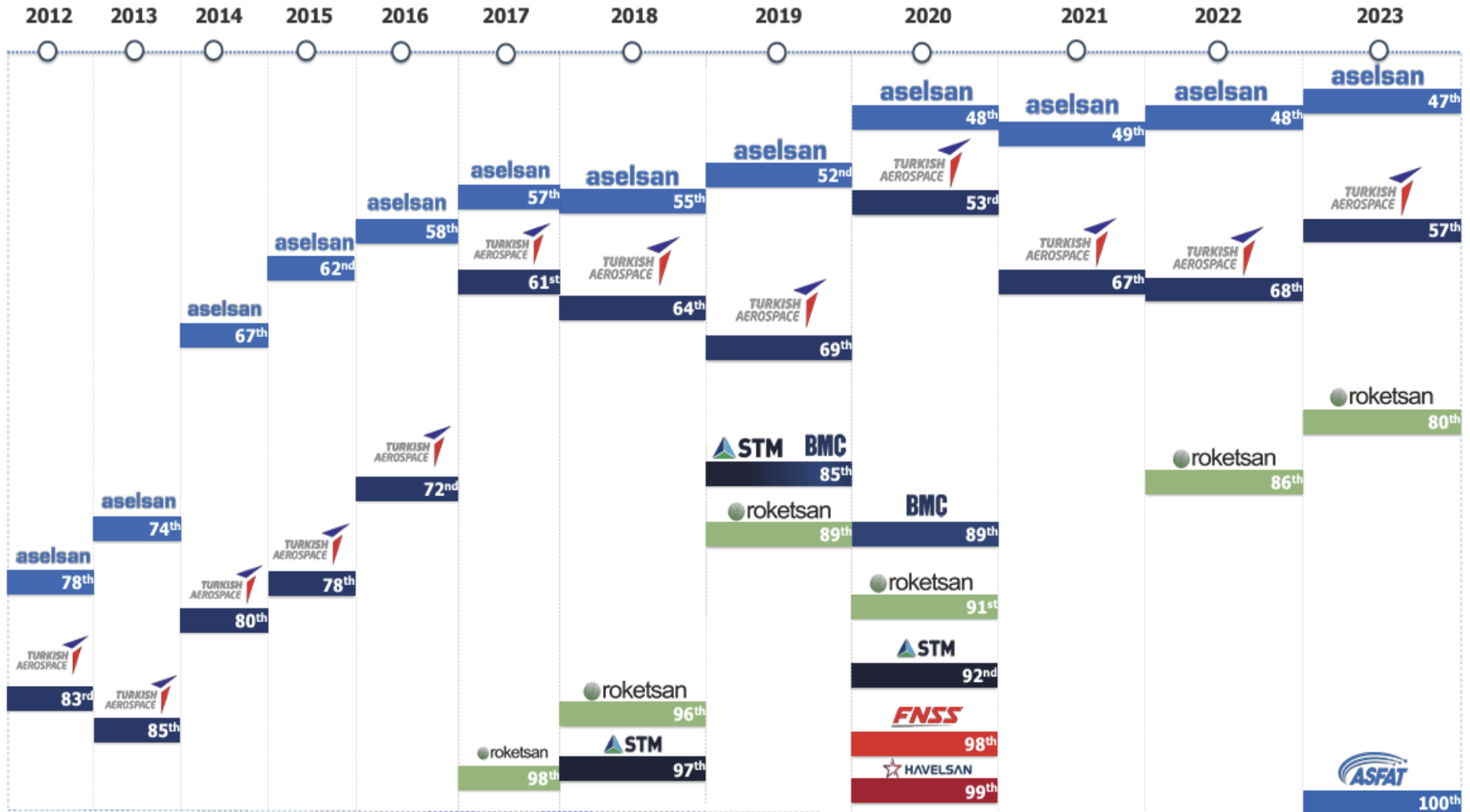
Türkiye's total defense budget for 2025 is 47 billion USD, and its military expenditures in 2023 were 15.8 billion USD. Additionally, it is estimated that the military expenditure of 2024 will constitute 2.09% of its total GDP. Moreover, 34.2% of Türkiye's defense expenditures are estimated to be allocated to equipment procurement in 2024, although the NATO guideline stipulates a minimum of 20%. See Tables 1,5, 6, and 8 for further insights.

Türkiye has been ranked as the third highest NATO Member State Military Ranking and eighth strongest army in the world in accordance with the calculated power index score depending on the number of military units, equipment, financial standings, and mobility capabilities (Globalfirepower Website, 2024a). Türkiye has been considered a pioneer nation in terms of military purpose UAS system concept development, production, and implementation of military tactics in the field directly. The success of Türkiye's innovative security entrepreneur and Turkish defense industry products' game changer and key element role has been proven in neighboring regions (Soyaltın-Collela & Demiryol, 2023). Türkiye, with its improved material capability and increased power, is capable of executing its defense and security policy in neighboring and distant regions.

**Table 1.** Overall Military Power of Türkiye (Table is prepared by the author depending on data received from www.globalfirepower.com, 2024)

<b>Overall Military Power of Türkiye (2024)</b>			
<b>Manpower</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>84 113 531</b>	
	Total Military Personnel (est.) including reserves*	883 900	
<b>Military Power</b>	<b>Air Forces (Aircraft Total)</b>	1 083	9th in 145 globally
	Fighters	201	14th in 145 globally
	Transports (Fixed-Wing)	84	9th in 145 globally
	Trainers	287	9th in 145 globally
	Special-Mission	28	10th in 145 globally
	Tanker Fleet	7	10th in 145 globally
	Helicopters	508	7th in 145 globally
	Attack Helicopters	111	5th in 145 globally
	<b>Land Forces</b>		
	Tanks	2 238	8th in 145 globally
	Vehicles	61 173	10th in 145 globally
	Self-Propelled Artillery	1 038	6th in 145 globally
	Towed Artillery	1 707	6th in 145 globally
	MLRS (Rocket Artillery)	296	13th in 145 globally
	<b>Naval Forces (Total Assets)</b>	182	17th in 145 globally
	Helicopter Carriers	1	5th in 145 globally
	Frigates	17	17th in 145 globally
	Corvettes	9	8th in 145 globally
	Submarines	13	8th in 145 globally
	Patrol Vessels	41	27th in 145 globally
	Mine Warfare	11	9th in 145 globally
	Defense Budget	47 billion USD	13th in 145 globally
<b>Geographical Preferences</b>	<b>Geography</b>		
	Square Land Area	783 562 km <sup>2</sup>	
	Coastline Coverage	7 200 km	
	Shared Borders	2 816 km	
	Waterways (usable)	1 200 km	

**Table 2.** Turkish Defense Companies Among World's Top 100. (source: Turkish Defense & Aerospace Industry 2022 Report. <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/library/publications/lists/investpublications/defense-aerospace-industry.pdf> ).

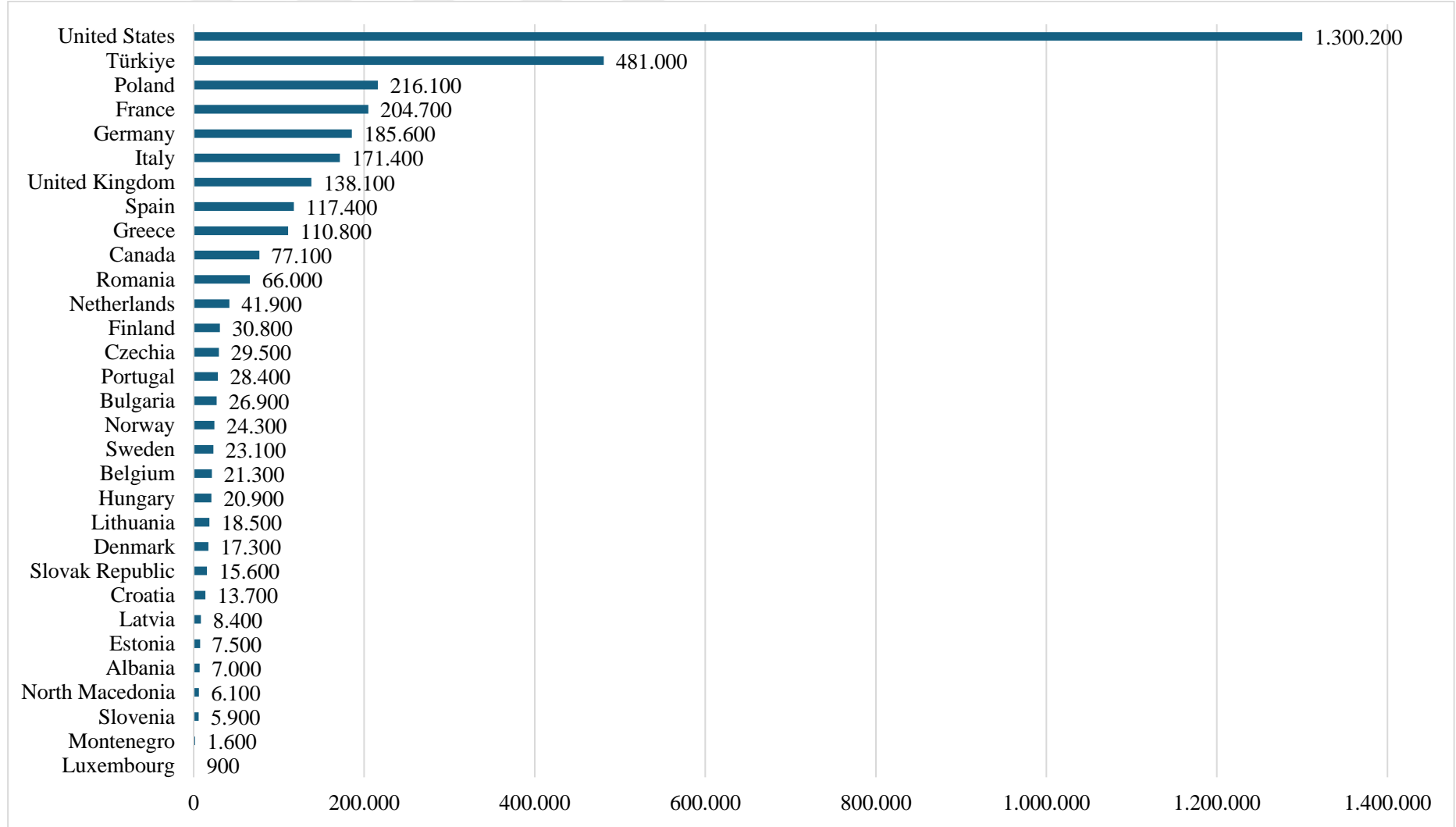




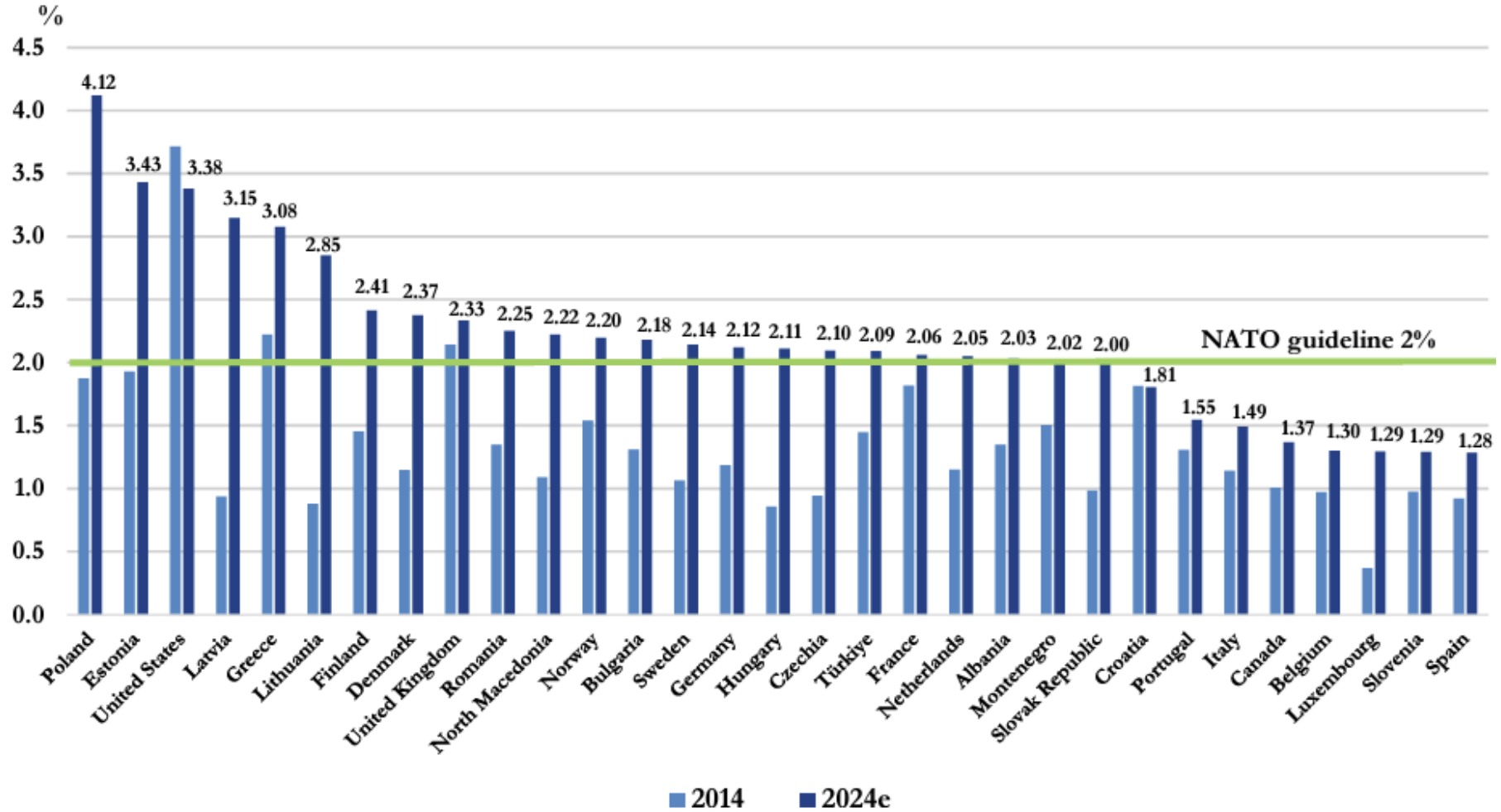
**Table 3.** Turkish Defense and Aerospace Industry Export, Import and Production Order Volume (2014-2023) in Millions USD. (The table is prepared by the author depends on Turkish Defense & Aerospace Industry Manufacturers Association Reports).

Turkish Defense and Aerospace Industry Export, Import and Production Order Volume (2014-2023) in Millions USD										
Year	Export Volume				Import Volume			Production Order		
	Total Export of Turkish Defense & Aerospace Industry	Total Export Civil Aviation Platforms Excluded	Military Aerospace Platforms	Weapon - Missile - Ammunition	Total Import of Turkish Defense & Aerospace Industry	Total Import Civil Aviation Platforms Excluded	Weapon - Missile - Ammunition	Total Order Volume Civil Aviation Excluded	Military Aerospace Platforms	Weapon - Missile - Ammunition
2014	1.885	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.351	N/A	N/A	10.768	N/A	N/A
2015	1.929	1468	355	N/A	1.067	831	255	6.580	1.647	N/A
2016	1.953	1434	379	195	1.289	935	280	11.620	3.391	1.080
2017	1.824	1282	393	122	1.544	1.188	294	5.663	1.336	990
2018	2.188	1690	693	111	2.449	1.596	522	10.728	1.473	2.658
2019	3.068	2456	771	380	3.088	1.935	811	6.999	1.676	759
2020	2.266	1611	408	274	2.161	1.424	624	4.805	1.237	773
2021	3.225	1582	1.652	1.670	2.062	1.375	657	5.893	1.095	2.074
2022	4.396	3166	546	686	2.700	1.628	783	7.655	2.234	2.281
2023	5.545	3604	720	1.109	3.303	N/A	N/A	17.889	8.043	5.216

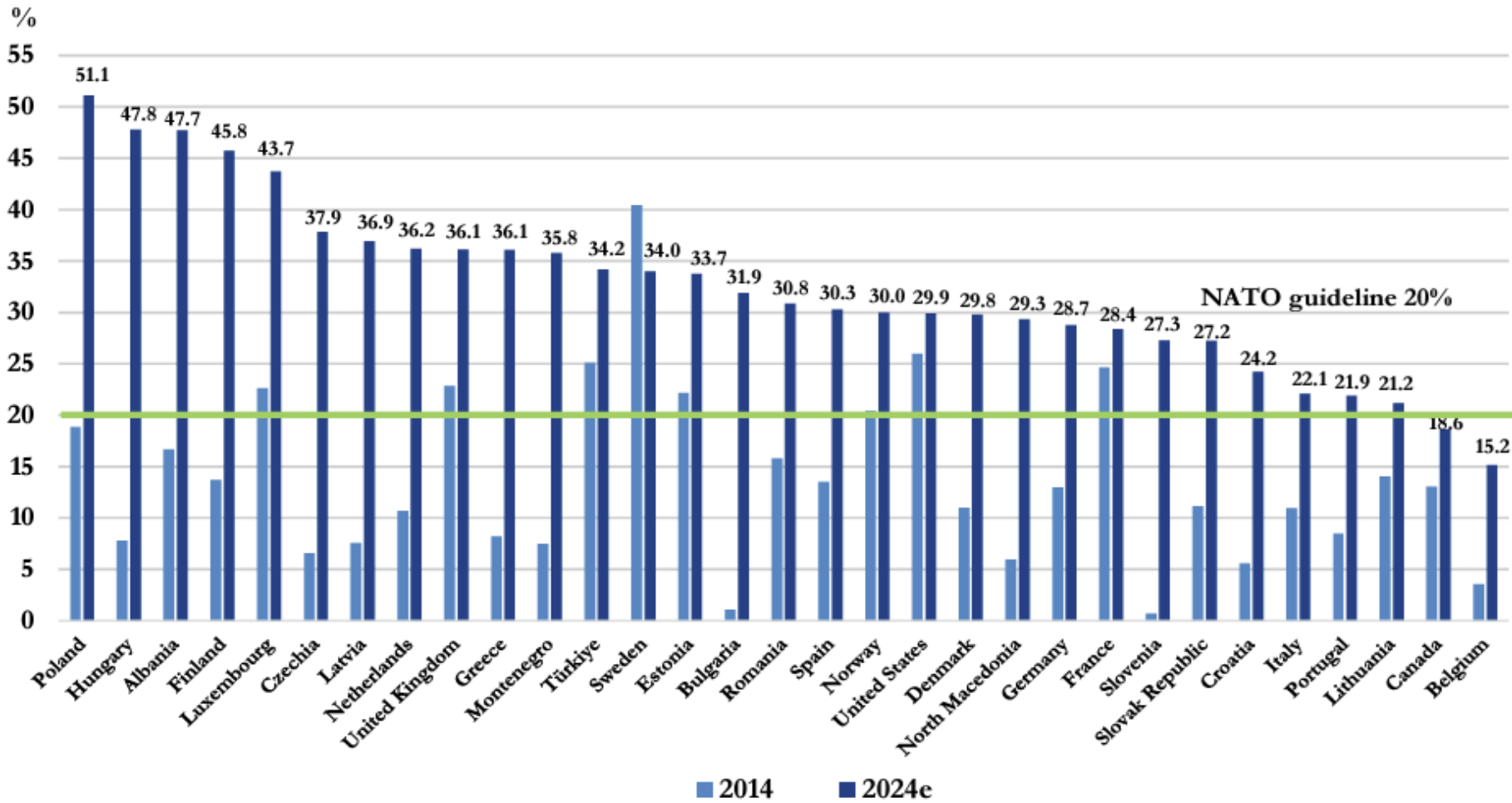
**Table 4.** Number of Active Military Personnel in NATO Countries in 2024 (The table is prepared by the author based on NATO Defense Expenditures Report data, 2024).



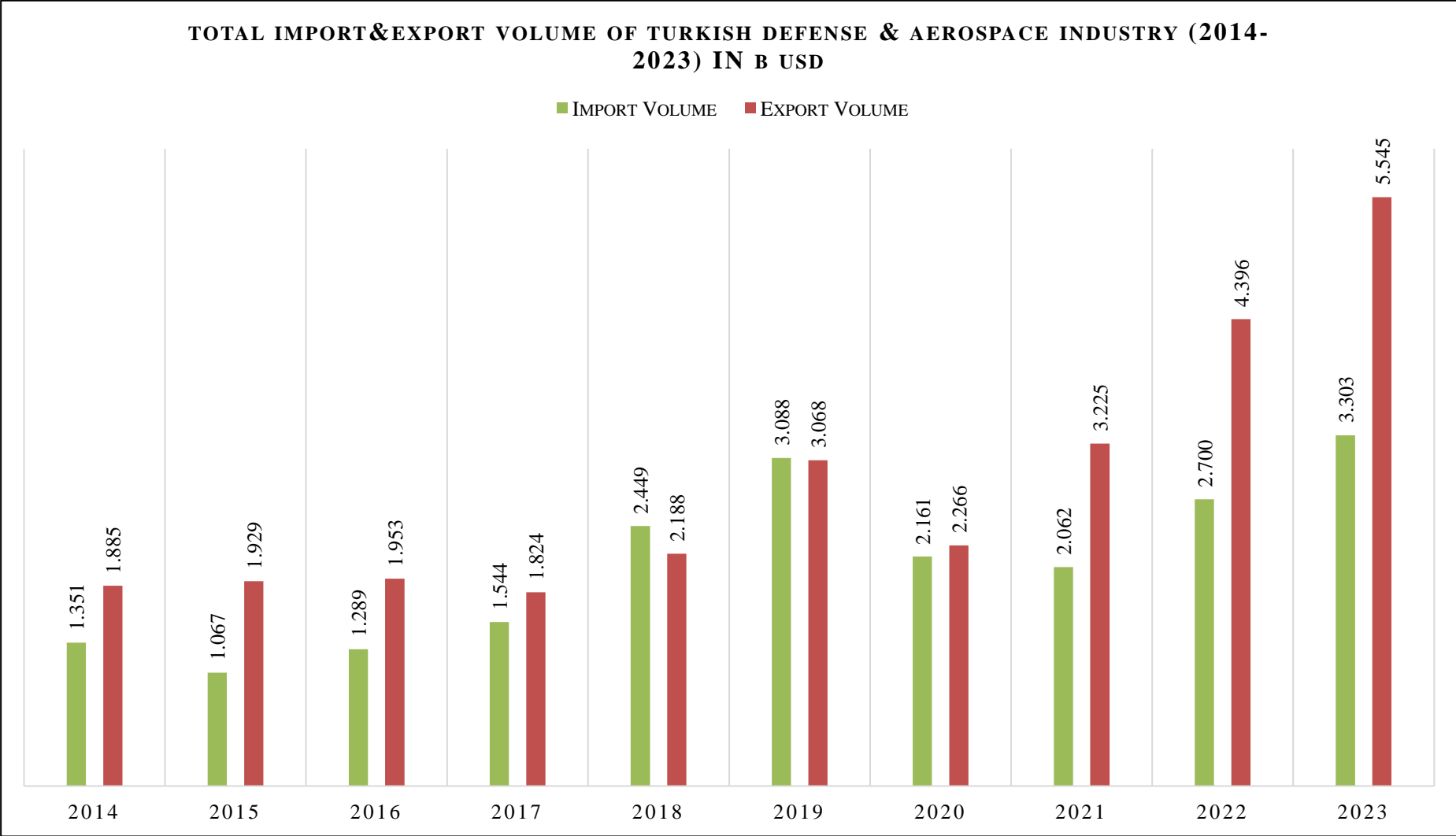
**Table 5.** NATO Defense Expenditure as a Share of GDP (%) (source: Data is received from [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int), 2024).



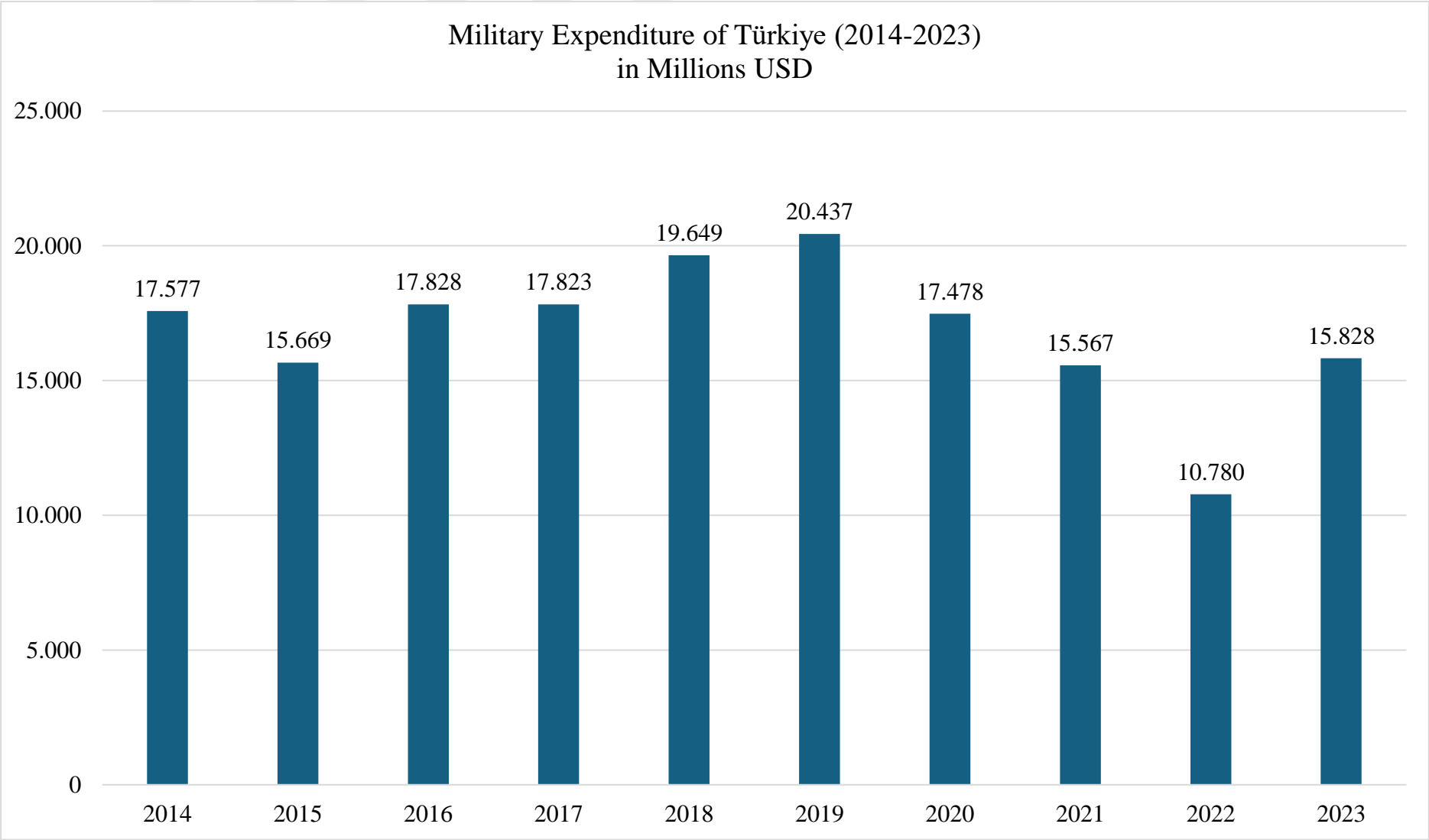
**Table 6.** NATO Equipment Expenditure as a Share of Defense Expenditure (%) (source: Data is received from [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int), 2024).



**Table 7.** Total Import & Export Volume of Turkish Defense & Aerospace Industry (2014-2023) in Billions USD (The table is prepared by the author based on Turkish Defense & Aerospace Industry Manufacturers Association Reports).



**Table 8.** Military Expenditure of Türkiye in Millions of USD. (The table is prepared by the author based on SIPRI data).



**Table 9.** The Largest Exporters of Major Arms in 2023. (The table is prepared by the author based on SIPRI data)

<b>The Largest Exporters of Major Arms in 2023</b>				
	<b>Exporter</b>	<b>Share of Global Arms Exports (%)</b>		<b>Percent Change from 2014-2014 to 2019-2023</b>
		<b>2019-2023</b>	<b>2014-2018</b>	
1	United States	42	34	17%
2	France	11	7,2	47%
3	Russia	11	21	-53%
4	China	5,8	5,9	-5%
5	Germany	5,6	6,3	-14%
6	Italy	4,3	2,2	86%
7	United Kingdom	3,7	4,1	-14%
8	Spain	2,7	2,7	-3%
9	Israel	2,4	3,1	-25%
10	South Korea	2	1,7	12%
11	Türkiye	1,6	0,7	106%
12	Netherlands	1,2	2,2	-46%
13	Sweden	0,8	0,7	15%
14	Poland	0,7	0,1	1138%
15	Canada	0,6	0,5	20%
16	Australia	0,6	0,3	88%
17	Switzerland	0,5	1	-47%
18	Ukraine	0,4	1,4	-73%
19	Norway	0,4	0,4	-16%
20	UAE	0,3	0,4	-24%
21	South Africa	0,3	0,3	3%
22	Belgium	0,3	<0,05	43%
23	Belarus	0,2	0,4	-34%
24	Brazil	0,2	0,2	-4%
25	Iran	0,2	0,1	276%

### 5.2.2. Diplomatic Capabilities

Müftüler's analysis of Türkiye's political landscape asserts that the nation has established a modern political system that stands in contrast to its neighboring countries in the Middle East and Central Asia. Türkiye is characterized by its stability, democracy, and secularity, qualities that are free from extremist influences and demonstrate a pro-Western orientation, albeit to different extents (Müftüler & Yüksel 1997). Parlar's analysis indicates that the concept of middle power was not incorporated into Türkiye's foreign policy from the republican era until the conclusion of the Cold War. This was due to prevailing security tensions, economic challenges, and domestic issues. However, the post-Cold War era, particularly the 2000s, engendered a conducive environment for Turkish political policy.

Consequently, Türkiye adopted a range of middle power behaviors to achieve its objectives at both regional and global levels. During this period, Türkiye sought to strengthen its international engagement by enhancing its institutional capacity within international organizations and forums. This initiative was in line with its rising position in the global system, a trajectory that was further fueled by its augmented financial resources following the year 2000 (Parlar, 2018). In this regard, Türkiye's active participation in numerous Western organizations (39 in particular by 2024 from defense to economy areas), including the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Council of Europe, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), has consolidated Türkiye's standing within the global community. Furthermore, Türkiye has exhibited a proactive stance by engaging with regional organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC). See Table 10 for further insight.

**Table 10.** Samples of the International Organizations that Türkiye Actively Participates in (The table is prepared by the author)

1.	United Nations (UN)
2.	North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
3.	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
4.	Council of Europe, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)
5.	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
6.	Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)
7.	Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC)



Türkiye has assumed an active role in managing international conflicts following its foreign and security policy approach as a middle power. This involvement has manifested through various initiatives, including mediation, facilitation, and peacekeeping operations. Türkiye has sought to address numerous regional and global challenges on the international stage, aiming to establish a global vision through the augmentation of its diplomatic capacity. From this perspective, Türkiye has decisively increased its number of representative instruments from active foreign representative offices of 163 in 2002 to 257 by 2024, including 146 embassies worldwide (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, 2025b). See Table 11 for the Geographical Distribution of the Foreign Representative Offices of Türkiye. This endeavor has involved the utilization of soft power through the implementation of public diplomacy instruments.

**Table 11.** Geographical Distribution of the Foreign Representative Offices of Türkiye (The table is prepared by the author based on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye data, 2025b)

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Regions</b>	<b>Number of Foreign Representative Offices</b>
1.	Europe	99
2.	Asia	73
3.	Africa	49
4.	America	32
5.	Oceania	4
<b>Total:</b>		<b>257</b>

Through these initiatives and in line with its middle power activism in foreign policy, Türkiye has assumed an active role in international conflict management issues such as mediation, facilitation, and peacekeeping by intervening in many regional and global problems on the international platform and has tried to create a global vision by increasing its diplomatic capacity by using soft power through public diplomacy tools. In this context, Türkiye, for example, has become one of the countries with a voice on global political economy issues by actively participating in the G-20. It has also continued its middle power activism by forming a good coalition with other middle powers in the international order by participating in the MIKTA grouping, which was established in 2013 as an informal consultation and coordination platform between Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia, with energy, Counter-Terrorism and Security, Trade and Economic

Cooperation, Good Governance and Democracy, Sustainable Development, Gender Equality and Peacekeeping Operations as key priorities. Türkiye has also assumed the rotating presidency of MIKTA in 2017 and 2022 and has not hesitated to lead and guide global issues, focusing on global health, effective migration management, and food security.

Türkiye's foreign policy, characterized by its soft power in the Balkans through Turkish humanitarian organizations and state-directed entities such as TİKA, Yunus Emre Institute, and Kızılay, as well as its direct involvement in African regions, exemplifies its role as a middle power. Furthermore, Türkiye has been instrumental in providing humanitarian assistance, ranging from donations to the provision of potable water to African populations. In addition, Türkiye has recently assumed a direct mediating role in establishing peace between Somalia and Ethiopia), thereby affirming its status as a middle power continually seeking to augment its influence within the international order (Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications Website, 2024).

The aforementioned material and diplomatic capabilities indicate that Türkiye's increased foreign policy activism and conceptualized foreign policy aims and behaviors are compatible with the middle power characteristics. As a middle power in the international system, Türkiye endeavors to enhance its international effectiveness by leveraging foreign policy instruments, including hard power capabilities, that are either disregarded by great powers or not addressed by them due to a lack of interest. Türkiye's foreign policy approach, characterized by a broadened perspective, aligns more closely with that of a global actor than a middle power primarily focused on maximizing its own power. Notably, even in areas of foreign policy that are of interest to great powers, Türkiye endeavors to propose innovative solutions, which contribute to the distinctiveness of its foreign policy.

## **6. TÜRKİYE - AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS AND TÜRKİYE'S MIDDLE POWER ROLE IN AZERBAIJAN**

The historical and cultural connections between Türkiye and Azerbaijan are exemplified by the “two states, one nation” rhetoric of their respective presidents, are rooted in a long and shared history. The Turkish presence in the South Caucasus region dates back to 250 BC, albeit under various dynasties and state names. Beginning with the Seljuk Empire in the eleventh century, Azerbaijan has been a Turkish country under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire, Iran, and the Russian Empire until today. However, the years 1918-1920 stand out as a historical turning point for Azerbaijani Turks. In this context, the Republic of Azerbaijan, which adopted the republican form of government, was established on May 28, 1918, following more than eighty years of rule by the Russian Empire. However, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was dissolved on April 27, 1920, after the Red Army, which had occupied Azerbaijan, dissolved the parliament and the government, and the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic was established on April 28, 1920. Two years later, on December 5, 1936, Azerbaijan became one of fifteen republics that constituted the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Akifoğlu, 2017).

The relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan remained limited until 1991, when Azerbaijan declared its independence. However, Türkiye was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence, and since then, the relations between the two countries have intensified. The two countries share deep-rooted similarities and relations regarding common history, culture, and language.

During the First Karabakh conflict in 1992, when Armenia unjustly occupied Azerbaijani territory, Türkiye refrained from entering the war on Azerbaijan's side despite significant pressure from the Turkish public. The potential for conflict with Russia influenced this decision. Despite its inability to participate directly in the war, Türkiye took significant international actions, including labeling Armenia as an occupying state and closing its borders with Armenia.

The Turkish republics that gained independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union further elevated the significance of the Caucasus region for Türkiye. In this context, Azerbaijan holds particular importance in Türkiye's defense and security policy due to its geopolitical importance and the historical, cultural, and religious ties between the two

nations. Azerbaijan serves as the primary gateway for Türkiye to access the eastern region, known as Turkestan, while Türkiye serves as the primary gateway for Azerbaijan to reach the western regions. In this context, Azerbaijan functions as a bridge between Türkiye and the Turkic republics in Asia, while Türkiye facilitates Azerbaijan's access to Europe and its integration into the international community. Consequently, both countries accord special importance to each other's foreign policy and international security concerns. In this regard, numerous protocols have been ratified to enhance bilateral relations, including the following:

1. Türkiye, Azerbaijan Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (January 2, 1992)
2. Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighborliness between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan (January 24, 1992)
3. Cooperation on Military Education Agreement (August 11, 1992)
4. Black Sea Economic Cooperation Agreement on Education, Culture and Communication (March 6, 1993)
5. Agreement on the Development of Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye (February 9, 1994)
6. Protocol on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye (February 9, 1994)
7. Agreement on Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments (April 4, 1994)
8. Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation (April 9, 1994)
9. Agreement on Educational, Technical, and Scientific Cooperation in the Military Field (June 10, 1996)
10. Türkiye, Azerbaijan Social Security Agreement (July 17, 1998)
11. Agreement between Türkiye and Azerbaijan on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection (October 14, 2004)
12. Approval of the Long-Term Economic and Commercial Cooperation Program and the Implementation Plan of Türkiye, Azerbaijan (February 18, 2008)
13. Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance (August 16, 2010)
14. Agreement on Military Medical Education and Cooperation (December 19, 2018)
15. Protocol Allowing Citizens of the Republics of Türkiye and Azerbaijan to Travel with Identity Cards during Mutual Visits (December 10, 2020)

16. Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye (June 15, 2021)

The most significant of these treaties are the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance and the Shusha Declaration. The Shusha Declaration, signed after the Second Karabakh War in 2021, is one of the crucial agreements that establish an alliance between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, serving the benefit and interests of both nations and states aiming to ensure cooperation for global and regional peace and stability and security. By expressing the consideration of national and moral wealth, the statements of the founder leader of the Republic of Türkiye, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as “Azerbaijan’s joy is our joy and her sorrow is our sorrow,” and the National Leader of the Azerbaijani Nation, Haydar Aliyev as “One nation, two states,” Shusha Declaration advocates the deepening and enhancing the bilateral relations between two states from a wide specter including mutual support in the areas from security and military to international and institutional activism in such as UN, OSCE.

For the period before the Second Karabakh War, the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance is the most consequential agreement affecting the policies of both Azerbaijan and Türkiye, particularly in the realm of international security, and the implications of the respective agreement have become apparent shortly and gradually. The subsequent section will examine and expound upon the repercussions of this treaty, with a particular focus on the second Karabakh Conflict.

Azerbaijan, a country with abundant energy reserves, particularly oil and natural gas, has encountered challenges in adequately extracting and transporting these resources. In response, it has pursued international agreements, seeking Western countries' support. While these accords have been economically beneficial, they have concurrently hindered the deepening of relations with Türkiye (Erarslan&Özdemir, 2021). Furthermore, the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan aligns the foreign policy objectives of both nations concerning numerous regional issues. Both countries share a common regional strategic objective, and no significant discord exists between their foreign, defense, and security policy interests. They are in alignment with each other in foreign policy on a multitude of issues. Consequently, it can be asserted with a high degree of confidence that the relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan has reached the level of a strategic partnership (Göktaş, Tarakçı&Baş 2022).

The energy factor assumes a particularly prominent role in the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Azerbaijan is an active producer of oil and natural gas, while Türkiye boasts significant potential in terms of energy consumption; in other terms an energy-dependent country due to its size and population. Moreover, Türkiye offers a strategic opportunity to transport this energy to Europe. In this regard, there have been endeavors since the 2000s to establish oil and gas pipelines between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, with the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 2006 being a notable milestone. This development has enabled the delivery of Azerbaijani oil to the global energy market, facilitated by Türkiye's strategic position as a transportation hub. Furthermore 2007, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline was constructed, enabling the transportation of Azeri natural gas to Türkiye. The Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Line Project, a 1.850 km pipeline that was signed between the two countries in 2012 and completed in 2018, further strengthened the existing energy partnership and ensured the transportation of Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe while making Türkiye an important energy partner (NTV News Website, 2018).

The opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway line in 2017 signaled a pivotal development in the enhancement of economic relations, with projects and initiatives within the energy sector contributing to the favorable progression of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations and Türkiye-Georgia relations. Additionally, the success in efforts declared by the Shusha Declaration in 2021 of opening the Zangezur Corridor, which connects Türkiye through its neighbor, The Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic within Azerbaijan, to the Azerbaijan motherland, is envisaged to amplify the bilateral relations of Türkiye and Azerbaijan in areas such as economics and transportation. The policy pursued in this context has enabled Türkiye to meet its own energy needs while contributing to the secure global distribution of Azerbaijani energy resources. The success of this policy demonstrates Türkiye's implementation of a middle power strategy with a potential global impact, thereby increasing its influence in the Caucasus region and additionally Central Asia, also home to the other Turkic states.

In addition to the energy sector, Türkiye and Azerbaijan have signed numerous accords in the domains of military security and defense the Cooperation on Military Education Agreement (August 11, 1992), the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance (August 16, 2010), and finally, the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye (June 15, 2021) in particular, which can be manifestations of hard power. These accords, and the Agreement

on Military Medical Education and Cooperation (December 19, 2018) in particular, also encompass the realms of visa facilitation, educational cooperation, and cultural exchange, which can be considered expressions of soft power. Within the scope of educational projects initiated to train the human resources of the newly independent Turkic republics, thousands of Azerbaijani students have been offered scholarships to study in higher education institutions in Türkiye, and Azerbaijan has become one of the countries with the highest number of scholarships.

Nevertheless, Türkiye's policy toward Azerbaijan has not always progressed in a positive direction. Türkiye's rapprochement with Armenia after 2002, its zero-problems-with-neighbors approach in foreign policy, and the signing of a protocol in Zurich for the normalization of relations clearly disturbed Azerbaijan and caused a temporary coldness between the two countries. In a statement made by the Turkish Prime Minister at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the opening of the Türkiye-Armenia border was contingent upon Armenia's advancement in resolving the conflicts within the region. While the immediate opening of all borders would be a desirable outcome, Erdoğan indicated that Türkiye could not adopt a positive stance unless Armenia withdrew from Azerbaijani territory. In this context, although Azerbaijan was assured at the leader level that the border between Türkiye and Armenia would not be opened until the Karabakh conflict was resolved, this political move did not receive a positive response from Azerbaijan (BBC News website, 2009).

Furthermore, the removal of Azerbaijani flags by Turkish authorities during a friendly football match in Bursa in 2009 led to an escalation in Azerbaijani reactions, while Türkiye contended that rapprochement with Armenia would contribute to the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. The South Ossetia war of 2008 had a direct impact on Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations and Türkiye's Azerbaijan policy. Before this war, Azerbaijan had maintained a balanced policy between Türkiye and Russia for an extended period. However, in the aftermath of the South Ossetia war, Azerbaijan began to exhibit a stronger inclination towards Russia, leading to an expansion of Russian influence in the region. Consequently, Türkiye was compelled to devise a more robust rationale for its Azerbaijan policy, establishing the foundation for the strategic partnership agreement formally ratified in 2010 (Köse&Wakikaza, 2022).

This led Türkiye to determine a road map with stronger arguments in its Azerbaijan policy, which will form the basis of a wide-ranging strategic partnership agreement to be signed in 2010. Therefore, the then Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,

personally visited Baku and addressed the Azerbaijani Parliament. The two countries restored their relations to the previous level through the following processes. Thus, the level of strategic partnership was reached again, which led Türkiye to follow a course in which the areas of cooperation were further expanded.

As previously mentioned, the Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement, which was signed on August 16, 2010, and the Shusha Declaration, which was signed after the Second Karabakh War on June 15, 2021, have a crucial effect on relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, as well as Türkiye's defense and security policy, especially in terms of military capability development and the implementation of Türkiye's defense and security policy. The Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement is of great importance and covers areas such as the development of the Azerbaijani armed forces, the holding of joint exercises, the provision of Turkish Defense Industry equipment, and the improvement of military cooperation. Notably, the agreement was complemented by establishing a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between the two nations, further solidifying their collaborative efforts.

This strategic partnership has been further reinforced by numerous joint military exercises, as well as Türkiye's provision of military equipment to Azerbaijan and its facilitation of cooperation between Azerbaijani and Turkish defense industry entities, such as BAYKAR, ASELSAN, and ROKETSAN, for the advancement of military technology. This collaboration has been further expanded through a series of significant agreements in the defense industry, which were signed between Turkish defense industry companies and the Azerbaijani state under the coordination of the presidency. See Table 12 for the Leading Turkish Defense Industry Companies operating in Azerbaijan in 2024.

**Table 12.** Leading Turkish Defense Industry Companies operating in Azerbaijan in 2024. (The Table is prepared by the author based on the data received from the Daily Sabah Website, 2024; Anadolu Agency Website, 2023; Anadolu Agency Website, 2024d).

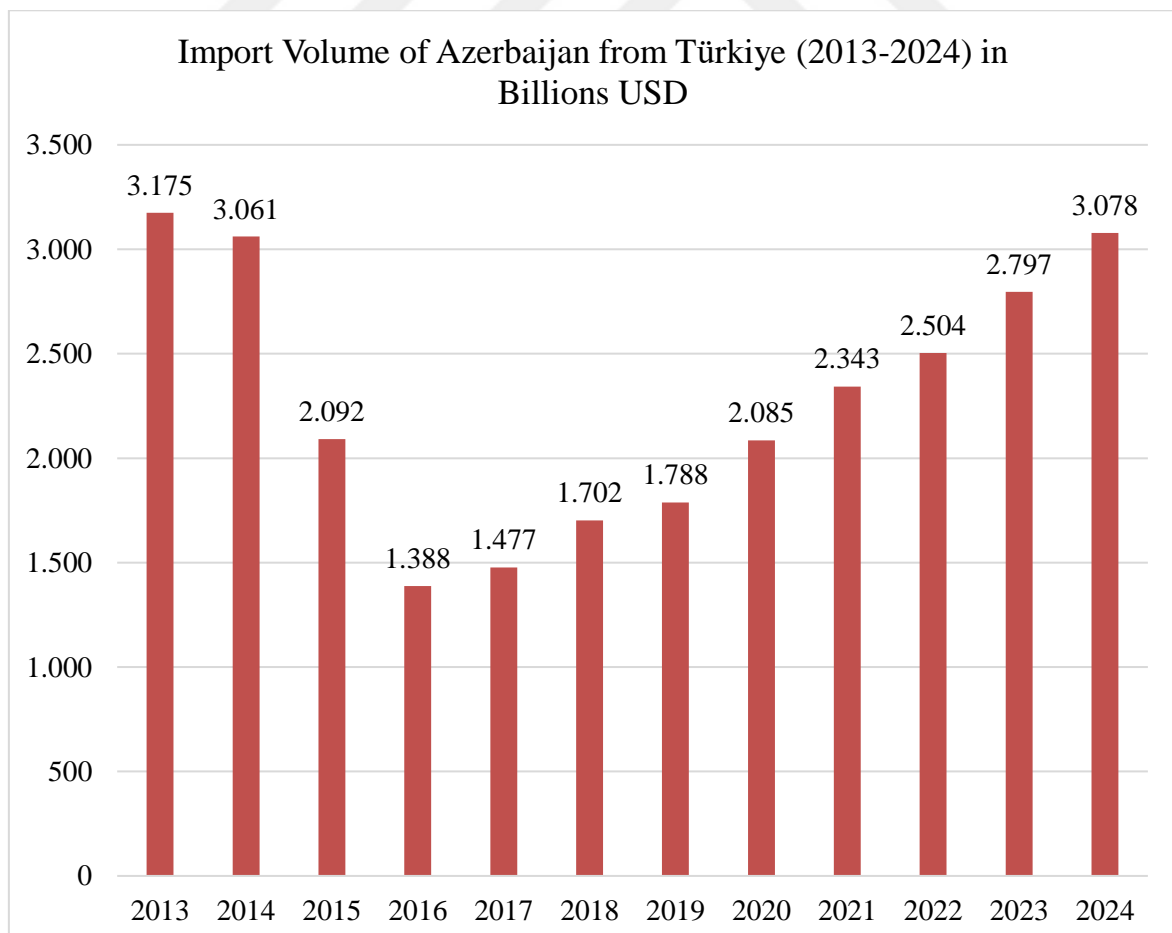
Nr.	Company Name	Nr.	Company Name
1.	ASELSAN	7.	SARSILMAZ
2.	BAYKAR	8.	TAI
3.	CANIK	9.	ULAK
4.	HAVELSAN	10.	SAMSUN YURT SAVUNMA (SYS)
5.	MKE	11.	ASSAN
6.	ROKETSAN	12.	ASFAT



The agreements encompass numerous critical projects, including the joint development of electronic warfare vehicles, the joint production of smart ammunition, simulation training technologies, the production of ammunition lines, strategic network communication systems, and the modernization of air platform communication (Turkish Armed Forces Foundation Website, 2024). Within this context, Türkiye has become the country participating in ADEX 2024 with the highest number of companies being represented with 50 Defense Industry Companies during the Fifth International Defense Exhibition “ADEX 2024”, the largest event of the defense sector in the Caucasus region, conducted in Baku. (Savunmasanayist Website, 2024a).

The economic effect of the strategic partnership can be tracked from the import volume of Azerbaijan from Türkiye. Starting from 2013, Azerbaijan’s import volume was lowest in 2016, at 1.33 billion USD; however, since 2016, the import volume has increased constantly and has reached 3.078 billion USD by 2024. See Table 13 for further insight.

**Table 13.** Import Volume of Azerbaijan from Türkiye (2013-2024) in Billions USD. (The table is prepared by the author based on TUIK data, 2025a).



The volume of Türkiye's exports of arms and military equipment, including the UAS, to Azerbaijan, increased significantly after the strategic partnership agreement and especially before the Karabakh conflict. For instance, in December 2019, the export of Turkish defense industry products to Azerbaijan increased by 103.03 percent, amounting to 52.672 million USD, and according to the Turkish Ministry of Trade, the volume of Türkiye's defense-related exports to Azerbaijan increased by 39.85 percent year-on-year in the period between January 2019 and February 2020, reaching 88.675 million USD (Azernews, 2020).

Azerbaijan's military imports from Türkiye rose sixfold in 2020, including UAVs and other military equipment, reaching 77 million USD in September alone before the conflict. Additionally, Türkiye sold 123 million USD worth of defense and aviation equipment to Azerbaijan in the first nine months of the same year. Military imports of Azerbaijan in 2019 for the same period were 20,7 million USD (Reuters News Agency, 2020).

By leveraging these opportunities, assistance, and trade facilitated by Türkiye, Azerbaijan has experienced a notable enhancement in its military capabilities, reached NATO standards, and is well-positioned to participate in NATO operations.

## **7. ANALYSIS OF TÜRKIYE’S MIDDLE POWER STATUS FROM A NEOREALIST THEORETICAL APPROACH PERSPECTIVE (CASE STUDY THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR)**

This chapter analyzes Türkiye's middle power status through a neorealist lens. To find out what neorealist goals Türkiye pursues as a middle power, the thesis's main case study, the Second Karabakh War, will be examined and analyzed by focusing on and using Mearsheimer’s five main neorealist assumptions. Therefore, the analysis will be conducted in two sub-sections: first, the analysis of material capability that aims to identify why and on what basis Türkiye, as a middle power state, supported Azerbaijan in accordance with its defense and security policy during the Second Karabakh War, and second, the theoretical analysis of Türkiye’s support and international security ambitions during the conflict as a middle power based on the neorealist perspective.

As mentioned in the introduction, this study offers two hypotheses: H1: Türkiye has proven its middle power status by its material and diplomatic capabilities. H2: By using Türkiye’s material and diplomatic instruments in the Second Karabakh War, Türkiye hold its middle power status.

### **7.1. Analysis of Material Capability**

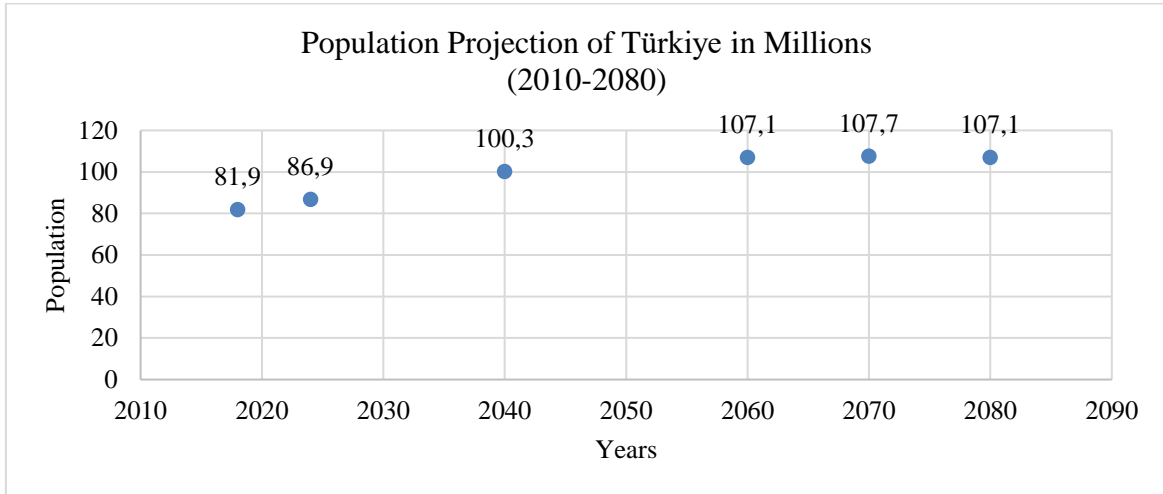
Material capability analysis will be conducted similarly under the titles of manpower, analysis of economic trends regarding the military capability perspective, and dependence on foreign defense manufacturers.

#### **7.1.1. Manpower**

Türkiye, with a population of 84 million citizens, has more people than most of the states considered middle powers in the international system, including Canada, Australia, South Korea, Poland, and another middle power in the Middle East, Iran. Moreover, 68.6 percent of the population is within the 15-65 age bracket, which makes Türkiye a youthful and potentially influential state regarding human capital. According to the projection of TUIK, Türkiye’s population will exceed 100 million by 2040 and keep reaching its peak level in

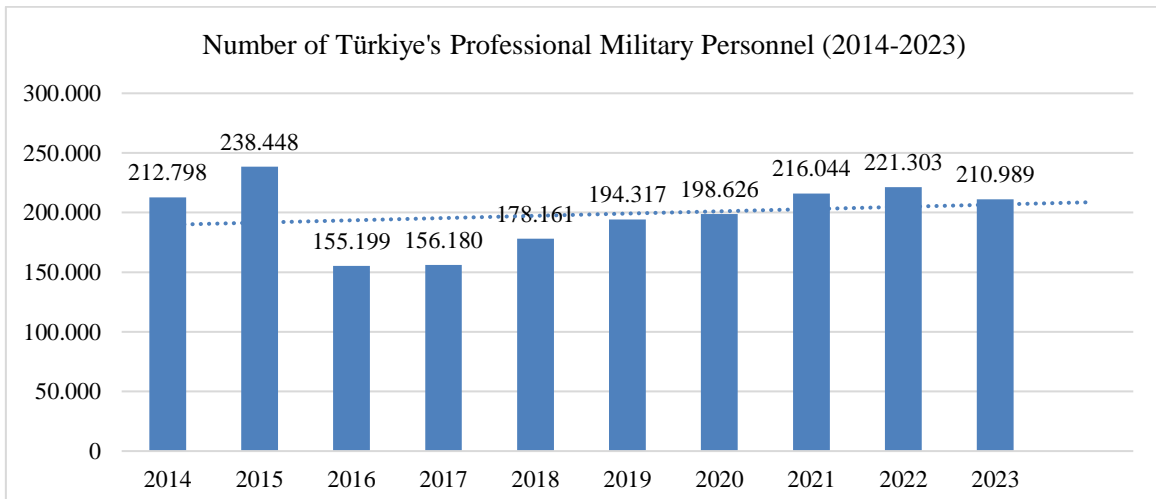
2070 with over 107 million, which provides a vision of the continuation of the potential of the young population. See Table 14 for the Population Projection of Türkiye in Million between 2010-2080.

**Table 14.** Population Projection of Türkiye in Millions between 2010-2080. (The table is prepared by the author based on TUIK data, 2025b).



The Turkish army's manpower is reflected in the number of professional military personnel. Türkiye, after having a dramatic decrease in 2016, increased the number of its professional military personnel from 155 199 in 2016 to 210 989 by the end of 2023 (Annual Activity Reports of the Turkish Ministry of Defense and Reports of the Court of Accounts 2015-2024). See Table 15 for the Number of Türkiye's Professional Military Personnel between 2014-2023.

**Table 15.** Number of Türkiye's Professional Military Personnel Between 2014-2023. (The table is prepared by the author based on the Annual Activity Reports of the Turkish Ministry of Defense and Reports of the Court of Accounts 2015-2024).



By analyzing the statistics of Türkiye's military personnel volume trend, it is possible to observe that Türkiye is increasing its manpower to enhance its military capability. So far, with its active military personnel amount, Türkiye has been the second-largest army in NATO, following the US. Türkiye has already proved its manpower to be a significant power factor for NATO; that being said, the increase in active manpower can also positively affect Türkiye's influence capability within NATO. Moreover, manpower improvement can also facilitate opportunities for Türkiye to enlarge its influence sphere regarding its defense and security policy.

### **7.1.2. Economics and Military Power**

As mentioned in the previous sections, Türkiye, with an innovative vision, has strongly supported its defense industry and aerospace companies for years. As seen in the yearly change in the world's top 100 defense companies list (maximum seven in 2020 and minimum two in 2012), even if the number of Turkish Defense companies varies yearly, especially when the companies take place at the end of the list, the top three among the Turkish companies, ASELSAN, TAI and ROKETSAN, have been constant members which are getting higher positions every year. See Table 2.

By 2024, Türkiye was one of the five countries with more than five defense companies in the top 100 list. Furthermore, it can be considered a significant success that within those countries, China has three companies while Türkiye has five (Anadolu Agency News, 2024). Additionally, Türkiye has many other defense companies with a high potential of placing on the respective list. BAYKAR company, the export leader in the market in 2024 with 1.831 billion USD alone, is one of them and is expected to rise starting from 2024 due to the dominance of the global UAV sector thanks to the outstanding success of the UAVs during the conflicts in different regions. Türkiye's robust support to defense companies is also reflected in the export and import of the defense industry. Technologically improved, Türkiye has raised its share of global arms exports by 107%, holding 1.6% of global exports between 2019 and 2023, while Türkiye's share was 0.7% between 2014 and 2018. Taking 11th place in the top largest major arms exporters in 2023, Türkiye exceeded most of the middle powers recognized by the international order. See Table 9 for further details.

Additionally, examining Türkiye's import and export volume of defense and aerospace industry between 2014 and 2023 indicates that Türkiye has a linear increase in both areas:

import increased from 1.351 to 3.303 billion USD, and export increased from 1.885 to 5.545 billion USD, and broke a record in its history, reaching 7.154 billion USD with a 29.5% increase compared to 2023, meaning that while improving its industry and becoming one of the pivotal countries globally, Türkiye is also increasing its military power following its defense and security policy. Analyzing the change ratios in import and export volumes, while the imports of Türkiye in the defense and aerospace industry area increased by 144.5% between 2014 and 2023, the exports had a steeper increase of 194.2% within the same period. These statistics indicate that Türkiye has significantly increased its defense industry capacity and decreased its dependence on foreign sources.

According to the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Investment Office Report of 2022, the local content in Türkiye's defense procurement reached 73% in 2022, while only 24% in 2002. Reaching the 80% local content target before 2025 has already been accomplished by 2024. Moreover, the production order for defense industry companies is also increasing significantly, reaching 17.9 billion USD in 2023 and 10.7 billion USD in 2014. Most orders belong to the military aerospace platform, 8043 in particular, including UAVs which proved its effectiveness in Libya, Syria, Ukraine, and Karabakh. Weapons, missiles, and ammunition follow the air platform with 5216 orders.

While increasing its production capacity and global market share, Türkiye also fosters its military capability. Türkiye's military expenditures increased from 15.67 billion USD to 20.43 billion USD between 2015 and 2020. After a decrease in a row of three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, military expenditures started increasing linearly again, with a 50% increase after 2022, reaching 15.82 billion USD in 2023. See Table 8 for further insight. The defense budget was 40 billion USD in 2024, and 47 billion USD was approved for 2025. 26.6 billion USD of the budget will cover defense spending, while the rest, 20.28 billion USD, will go to internal security (breakingdefense website, 2024).

Although increasing military expenditures is a good indicator of Türkiye's policy of maximizing military power, another important indicator supports the hypothesis: equipment expenditure as a share of the defense expenditure ratio. As aforementioned, Türkiye's military expenditures in 2023 were 15.8 billion USD; it is estimated that the military expenditure of 2024 constituted 2.09% of its total GDP. Furthermore, 34.2% of Türkiye's defense expenditures are estimated for 2024 to be allocated to equipment procurement, although the NATO guideline stipulates a minimum of 20 percent. These statistics also prove

that although Türkiye increased its military manpower, which would reflect a higher portion of GDP, Türkiye also increased equipment expenditure as a share of defense spending to an estimated 34.2% in 2024, while it was 25% in 2014. See Table 6 for further insight.

The increase in military assets of the Turkish Armed Forces with significant firepower capability between 2014-2024 draws attention, especially in air assets. Within air assets, attack helicopters have the most significant increase, with 88% from 59 to 111, followed by utility helicopters, with a 14.67% increase from 443 to 508. Türkiye also improved its fighter capability by 10.95%, from 201 fighter jets to 223 between 2014 and 2024. Regarding the Land Forces, the number of tanks decreased dramatically by 38.80% from 3657 to 2238 due to removing technologically obsolete tanks from inventory. However, it has been announced that the Turkish Heavy Tank, Altay, will be included in the Turkish army inventory in 2025 (Anadolu Agency, 2024c). Furthermore, besides the armed vehicles, the number of artillery assets that provide important fire effects increased by 145% and reached 2745 from 1710 artillery. Regarding the naval forces, apart from increasing frigate and corvette capacity by increasing each vessel, Türkiye took an important step by adding a helicopter carrier into the naval forces, facilitating the opportunity to execute missions overseas, including air assets which are not limited to helicopters but also the Turkish UAVs. See Table 17 for further details.

In addition to the manned assets with firepower capability, Türkiye, with its innovative approach, has various types of armed and unarmed UAVs that can use smart ammunition. Although the exact number of UAVs in the Turkish Army inventory has not yet been announced officially, it has been declared by the CEO of BAYKAR, Selçuk Bayraktar, that more than 150 TB-2 and 12 AKINCI have been delivered to the Turkish Army until 2024 (Savunmasanayist Website, 2024b). Following a vision of improved and strong military power, from the beginning of 2010 until 2024, the Turkish Defense Industry utilized Turkish Army UAVs with the capability of airtime endurance of up to 50 hours, executing missions at 40,000 feet MSL, and carrying smart ammunition, which are also the products of the Turkish Defense Industry. This improvement gave the Turkish Army a significant military power factor and prestige worldwide. See Table 16 for the Transformation Vision of the Turkish Defense Industry.

In conclusion, all the material, economic, and military capability indicators prove that Türkiye is developing and improving its defense production capacity and achieving self-

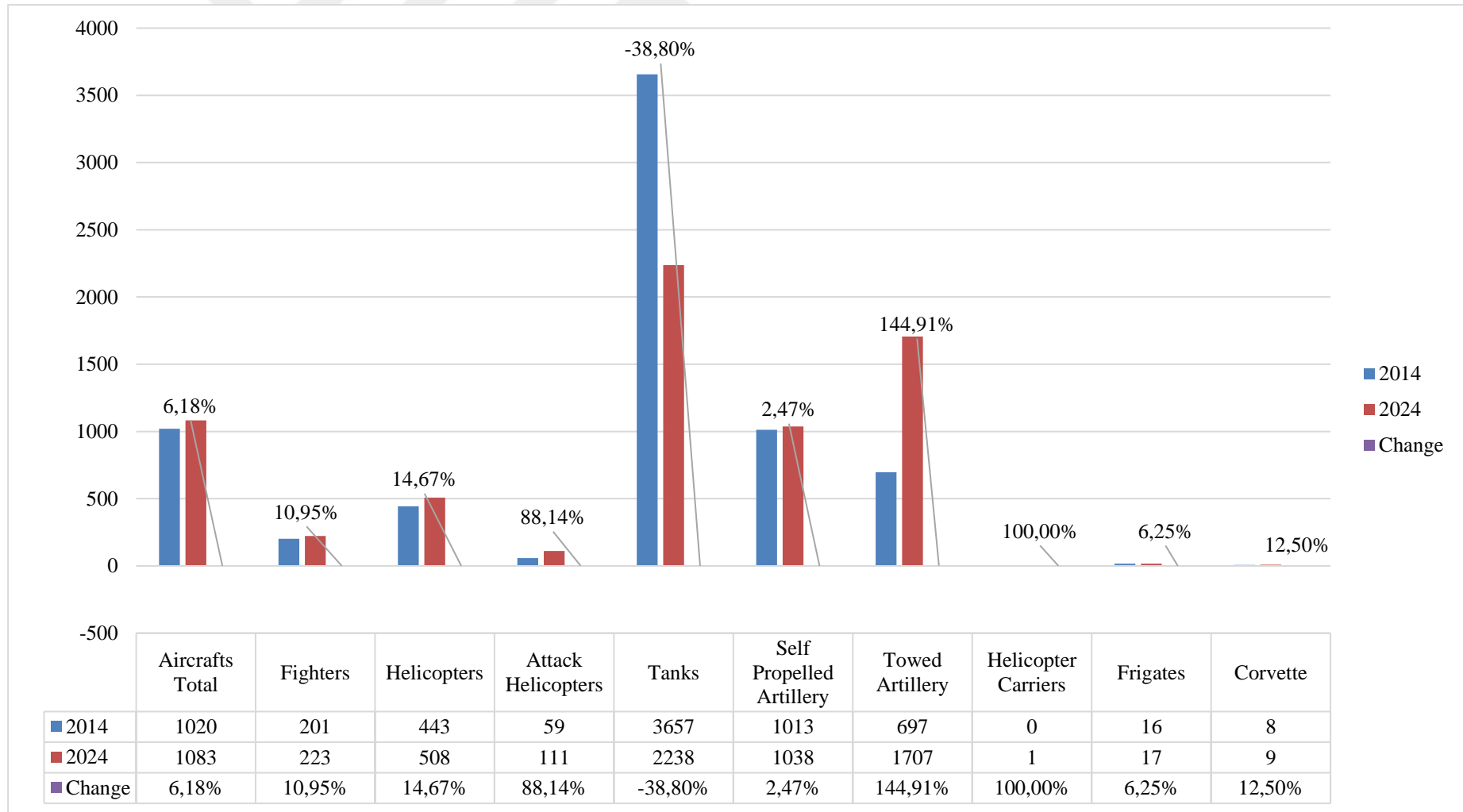
sufficiency in the defense area. Moreover, the indicators also point out that Türkiye maximizes its military power, facilitating the opportunity to enlarge its sphere of influence. With the current trend and development, Türkiye, with bigger objectives, can possess more power than a middle-power state. From material, economic, and military perspectives, it is no surprise that following the successful missions in regions such as Libya, Syria, and Iraq, Türkiye was involved in the Second Karabakh War and supported Azerbaijan, which would provide the opportunity for Türkiye to reach its power ambitions.

**Table 16.** Transformation Vision of the Turkish Defense Industry (2010-2030). (Table is prepared by the author based on the Turkish Defense & Aerospace Industry Manufacturers Association Report 2022).

Years	2000-2010	2010-2020		2020-2030
<b>Objective</b>	Partial Design	Indigenous Design		Basic&Advance Technologies
<b>Land Domain</b>	Altay (Tank)	-		-
<b>Air Domain</b>	T 129 Atak (Attack Helicopter)	Gökbey (Utility Helicopter)	Bayraktar TB2 & TB3, AKINCI (UAS)	TF-X KAAN Fighter
	T 70 (Utility Helicopter)	Hürkuş (Basic Trainer Aircraft)	Hürjet (Advanced Jet Trainer and Light Attack Aircraft)	Bayraktar Kızılelma (MIUS)
	Anka (UAV)	TF-X MMU (Indigenous Fighter Project)	T 929 ATAK II (Heavy Duty Attack Helicopter)	* Complete Localization
<b>Sea Domain</b>	Milgem (Warship)	-		* Life Cycle Management
<b>Space Domain</b>	-	Göktürk-3 (Satellite)		* Performance Based Logistisc



**Table 17.** Change in Firepower Assets of Türkiye Between 2014-2024 (Table is prepared by the author depending on data from www.globalfirepower.com, 2014 and 2024).



## 7.2. Theoretical Analysis

According to neorealism theory, the states are the main actors in international relations. The neorealist theory assumes that the ordering principle of world affairs is anarchy, which fosters uncertainty and insecurity, and states strive for survival. Anarchy imposes systemic constraints and generates competition among states. In the post-Cold War era, the security environment is characterized by a notable ambiguity. This is primarily due to the absence of a balanced global power structure, which is further compounded by the absence of a dominant global authority with the capacity to impose stringent penalties.

An examination of Türkiye's foreign and security policy reveals the country's persistent pursuit of neorealist ambitions for power in numerous and distinctive domains, extending beyond its immediate neighborhood. This policy is particularly noteworthy in the context of the post-Cold War international environment, which has been characterized by a sense of disorder and instability. The ambiguity of the international system and the uncertainty of states' intentions have contributed to Türkiye's ability to pursue its foreign policy objectives independently. Waltz's theory posits that "economic capabilities cannot be separated from the other capabilities of states. States use economic means for military and political ends; and military and political means for the achievement of economic interests" (Waltz, 1979, p. 94). Examining Türkiye's defense and security policy from this perspective, it is evident that Türkiye seeks to capitalize on opportunities and translate them into benefits. A thorough examination of Türkiye's foreign, defense, and security policy reveals that its strategic combination of middle power status and neorealist aspirations can facilitate realizing its regional hegemony objective. Türkiye's involvement in numerous international conflicts and political disputes, spanning from the Balkans to Afghanistan, Ukraine to Somalia, underscores its active role in global politics. Additionally, Turkey's activism in establishing the Organization of Turkic States in 2009 and announcing the Asia Anew Initiative also indicates that Turkey is a rational actor employing a comprehensive and holistic strategy, aiming to enlarge its area of influence, facilitating opportunities for the regional hegemony goal.

For instance, looking closer to Türkiye's Libya policy, in response to inquiries regarding Türkiye's participation in the Libyan crisis and the deployment of its military forces in 2019, the Minister of National Defense, Hulusi Akar, articulated Türkiye's stance on the matter. Akar asserted that the Turkish Armed Forces are prepared to undertake any

assigned task, characterized as effective, deterrent, and respected, both domestically and internationally, with the objective of safeguarding the rights, interests, and national interests of Türkiye. If a task is allocated to the Turkish Armed Forces in this regard, they are fully prepared to execute it (Euronews website, 2019). This statement was followed by a parliamentary decision that led to the deployment of Turkish military forces in Libya. In this capacity, Türkiye has sought to advance its national interests and international policy objectives in the region, aligning itself with other major actors such as Russia and France. This has culminated in the signing of numerous accords between Türkiye and Libya aimed at fostering lasting peace, stability, and security in Libya while ensuring mutual benefits for all parties involved. Of particular significance are the “Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction in the Mediterranean” and “Security and Military Cooperation” Memorandums of Understanding, which were signed on November 27, 2019 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 2024a).

An additional illustration of this dynamic is Türkiye's engagement with its neighboring nation, Iraq. Türkiye has participated in various projects and agreements with Iraq, particularly in the domains of economics and security. Since 2000, Türkiye has pursued the Development Road Project, designed to enhance trade between Asia and Europe. The project involves the construction of the Al-Faw Port in Basra, Iraq's only seaside city, intending to facilitate trade with Gulf countries and the Asian continent. Türkiye's support for this initiative is motivated by its belief that it will contribute positively to regional stability and security. In examining Türkiye's security policy regarding Iraq, the “Memorandum of Understanding on Military, Security Cooperation and Fight against Terrorism” was signed between the two states to end the presence of the PKK terrorist organization in Iraq, and the Iraqi state declared the PKK a banned organization. Furthermore, Türkiye continues its cross-border operations following international law, Article 51 of the UN Charter particularly, and within the framework of the right to self-defense against terrorist organizations, which poses a threat not only to national security but also to the regional stability and sovereignty of Iraq (Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 2024b).

Examining another geography where Türkiye's foreign and security policy has reached its sphere of influence reveals an example of this strategy in action. In 2024, Türkiye facilitated the establishment of peace between Somalia and Ethiopia by signing a joint declaration, thereby demonstrating its capacity to promote international harmony. Consequently, in addition to Türkiye's ongoing soft power activities in Ethiopia and Somalia,

Türkiye also signed a 10-year defense pact concerning defense policy and agreed to train Somali armed forces. These accords are pivotal in safeguarding Türkiye's security and military vision in Africa, ensuring the realization of future foreign policy objectives, and laying the groundwork for enhanced regional security and collaboration. They serve as a testament to the remarkable scope of Türkiye's middle power policy and its capacity to make a tangible impact on the global stage (Tepeciklioğlu, 2024).

Recent events have demonstrated Türkiye's growing middle power capability and its aspirations for regional hegemony. During the Ukraine-Russia war, Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) utilized by the Ukrainian army achieved notable success against the Russian army, becoming pivotal actors on the battlefield and significantly hindering Russian forces. The success of Turkish unmanned aerial systems (UAS) has been extensively covered by both mainstream media and social media news outlets, highlighting Ukraine's commitment to self-defense and the maintenance of its territorial integrity in the face of significantly superior Russian forces. Video recordings of Ukrainian army members and civilians singing a war song titled “Bayraktar” emerged, telling the story of Ukraine's resistance against Russian attacks and its successful destruction with the help of the Turkish UAV, Bayraktar. This song became a phenomenon on the internet and in global media. David van Weel, NATO's assistant secretary general, underscored the pivotal role of Turkish Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) in modern warfare, stating, “It is a good example of what innovation can do in modern-day warfare. The ongoing war in Ukraine demonstrates what the future of warfare looks like” (Daily Sabah, 2022). Prior to the Ukraine war, Turkish drones equipped with smart ammunition and electronic warfare (EW) assistance capability were observed in Syria, Libya, and Karabakh in Azerbaijan, thereby offering a novel perspective on NATO's military vision and tactics. The Ukraine example signifies Türkiye's innovation and guidance capability in terms of military power and tactical leadership, even within the NATO framework.

From a neorealist perspective, it is evident that Türkiye's defense industry development, supported by substantial economic incentives for innovation and successful commercialization on the global stage, contributes to its presence in the international system. Through its defense, security, and foreign policy, Türkiye engages with the anarchic order of the international system, pursuing its neorealist ambitions by making independent decisions. Furthermore, Türkiye possesses its military capabilities and forces and aims to maximize its power bi-directionally by facilitating opportunities for its defense industry. As

demonstrated by the examples provided, Türkiye's foreign policy is characterized by its pursuit of regional hegemony, a concept articulated by Mearsheimer as “A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.21) Türkiye's strategic objective of attaining regional hegemony is pursued through the maximization of its existing power and the expansion of its sphere of influence.

Focusing on the Second Karabakh War, we can see the insecurity and uncertainty in the region, especially between Azerbaijan and Armenia, since the demolition of the USSR. Türkiye, on the other hand, has never hidden its interest in the respective region and its political approach towards Azerbaijan from the beginning of the conflict. Türkiye, although not directly involved by its military troops, supported Azerbaijan physically through its military equipment, with unmanned aerial systems and TRG-300 guided missiles particularly, and guidance as an outcome of the Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement signed in 2010. This agreement also legalizes and provides an opportunity for each side of the agreement to support and defend the contracting parties in case of any third-party attack.

Türkiye also supported Azerbaijan diplomatically through the president's and other diplomats' discourses. Leaders' speeches such as President Erdoğan's “Türkiye stands with and will continue to stand with friendly and brotherly Azerbaijan with all our means and all our heart” (Anadolu Agency, 2020) and his Azerbaijani counterpart Aliyev's speech as “I am certain that the unwavering Azerbaijani-Turkish unity and fraternity – our greatest legacy for the upcoming generations – will keep developing and strengthening in compliance with the ‘one nation, two states’ concept,” (TASS, Russian news agency, 2020) clearly indicates the support of Türkiye to Azerbaijan and mutual cooperation in leaders level. Furthermore, the rise in the frequency of telephone communications between President Erdoğan and President Putin, particularly the three formal telephone conversations that transpired between October 14 and November 10, 2020, underscores Turkey's endorsement of Azerbaijan's aspirations for a lasting resolution to the Second Karabakh War. This substantiates the assertion that Turkey's stance in support of Azerbaijan at the highest echelons of leadership is unwavering.

Additionally, Türkiye's decision to provide Bayraktar unmanned aerial systems has been a cornerstone for the ongoing conflict, and additionally, sending military support, including troop deployment for the observation role in the joint center with Russia, creates a clear scene that Türkiye does not want to lose its influence and control over the region and

leave the region to the hands of Russia (TRT World, 2020). The idea behind that policy carries a realistic message and a sign that Türkiye aims to maximize its political power and influence in the Caucasus region by standing by its sister state Azerbaijan and against either Armenia or Russia, whose status as a great power might be questionable today.

Examining The Second Karabakh War, the existence of anarchy, owing to offensive military capability by the power holders, the possibility of war in the long term, the survival goal, and power holder states being rational actors clearly match Türkiye's defense and security policy over Azerbaijan and Second Karabakh. In this instance, Türkiye has utilized its diplomatic and material capacities as a middle power, employing an active and offensive approach in its defense and security policy toward the region. Furthermore, Armenia asserts that Turkish troops present in the conflict consist of special forces and the support of deployed militia from Syria. However, both the Azerbaijani and Turkish governments have refuted these claims. In contrast, Türkiye has clearly indicated that its support was provided through the provision of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) that were under the control of Azerbaijani forces and that the remainder of the support was provided through diplomatic channels. It can also be expressed that the US's political concentration in the presidential elections in the US, the understanding of Russia's distant attitude towards the Karabakh issue, and decisiveness in Türkiye's support to Azerbaijan provided a clear opportunity for Azerbaijan to act in the correct timing and for Türkiye to conduct its strategy towards the region (Sarıkaya&Aslanlı, 2024).

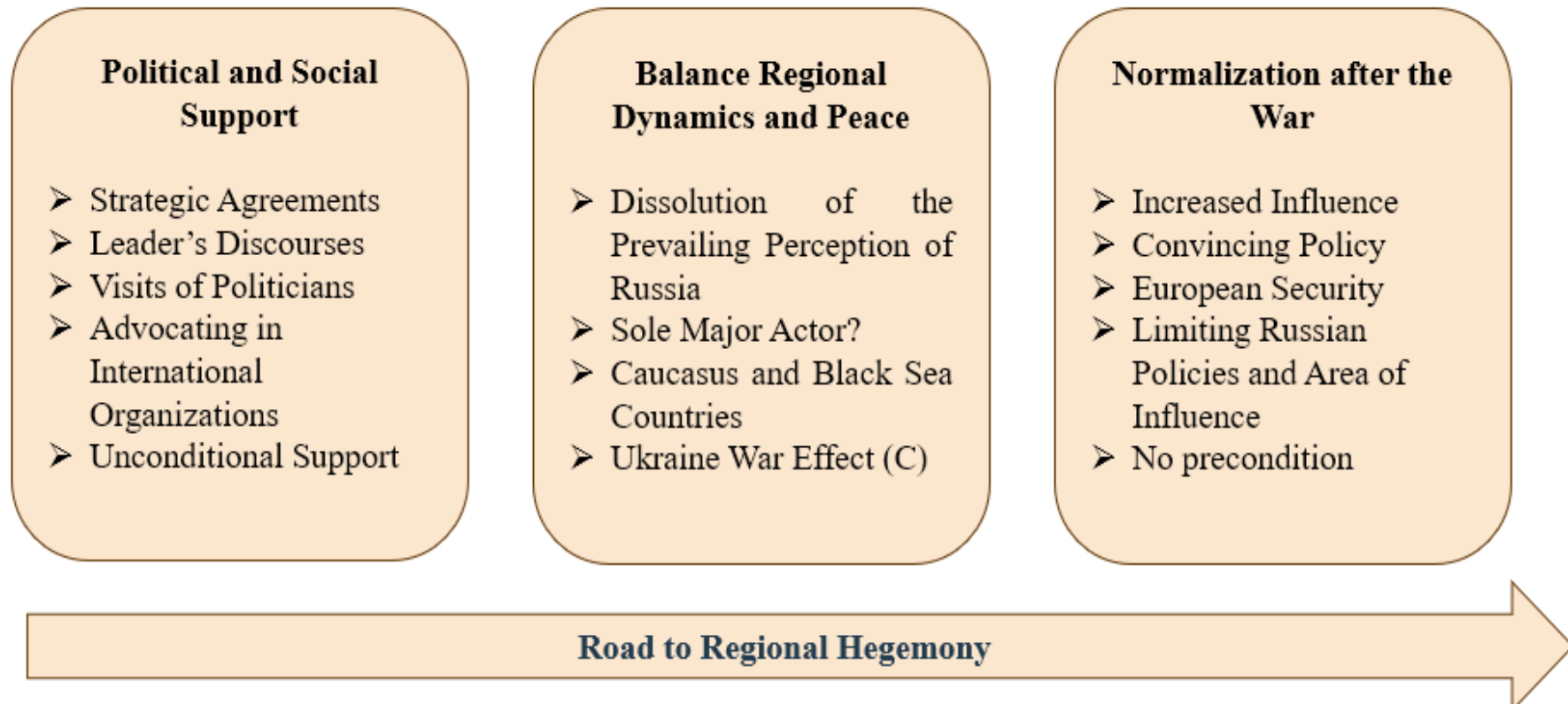
With the support of Türkiye, Azerbaijan maximized its power accumulation. On the other side, Armenia could not have balanced that power accumulation with the support of Russia due to Russia's ignorance until the last phase of the conflict. That ignorance might be considered as a punishment for the ongoing relationship between Armenia and The US relationships and Armenia's decision, by the leadership of Pashinyan, to treat the European Union as the savior, and in some way, the future of Armenia by developing relations in terms of building European economic and cultural areas instead of taking the side of Russian dominated Eurasian Economic Union (Yavuz, 2023). However, the contrary of government's way of thinking, there were also many Armenian foreign policy academicians who still claim and insist that the security of Armenia, which is located between two hostile neighbor states, Azerbaijan and Türkiye, could be established and secured only by relying on Russia and Russian policies. Although Pashinyan's attitude changed compatible with the majority of Armenian citizens believing that Russia, by the agreement of friendship,

cooperation, and mutual assistance signed in 1997, would defend their country with its military forces in case of an attack from Türkiye or Azerbaijan, that was not the case with no more than deploying troops with peacekeeper role until the last phase of the Second Karabakh War, in parallel with Russia's statements considering that the responsibilities towards Armenia do not apply to Karabakh Region (Sarıkaya&Aslanlı, 2024). See Figure 3 for the Analysis of Türkiye's Diplomatic Capability IAW Security Policy During the Second Karabakh War.

Considering Mearsheimer's assumptions from a neorealist perspective, The first assumption is "The international system is anarchic, which does not mean that it is chaotic or riven by disorder" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.30). The international system is comprised of independent states that function without the presence of a central authority. The concept of sovereignty, which asserts the right of self-government and self-determination, is intrinsic to the individual states that comprise the international system. This implies that no state within the international system is subject to the authority of another. In essence, sovereignty is a principle that ensures that no government is superior to any other within the global system. When analyzed this assumption through the lens of Türkiye's context, the prevailing uncertainty within the international system and security environment has contributed to an enhancement in Türkiye's autonomy, enabling the implementation of policies that align with its aspirations for regional preeminence, as evidenced by its actions in the Second Karabakh conflict.

Secondly, "The second assumption is that great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.30). An interpretation of this assumption for Türkiye would extend to a period much earlier than the Second Karabakh Conflict. An interpretation of this assumption for Türkiye would extend to a period much earlier than the Second Karabakh Conflict. During this period, Türkiye facilitated significant contributions to the enhancement of the military and combat capabilities of the Azerbaijani army. These efforts were substantiated by agreements such as the Cooperation on Military Education Agreement (August 11, 1992), the Agreement on Educational, Technical, and Scientific Cooperation in the Military Field (June 10, 1996), the Agreement on Military Medical Education and Cooperation (December 19, 2018) and most importantly the Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement and included the organization of joint exercises, the

# The Analysis of Türkiye's Diplomatic Capability IAW Security Policy During the Second Karabakh War



**Figure 3.** Analysis of Türkiye's Diplomatic Capability IAW Defense and Security Policy During the Second Karabakh War (The figure is prepared by the author).



education of Azerbaijani military personnel, and the provision of Turkish defense industry products such as unmanned aerial systems and close-range guided missile systems to the Azerbaijani army. Türkiye's integration of unmanned aerial systems into its battlefield doctrine has been a subject of considerable interest. This transition, observed during operations in Idlib, Syria, has been particularly noteworthy for its implications in the context of the Second Karabakh War. According to Özgen, Türkiye's provision of UAS not only represented a significant strategic shift but also marked a transfer of military doctrine to Azerbaijan (Özgen, 2021). The activism of Türkiye during the respective conflict would focus on possessing military power.

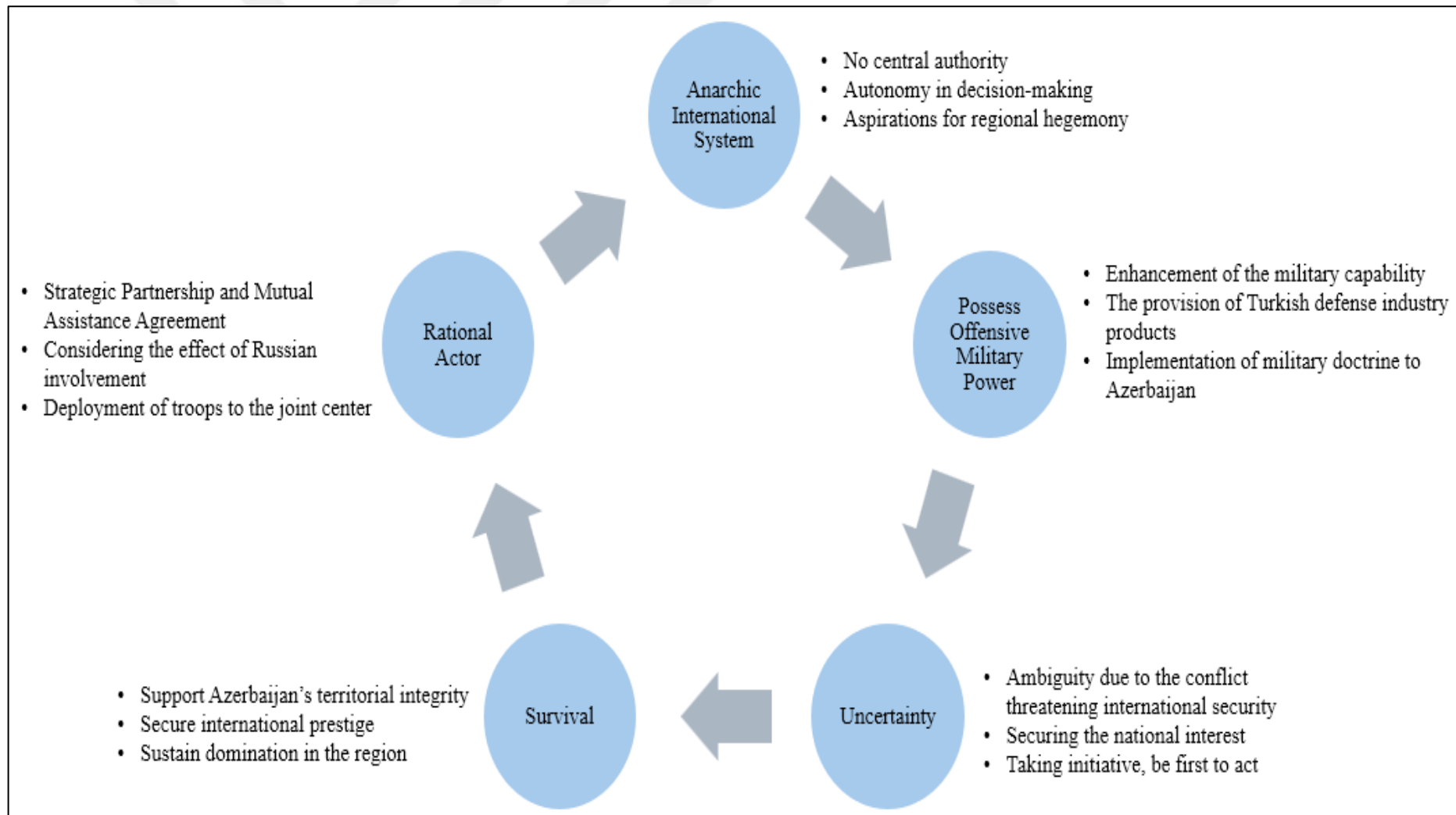
As articulated by Mearsheimer (2001, p. 21), “A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system.” Türkiye's possession of an enhanced middle power in the region, in conjunction with its decision-making role by facilitating Azerbaijan's military capabilities, implementing its doctrine in the context of interstate conflict, and providing military troops after the conflict—all of which are considered to be at the same level as Russia—supports its neorealistic regional hegemon objective.

Considering the third and the fourth assumptions together, as Mearsheimer contends, states cannot be certain of other states' intentions or whether they will employ military force preemptively, even in the absence of overt hostility. The fundamental objective of states is survival, with a strong emphasis on preserving their territorial integrity and political sovereignty due to the paramount importance of security. In examining Türkiye and Azerbaijan relations, the interstate armed conflicts in Karabakh emerged as a substantial threat to the oil and natural gas pipelines traversing both countries, including the transport routes facilitating energy security. As a growing economy, Türkiye is becoming increasingly dependent on Azerbaijan oil and gas, gradually increasing its consumption and collecting fees from the pipelines that cross and pass through Türkiye. The integration of the two countries' economies is evident in the presence of pipelines and railways, with Azerbaijan emerging as the predominant investor in Türkiye's energy sector. SOCAR, an Azerbaijani state-owned oil company, has a significant presence in Türkiye, with an estimated trade volume of \$15 billion by 2024 (Yavuz, 2023). Consequently, Türkiye's foreign policy is likely to be influenced by its growing reliance on Azerbaijani oil and gas, recognizing energy security as a paramount security concern. Consequently, Türkiye's assertive actions could be interpreted as a means of safeguarding its significant economic interests, ensuring its position in the global system, and pursuing its regional and global objectives.

The fifth assumption of Mearsheimer states that great powers are rational actors, aware of their external environment, and able to think strategically. In order to survive, they determine and implement their survival strategy by calculating their own and other states' actions and how these actions will affect both sides. Türkiye's growing involvement in global security issues is evident in various regions worldwide. Türkiye is cognizant of the ongoing international events and disputes that could impact its strategic interests. Consequently, Türkiye takes measures to preserve its influence in regions of interest and augment its standing as a significant actor in these areas. While Russia's involvement at the conclusion of the conflict and the deployment of Russian troops to the area between Karabakh and Armenia may be interpreted as an escalation of Russian influence, this may be perceived differently from the perspective of other actors, particularly in light of Türkiye's deployment of troops to the joint center, where they assume a role comparable to that of Russia. See Figure 4 for the Analysis of Türkiye's Security Policy During the Second Karabakh War with Mearsheimer's assumptions.

In addition to Mearsheimer's assumptions, analyzing Türkiye's middle power role during and after the conflict provides us with the effectiveness of diplomatic capability associated with a nation's morale booster, which directly influences the results on the battlefield. Türkiye not only provided material support to Azerbaijan but also supported politicians from all political sides and the entire Turkish society. In this context, high-level officials issued statements throughout the war that condemned the attacks carried out by Armenia and expressed support for Azerbaijan. In addition to politicians, Turkish citizens demonstrated their social support for Azerbaijan and its citizens by displaying Azerbaijani flags in their homes and workplaces and organizing rallies to condemn Armenia's attacks.

The Turkish community's unconditional support for Azerbaijan has once again demonstrated in the international arena that Türkiye is a true ally of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, Türkiye has defended Azerbaijan's just cause in all international organizations it is a member of. The ruling and opposition parties in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye issued a joint statement that condemned Armenia's attack on the Tovuz region and emphasized that Armenia was the biggest obstacle to peace and tranquility in the region. A high-level delegation from Türkiye, led by the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, Mustafa Şentop, visited Azerbaijan and delivered a speech at the Azerbaijani Parliament (Erarslan & Nurdemir, 2021). A thorough evaluation of Türkiye's foreign, defense, and security policy and its status as a middle power is imperative. By employing a neorealist



**Figure 4.** The Analysis of Türkiye's Defense and Security Policy During the Second Karabakh War with Mearsheimer's Assumptions (The figure is prepared by the author).

approach and examining the conflict through the lens of Mearsheimer's assumptions and the concept of middle power, it becomes evident that Türkiye's status as a middle power and its foreign policy have a direct impact on the outcomes of the Second Karabakh conflict.

Türkiye's overt support for Azerbaijan has signaled its emergence as a pivotal actor in the establishment of peace in the South Caucasus, a stance that has been characterized by its determination. This support has effectively dispelled the prevailing perception that the Karabakh conflict, which has persisted for an extended period, could only be resolved with Russia's permission. Moreover, the victory of Azerbaijan, facilitated by Türkiye's support, signaled to states with illegally occupied territories that the status quo was not indefinite. This development has contributed to a more balanced regional dynamic.

Türkiye's growing involvement in international politics has enabled it to augment its influence in the Caucasus region, extending beyond the confines of Karabakh. This development has contributed to the dissolution of the prevailing perception that Russia stands as the sole major actor in the region. Consequently, Türkiye has begun to be regarded by other countries in the region as a potential ally capable of maintaining a balance of power against Russia, particularly within the Caucasus region. Türkiye's growing involvement in international politics, marked by its increased influence in the Caucasus region beyond Karabakh, has contributed to a shift in perception regarding the region's major actors. As Erarslan and Özdemir state, Türkiye has emerged as a perceived ally among other countries in the region, capable of maintaining a balance of power against Russia, particularly in the Caucasus and Black Sea regions. This shift is particularly evident in the context of the recent Russia-Ukraine war, where Türkiye's provision of drones to Ukraine has been instrumental in its counteroffensive against Russia, leading to significant losses suffered by the Russian military. In response, Ukrainian mainstream media and social media platforms have lauded Türkiye's support for Ukraine, recognizing its role in influencing the balance of power and security dynamics in the region and beyond.

As indicated by the research of Aydınta and Giragosian (2022), the period following the Second Karabakh War resulted in a series of unexpected positive developments, thereby facilitating the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Armenia. According to the aforementioned authors, Türkiye's policy and support for Azerbaijan during the conflict led to Azerbaijan's victory. However, Türkiye's role as a middle power, combined with its "convincing policy" in conjunction with Russia, resulted in Türkiye gaining significant

influence in the region. Armenia, confronted with the consequences of the conflict, including the loss of unjustly occupied territory, adopted a post-war strategy emphasizing de-escalation and stability. This decision was accompanied by Armenia's intention to normalize relations with Türkiye. From a European security perspective, this normalization is significant and is supported by the fact that peace between Türkiye and Armenia would help limit Russian policies and the area of its influence on NATO's eastern flank. Furthermore, it would facilitate the achievement of European security objectives.

Despite the initial efforts to normalize relations between 2008 and 2009 have been unsuccessful, the process yielded significant insights for both nations, particularly in identifying a course of action that would not adversely impact Azerbaijan's relations during the conflict. Subsequent efforts to normalize relations commenced one year after the Karabakh conflict, driven by reciprocal positive statements from the leaders of Türkiye and Armenia. The initial high-level expression of the desire for normalization occurred during the meeting between Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan on March 12, 2022, in Antalya. The two ministers posed for cameras and articulated their commitment to the normalization process without preconditions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The efforts to reopen the land border between the two countries, as reported by Anadolu Agency (2022), along with diplomatic engagements and the leaders' discourse, contributed to the adoption of a normalization policy by both states. Notably, despite the land borders remaining closed as of 2024, Armenia permitted Turkish and Azerbaijani flights to utilize its airspace, enabling Turkish Airlines to access a more direct route to Azerbaijan and other East Asian destinations. Furthermore, the decision was made to initiate mutual direct commercial flights between Türkiye and Armenia. Moreover, as Türkiye takes positive steps toward Armenia, according to the study of Göktaş, Tarakçı, and Baş (2022), Türkiye's brand value in the Azerbaijani population has increased significantly due to the historical ties and evident support during the conflict. Consequently, it is possible to infer that Türkiye has successfully used its middle power and did not hesitate to possess its power capabilities to establish regional stability and balance in the Azerbaijan-Armenia region while getting one step closer to its neorealist ambition, regional hegemony. Therefore, an examination of Türkiye's broad-scale diplomatic efforts during and after the Karabakh conflict indicates that Türkiye's status as a middle power and its foreign policy fostered its influence capability in establishing balance in the region.

It is clear that the capability of decision-making independently promotes Türkiye's middle power status (Müftüler & Yüksel, 2017). From a theoretical perspective, as Mearsheimer defines hegemon as “a state that dominates all the other states in the system” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.40), it is possible to argue that Türkiye's foreign, defense, and security policy as a middle power aims to become a regional hegemon state in its immediate neighborhood region. Additionally, although the efforts of developing positive relations by high-level governmental representatives and leaders' discourses, the attempt of opening the land border, opening the airspace for commercial flights, and initiating direct flights in mutual destinations might seem like a liberal course of action Türkiye's foreign policy towards Armenia is more coherent as a realist approach due to Türkiye's encouragement of Armenia to act rationally against Russia and its intention of demolishing Russia's hegemony in the Caucasian region. This approach has been evident in numerous instances over the past decade, notably in the cases of Libya and Syria. By charting an independent foreign policy course vis-à-vis Russia, underpinned by its status as a middle power, Türkiye has sought to bridge the gap between its aspirations and its actual regional influence. This ambition is rooted in Türkiye's pursuit of a substantial regional hegemon role rather than a limited regional power, a shift that has been facilitated by its advancement in defense and security policy perception and capabilities following the diminution of the United States' global hegemony (Pusane, 2021).

In the context of the Second Karabakh War, Türkiye assumed an active political role in every phase of the conflict, driven by its own political interests that are intricately linked to domestic politics, foreign policy, and the explicit declaration of support grounded in historical and cultural affinities. The victory of Azerbaijan not only facilitates the promotion of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity but also increases Türkiye's prestige in the region and provides Türkiye a “special position” as the sole regional arbiter (Aliyev, 2022, p.123).

Moreover, the decision of the US Congress to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide had a detrimental impact on Türkiye-US relations, thereby diminishing the United States' influence in Türkiye concerning the Karabakh conflict in comparison to previous years. This development consequently enabled Türkiye to implement its own policies more expeditiously and autonomously in regard to the Karabakh conflict, thereby enabling the maximization of its own objectives.

Furthermore, as Köse and Wakizaka's study on the disputes and crises between Türkiye and Russia during the Syrian Civil War, particularly the aircraft crisis, indicates, Türkiye exhibited heightened assertiveness in challenging Russia's influence in the Caucasus. This observation aligns with Mearsheimer's assertion that “great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.30). The victory in the Karabakh conflict demonstrated to the international community that Türkiye's assertive foreign policy dispelled the perception of a resolution to the Karabakh conflict being unattainable without Russia's consent.

Moreover, as Javakhishvili (2022) expresses in her article, although it could not be implemented, the “3+3 platform” initiative demonstrates that the Second Karabakh conflict has been a significant milestone in the development of Türkiye and Russia relations regarding the influence capability in the respective region. In addition to Türkiye's foreign, defense, and security policy achievements in the Azerbaijan-Armenia case, taking into consideration the following incidents, such as the Syrian and Ukraine wars, it is possible to argue that Türkiye significantly promoted its middle power status and capabilities of influence among other powers that influence the region.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In the post-Cold War era, the security environment was marked by a notable ambiguity, primarily due to the absence of a balanced global power structure. This absence is further compounded by the absence of a dominant global authority with the capacity to impose rigorous penalties. Consequently, the anarchic and unstable international environment has facilitated the emergence of middle powers in various regions worldwide. With activism in its defense and security policy and developed material and diplomatic capabilities by combining the influence of hard power tools and soft power approaches depending on the country's interests, Türkiye has gained and proved itself as a strong and decision-making middle power in world politics, pursuing bigger objectives. With the US foreign policy change towards the Middle East and Caucasia region in the last ten years, Türkiye has used the opportunity to possess its power and play a key player role in its close neighborhoods and other regions, even thousands of kilometers away, such as Libya, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the Balkan countries.

An examination of Türkiye's defense and security policy demonstrates the country's ongoing pursuit of neorealist ambitions for power in numerous and distinctive domains extending beyond its geographic proximity. This pursuit is particularly noteworthy in the context of the post-Cold War international environment, which has been characterized by a sense of disorder and instability. Additionally, the ambiguity of the international system and the uncertainty of states' intentions have contributed to Türkiye's ability to pursue its security policy objectives independently. Therefore, it is possible to express that Türkiye has designed its foreign and security policy with concrete steps to maximize its power by fostering its military capability, investing in the defense industry, producing products that could affect the perception of the wars and tactics significantly, and eager to raise its voice for the decisions that would support its foreign policy interests.

In addition to its young and high potential manpower capability, Türkiye's vision and ambition for innovation gave Türkiye a strong global position in the defense industry. Türkiye's emergence as one of the five countries with more than five defense industry companies in the top hundred defense companies list globally, surpassing China, signifies a noteworthy achievement. This success not only shows itself as an increase in defense export rates but also utilizes a solid foundation for reaching the ultimate objective of achieving full self-sufficiency. The augmentation of its defense expenditure, personnel, and equipment,



even above NATO standards, signifies Türkiye's strategic intention of maximizing its military power.

Türkiye's decisive defense and security policy, enhanced military capability in support of innovative game-changer UAS technology, and successful activism in Libya, Syria, and Iraq have made Türkiye a more rational actor, developing strategies without focusing solely on neighboring areas. As seen in examples from Canada and Australia, successful diplomatic capability, which various academicians consider a requirement for a middle power, is another important area of Türkiye's foreign and security policy. Türkiye's efforts in the Russia-Ukraine War or the mediator roles in African countries such as Somalia and Ethiopia can be good examples of Türkiye's expansion of its vision and global influence sphere and stepping up to the international stage associated with its enhancing middle power perspective.

Türkiye's explicit political and military support to Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh conflict was an excellent example of promoting its power to raise its influence in the region on the path of regional hegemon objective. Türkiye, having its historical bonds with Azerbaijan and the strategic agreement signed in 2010, set the foundation of its policy that facilitates opportunities to reach its hegemony objective. In the context of the second Karabakh conflict, Türkiye has implemented a foreign and security policy that, in addition to providing support to its ally, Azerbaijan, has sought to eliminate the threat posed to its international security, particularly in the energy sector by the conflict in the Karabakh region. Furthermore, Türkiye has demonstrated a resolute commitment to possess its offensive military power, aiming to establish a dominant foreign, defense and security policy in the Caucasus region and against Russian influence. As part of a comprehensive long-term strategy, Türkiye has shared its military capabilities with Azerbaijan, which are regarded as seminal even by NATO, and has ensured that the conflict is concluded in the interests of both Azerbaijan and Türkiye without direct intervention.

Additionally, it can be posited that Russia's foreign policy priorities in other regions, such as Ukraine and Syria, and its ignorance of the Karabakh crisis contributed to Türkiye's policy activism during the conflict. Türkiye leveraged its status as a middle power and its capabilities more independently. Furthermore, Russia's intervention in the final phase of the conflict and Putin's diplomatic efforts averted a protracted conflict and established a conducive environment for Türkiye to formulate its strategy.

On the other hand, Türkiye's approach to Armenia and its attempts to normalize relations despite the ongoing disagreements throughout history shortly after the conflict indicate that Türkiye's foreign and security policy is aimed at strengthening its regional power and consolidating its power level in the Caucasian region and the international political environment while pursuing its regional hegemony goal.

In conclusion, it is possible to argue that Türkiye's middle power status and defense and security policy directly affected the consequences of the Second Karabakh War and increased Türkiye's influence in establishing the regional balance. Furthermore, it is possible to express that in compliance with the hypotheses of the thesis, Türkiye held its middle power status by using its material and diplomatic instruments in the Second Karabakh War and besides maintaining its security policy and increasing its activism in Azerbaijan would strengthen Türkiye's material and diplomatic capabilities and sphere of influence. Focusing on the Second Karabakh War case makes it possible to conclude that secured Azerbaijan means secured Türkiye. Therefore, as decreasing its ambitions in the region may lead Türkiye to struggle to maintain its middle power status in the international order, increasing activism and implementation of its strong defense and security policy in the respective region, including Azerbaijan, would provide Türkiye more opportunities on the way to the hegemony goal.

With the respective achievement, Türkiye promoted its middle power and its capabilities of influence among other powers that influence the region. Türkiye's defense and security policy reveals that its strategic combination of middle power status and neorealist aspirations can facilitate realizing its regional hegemony objective. In case Türkiye continues interlinking and harmonizing its military and diplomatic activism in world affairs, it would be no surprise for Türkiye to expand its area of influence and directly affect more regions in the world as an enhanced middle power which can be considered as an initial step to be a great power.

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