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**Title:** Erdoğan's flying 'Neo-Ottoman' Diplomats:  
A holistic analysis of Bayraktar Diplomacy  
**Course:** Master Thesis  
**Date:** January 16, 2023  
**Supervisor:** Dr. Ozan Özavci  
**WORDCOUNT:** 14.972  
**PAGES:** 58



## **Abstract**

*From being reliant on foreign military technologies to developing domestically produced hardware, Türkiye – in the last decade – has developed a burgeoning drone industry that seemingly provides the country international leverage. This thesis analyzes in what respect Türkiye utilizes its newly acquired drone industry to reach its 'Neo-Ottoman' inspired foreign policy goals. The thesis starts off with a description of the foreign policy evolution of the Turkish Republic from its founding in 1923 till the present day. It analyses the drivers behind the country's move from Kemalism to Neo-Ottomanism and moreover the deteriorating effect this has on Türkiye's relationship with its traditional allies in the West. This dynamic is connected to Türkiye's domestic drone industry by stating the country's growing assertiveness and deteriorating relationship with the West, stimulated Ankara's motivation to cultivate its domestic drone industry – and autonomize its arms industry as a whole. Türkiye's drone warfare capabilities allow the country to independently conduct successful military interventions with a relatively favorable 'risk to reward' ration. By internationally providing its drone technologies – and concomitant strategies – Ankara is capable of 'exporting' military success to the nations it favors. Hence, Türkiye's drone industry increases Ankara's direct and indirect, military and non-military interventionist capabilities. This in turn, stimulates the foreign policy assertive of Türkiye which stems from Ankara's goal to present itself as a Neo-Ottoman regional power, capable of rivaling major brokers. Hence, from a (neo-)realist perspective, the cultivation of Türkiye's drone industry can – on the medium to short turn – be seen as a real foreign policy asset. This thesis concludes with a discussion of the possible negative ramifications of Türkiye's current drone policies on its international standing, thereby adding a more critical note to the success story that is predominantly presented in this thesis.*

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*At the military air base in the provincial town Batman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is seen signing the Bayraktar TB2 drone produced by Baykar Technologies. <sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Umar Farooq, ‘The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power’ (May 14, 2019), photo taken by: Murat Cetinmuhurdar, <https://theintercept.com/2019/05/14/turkey-second-drone-age/> (October 7, 2022).

# *Erdoğan's flying 'Neo-Ottoman' diplomats: A holistic analysis of 'Bayraktar Diplomacy'*

## **Introduction**

Imagine the following scenery. It is the year 2010, a leading political analyst predicts that in 2022 Ukraine will defend its country against Russian aggressors with the help of a Turkish made drone named the TB2. A drone that is so effective, that a Ukrainian folklore song has been made about it.<sup>2</sup> A statement as such would easily be dismissed as a Turkish chauvinistic mirage. Rightfully so, had it not been for the fact, that this imaginary political analyst would have been spot on with his prediction. Türkiye has developed an internationally renowned drone industry that – since its launch on the international stage in 2016 – has provided Ankara military strength, international status, political leverage, and financial gains.

The TB2 drone's ability to be militarily effective has been demonstrated in several conflicts. For example, the TB2 drone carried out accurate bombings in Libya which allowed Ankara to support the internationally recognized government against resistance forces of General Khalifa Haftar. Ankara has also aided the Azerbaijan government in their border dispute against the Armenians in the Karabakh-Nagorno War by providing air dominance. Furthermore, the Turkish Armed Forces have used the TB2 drone to support Syrian resistance forces and combat Assad's regime in Syria.<sup>3</sup>

Within this context, the relative low cost and high effectiveness of Türkiye's drone interventions have enabled the Turks to get involved in conflicts where they normally might have been more tentative. Hence, Türkiye's efficient employment of their domestic drones changed the nature of Ankara's interventions, which are now more based on small-footprint actions that aim to maximize political and military influence while minimizing financial and humanitarian costs.

Furthermore, Türkiye's drone industry – with the TB2 as their leading model – has allowed Türkiye to become an internationally recognized arms dealer. This provided the Turks with much needed financial gains and international political leverage. Exact sales figures are hard to find but according to the Turkish state-run news agency *Anadolu Ajans*, the TB2 is now

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<sup>2</sup> YouTube, 'Bayraktar/Patriotic Ukrainian Song – English Lyrics' <https://youtu.be/sk3IbKsNVpw> (October 26, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Oryx, 'A Monument Of Victory: The Bayraktar TB2 Kill List' (February 23, 2022) <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/12/a-monument-of-victory-bayraktar-tb2.html> (October 12, 2022).

being exported to 24 countries. This makes it the most exported fighter drone in the world.<sup>4</sup> When asked, whether TB2 drones will be sold to India, the CEO of Baykar Technology Haluk Bayraktar stated that: ‘Our priority is to share our capabilities with brotherly countries that we have strategic relations [with], friends, allies, NATO members. Countries like Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Ukraine are our priority’.<sup>5</sup> Haluk Bayraktar’s statement unveils the political leverage, that Türkiye now holds as they became a leading drone power.

Considering the leading ideology within the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), referred to as Neo-Ottomanism, in which Türkiye strives to become the central power in regions, which were formerly within the sphere of influence of the Ottoman Empire. One could say that the country’s domestic drone industry could provide a powerful foreign policy asset in this respect.<sup>6</sup> *This thesis examines in what respects Türkiye utilizes its domestic drone industry to reach its foreign policy goals.* How does the new drone industry effect the ‘Neo-Ottoman’ ambitions of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to transform Türkiye into an independent regional superpower? And how does this ‘Bayraktar Diplomacy’ in turn, effect Türkiye’s position/status within the international community?

### **Historiography**

To determine the effect of Türkiye’s drone industry on its foreign policy goals one must first clarify what Türkiye’s current foreign policy entails. There is ample literature available in which president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s foreign policy is discussed. For example, *The Council on Foreign Relations* (CFR) analyzes the policies of Türkiye, stating that its assertive nature is complicating its long-standing influential voice – which was based on its geographical location and NATO membership – in international politics.<sup>7</sup> Aslı Aydintaşbaş goes a step further by making a ‘Huntington-esque’ statement. She postulates that Türkiye’s Islamic turn nullifies any hopes for Türkiye returning to the so-called Western Fold and that ‘Ankara’s assertive foreign policy is here to stay’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Middle East Monitor, ‘Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drone being exported to 24 countries’ (September 1, 2022) <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220901-turkish-bayraktar-tb2-drone-being-exported-to-24-countries/> (October 26, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Ashish Dangwal, ‘No Bayraktar Drones For India; Turkish CEO says will sell TB2 UAV’s Only To Brotherly Nations Like Pakistan, Ukraine’. (September 7, 2022) <https://eurasianimes.com/no-bayraktar-drones-for-india-turkish-ceo-says-will-sell-tb2-drones/> (September 11, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Gabriela Özel Volfová, Gabriela Özel. “Turkey’s Middle Eastern Endeavors: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP.” *Die Welt Des Islams* 56, no. 3/4 (2016): 489–510,492. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24894003>

<sup>7</sup> Kali Robinson, ‘Turkey’s Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions’ (August 24, 2022) <https://www.cfr.org/background/turkeys-growing-foreign-policy-ambitions> (8 October 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Aslı Aydintaşbaş, ‘Turkey Will Not Return to the Western Fold’ (May 19, 2021) <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2021-05-19/turkey-will-not-return-western-fold> (October 8, 2022).

Furthermore, many articles present and discuss the leading principles behind Turkish foreign policy such as the ‘Zero Problems with the Neighbors’ doctrine<sup>9</sup> and the related ‘Strategic Depth’ framework, which were both devised by Türkiye’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu.<sup>10</sup> Within this context Ankara’s Neo-Ottoman ambitions are also discussed, for example by Avatkov Vladimir Alekseevich who states, that the ideology provides Türkiye’s new ‘unofficial’ foreign policy strategy.<sup>11</sup>

Current literature also analyzes the impact of killer drones on foreign policy and diplomacy in general. Retired US Army colonel Ann Wright for example, wrote an analysis in 2017, examining the role of ‘killer drones’ and critiquing the increased militarization of U.S. foreign policy. She postulates, that killer drones are (falsely) presented as a viable middle course alternative to traditional military interventions.<sup>12</sup> In this context the benefits of using attack drones lowers both the risk and the threshold for nations to intervene, but this can have long term negative consequences on the international community.

Sufficient literature can also be found on the topic of how Türkiye’s drone industry came about. Owen LeGrone analyses the development, production capabilities and current operations of Baykar Technologies, Türkiye’s most prominent drone producer.<sup>13</sup> Umar Farooq presents a brief developmental history of Türkiye’s drone industry by summarizing important events leading up to the present situation in which Türkiye ‘defied the U.S. by becoming a killer drone power’.<sup>14</sup> Existing literature also links the elements of foreign policy, diplomacy, and drones by explaining how Türkiye is using its newly acquired drone technology and industry to influence its interventions and foreign policy outcomes. This is referred to as ‘Bayraktar Diplomacy’, which is derived from the broader term ‘drone diplomacy’.<sup>15</sup> By extension, military analyst Can Kasapoğlu states that Ankara strives to spark ‘drone-warfare

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<sup>9</sup> Ali Askerov, ‘Turkey’s ‘Zero Problems with the Neighbors’’ Policy: Was it Realistic? *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 4 no. 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2347798917694746>

<sup>10</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, ‘Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu’ <http://www.altinicizdiklerim.com/resimler/StratejikDerinlik.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Avatkov Vladimir Alekseevich, ‘Neo-Ottomanism as a Key Doctrine of Modern Turkey’ *The Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO)* Vol.1, No.1,80-88,80. (September 2018) doi: 10.17265/2160-6579/2018.01.007

<sup>12</sup> Ann Wright, ‘Killer Drones and the Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy’ (June 2017) <https://afsa.org/killer-drones-and-militarization-us-foreign-policy> (October 7, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Owen LeGrone, ‘The Rise of Turkey’s Baykar Technologies, Part I’ (September 4, 2022) [https://www.tearline.mil/public\\_page/uav-turkey-facilities/](https://www.tearline.mil/public_page/uav-turkey-facilities/) (October 7, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Umar Farooq, ‘The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power’ (May 14, 2019) <https://theintercept.com/2019/05/14/turkey-second-drone-age/> (October 7, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Jakoubek, ‘Turkish Drone Diplomacy’ (December 3, 2022) <https://www.securityoutlines.cz/turkish-drone-diplomacy/> (January 1, 2023).

ecosystems or techno-geopolitical ecosystems and hence uses its drone industry as a strategic means to build strategic outreach'.<sup>16</sup>

The current literature also contains academic articles analyzing the effectivity of Turkish drones. To demonstrate the effectiveness of the Turkish drone, many articles cite the role of Turkish drones in the Syrian civil war, the Libyan civil war, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Tigray War and the Russo-Ukrainian war.<sup>17</sup> Some authors even go so far as to state that the TB2 has transformed the way modern warfare is fought and that 'Bayraktar Diplomacy' has 'decided the faith of nations'. Statements as such are supported by extensive 'kill lists' of targets, that were allegedly taken down by the TB2 drone.<sup>18</sup>

Federico Borsari presents several arguments to confirm that the TB2 is a real foreign policy asset. On the one hand, the TB2 provides economic gains by boosting Türkiye's defense industry. On the other hand, the TB2 allows the Turks to engage in small but effective military interventions to increase their regional influence and gain political leverage on a global scale. There is limited literature in which the added tactical value and effectiveness of Turkish drones are denied. However, some authors try to provide some perspective by stating, that the TB2 is not a groundbreaking machine capable of dominating any battlefield. The TB2's main strength is its cost effectiveness and disposability coupled with 'being good enough' i.e., the TB2 does its job and – because of its low cost – is easy to replace.<sup>19</sup>

This ties in with the concept of 'the democratization of air power', whereby less wealthy nations and/or entities have access to advanced lethal technologies such as killer drones. Within this context it is stated the popularity and somewhat unregulated nature of the Turkish drone industry, could complicate the geopolitical balance of power and contribute to the diminishing hegemony of the West.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the unregulated nature of the Turkish drone industry

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<sup>16</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, 'Techno-Geopolitics and the Turkish Way of Drone Warfare' (March 2022) 1-9, 5. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Techno-Geopolitics-and-the-Turkish-Way-of-Drone-Warfare.pdf> (January 3, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> James Jeffrey, 'Has Turkey become an armed drone superpower?' (April 19, 2022) <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/has-turkey-become-an-armed-drone-superpower/> (October 8, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Oryx, 'A Monument Of Victory: The Bayraktar TB2 Kill List'

<sup>19</sup> Aaron Stein, 'The TB2: The Value of a cheap and 'good enough' drone' (August 30, 2022) <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/airpower-after-ukraine/the-tb2-the-value-of-a-cheap-and-good-enough-drone/> (October 7, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Sartaj Javed, 'Drones Are The New Proxies – Arms Diplomacy As A Turkish Foreign Policy Instrument' [https://www.democracylab.uwo.ca/research/opeds/Drones%20Are%20The%20New%20Proxies%20-%20Arms%20Diplomacy%20As%20A%20Turkish%20Foreign%20Policy%20Instrument.html#\\_ftnref1](https://www.democracylab.uwo.ca/research/opeds/Drones%20Are%20The%20New%20Proxies%20-%20Arms%20Diplomacy%20As%20A%20Turkish%20Foreign%20Policy%20Instrument.html#_ftnref1) (October 9, 2022).

has caused much critique in the international community, with nations like the U.S. condemning the sales policy of Ankara.<sup>21</sup>

### **Academic Relevance & Methodology**

This thesis will present a structural analysis of interrelated dynamics consisting of Türkiye's history, current (Neo)-Ottoman foreign policy goal(s), domestic drone industry, utilization of said industry (i.e., Bayraktar Diplomacy) and position within the international community. To depict a holistic picture of Bayraktar Diplomacy, this thesis presents a multifaceted analysis. To understand why Türkiye uses Bayraktar Diplomacy, Ankara's (national)-security needs, regional status, (geo)-political ambitions and economic goals will be analyzed within the framework of Erdoğan's (neo)-realist approach to Neo-Ottomanism. To understand in what respects Türkiye utilizes Bayraktar Diplomacy, I will present several case studies in which Ankara leverages its drone industry to reach outcomes, that are supposedly favorable of the Neo-Ottomanist ideology. I will do this by analyzing the added value of the Turkish drone industry in respect to Türkiye's capability to successfully conduct both military and non-military, direct and non-direct interventions. Türkiye's involvement in the Syrian War, the Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Libyan War, and the Russo-Ukrainian War are examples of this. To my knowledge the existing literature fails to deliver this holistic analysis in which 'Bayraktar Diplomacy' is historicized and politically contextualized in the framework of Neo-Ottomanism. Hence, this thesis adds both depth and broadness to the academic field.

### **Theoretical framework**

Starting with the premise that Türkiye is using its new drone industry to achieve its Neo-Ottoman goals of increasing its regional power and geo-political status, this thesis will use (neo)-realism as a theoretical basis. (Neo)-realism is a basic perspective to international relations, arguing that the international system is anarchic and that all nations are seeking to maximize their security and power. In accordance, all governments that manage this most efficiently, will survive.<sup>22</sup> When we examine Türkiye's drone industry, both its *raison d'être* and the international reaction to the development of this industry provide examples, that resonates characteristics of (neo)-realist principles. The urge to ensure one's own safety takes a prominent role in realism theory. If we look at the (direct) genesis of the Turkish drone industry, it becomes clear that increasing homeland security was the main purpose. Many of

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<sup>21</sup> Umar Farooq, 'U.S. Lawmakers Demand Federal Scrutiny of Turkey's Drones' (July 29, 2022) <https://www.propublica.org/article/tb2-drones-turkey-federal-investigation-request> (November 15, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge 2000) <https://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/cam032/99053676.pdf>, 7-8.

the Turkish drones – including the TB2 – were initially used to either bomb or gather intel on terrorist organizations such as the PKK.<sup>23</sup> In this context violent methods and technologies are used to increase security.

Furthermore, the logic of realism suggests, that ethics and morality are of less importance for governments and that ‘the presence of force and recurrent reliance on it, mark the affairs of nations’.<sup>24</sup> An example of this can be derived from Türkiye’s drone policy. It is speculated that certain political entities or nations – including the Turks themselves – have used Turkish drones in such a manner, that human rights were violated. These allegations are dismissed by the Turkish government who – to further its own interests – purposefully pursues a ‘no questions asked’ policy when it comes to selling drones.<sup>25</sup> The Turkish drone industry was created to increase national security, but its success has seemingly given the Turks an asset, which they use to create leverage. This is in line with realist theory, which emphasizes the constant ambition of nation-states to increase their power and influence. Considering the examples above, (neo)-realist theory provides a useful lens to explain why and to what extent Türkiye uses its newly acquired drone industry to achieve its foreign policy goals.

## Sources

To apply the research methods above a variety of sources will be used. I will analyze for example statements – both spoken and written – of the Turkish government, which will be accessed via governmental channels like the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>26</sup> News updates and official statements from Türkiye’s main drone producing company Baykar Technology can be accessed via their website.<sup>27</sup> A list of targets, that have been taken out by the TB2 drone, can be retrieved via the defense analysis website Oryx.<sup>28</sup> (International)-media content, in which the Turkish drone industry is mentioned, will be accessed via several news outlets and video sharing websites like YouTube.<sup>29</sup> These sources will be complemented

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<sup>23</sup> Burak Bekdil, ‘The Rise and Rise of Turkish Drone Technology, (April 11, 2021) <https://besacenter.org/the-rise-and-rise-of-turkish-drone-technology/> (October 10, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 8,10.

<sup>25</sup> Umar Farooq, ‘The Drone Problem’: How the U.S. Has Struggled to Curb Turkey, a Key Exporter of Armed Drones’. (July 12, 2022) <https://www.propublica.org/article/bayraktar-tb2-drone-turkey-exports> (October 12, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/default.en.mfa> (October 12, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Baykar Technology, <https://baykartech.com/en/> (October 13, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> Oryx, ‘A Monument Of Victory: The Bayraktar TB2 Kill List’.

<sup>29</sup> YouTube, ‘BAYRAKTAR TB2: Turkish drone steals spotlight’ (March 23, 2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HBwQRu6LJo> (October 11, 2022).



with literature, that consist of academic journals, books and policy reports such as articles on Türkiye's drone diplomacy.<sup>30</sup>

### **Chapter layout**

To get a holistic picture of the relationship between Türkiye's drone industry and their Neo-Ottoman foreign policy goals, chapter 1 will first elaborate on how Türkiye's foreign policy developed over time, what its main drivers were and what their current foreign policy framework entails. Chapter 2 analyzes how and why Türkiye's drone industry came about and situate the industry's place in the international community. These first two chapters provide the contextual and historical basis. Chapter 3 then analyzes how Türkiye utilizes its drone industry to reach its – Neo-Ottoman – foreign policy goals, and what kind of effect this has on their position/status in the international community.

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<sup>30</sup> Levent Kenez, 'Erdoğan uses 'drone diplomacy' to silence opponents abroad' (September 28, 2022) <https://nordicmonitor.com/2022/09/Erdoğan-uses-drone-diplomacy-to-silence-opponents-abroad/> (October 14, 2022).

## Chapter 1. From Kemalism to Neo-Ottomanism: The evolution of Turkish foreign policy

*Minarets are our bayonets, domes are our helmets  
Mosques are our barracks, believers our soldiers  
This divine army watches over my religion  
Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest.<sup>31</sup>*

Written in a time when the Ottoman Empire was on its last legs, the translated poem above depicts a nostalgic yearning to a period in Ottoman history that was dominated by religious conquest. Although the official origin of the poem is still contested, it is thought that it was written by the prominent Turkish sociologist Ziya Gökalp. What makes this poem particularly special however, is the fact that in 1998 it led to the imprisonment of the current President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. During a speech in the early days of his political career, Erdoğan had recited the pro-Ottoman, pro-Islam poem in the Eastern province of Siirt. Erdoğan was sentenced to 4 months in jail because – at the time – such actions went strictly against the secular principles of the Turkish constitution. Fast forward to 2021 Erdoğan proudly recites the exact same poem at the exact same location whilst being cheered on by his loyal followers.<sup>32</sup> The incident depicts the historical and religious drivers behind Türkiye’s transformation in the last hundred years, on both the national and geopolitical level. In this chapter I will explain how Türkiye’s national and foreign policy – which go hand in hand – have experienced a paradigm shift, leading to the current situation in which Neo-Ottoman and Islamist sentiments play a center role.

What started initially as a small Turkoman principality under Osman I in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, grew out to be one of the longest lasting dynasties in world history. The descendants of Osman I would conquer large swaths of territory reaching from Central-Asia to North Africa and the Balkans. At the peak of their power in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century the Ottomans were both

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<sup>31</sup> Uri Friedman, ‘The Thinnest-Skinned President in the World’ (April 26, 2016) <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/turkey-germany-Erdoğan-bohmermann/479814/> (December 22, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Cumhurbaşkanlığı Erdoğan Siirt’te hapse girmesine neden olan siiri okudu, SonDakika (December 4, 2021) <https://www.sondakika.com/politika/haber-cumhurbaşkanlığı-Erdoğan-siirt-te-hapse-girmesine-14576414/> (December 24, 2022).

feared and inspired by contemporaneous Europeans according to the scholars Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters.<sup>33</sup>

As with any dynasty in history however, the successes of the Ottoman Empire would not last forever. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, historical actors – both within the Ottoman Empire and Europe – had concerns regarding the diminishing power of the Ottomans and the possible implications this could have for the region and the geopolitical balance of power in general. This paradigm, known as the ‘the Eastern Question’, led to a situation in which the Ottomans would – both willingly and unwillingly – find themselves at the receiving end of European Great Power interventions. As postulated by Ozan Özacı, from this point onward ‘the threat perceptions and interests’ of Western Powers and the Levant became increasingly interwoven. ‘Historical actors both imperial and peripheral, European and Levantine’ were tied up in an ever-increasing pursuit of security, which paradoxically enough only exacerbated their perceived threats and problems.<sup>34</sup> With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, the Eastern Question supposedly came to an end. The dynamic of interwoven and both congruent and deviating threat perceptions and interests between ‘the Turks’ and the West would remain to play a central role in Turkish foreign policy.

Born from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic has had an eventful political development since its founding. The conditions of the Treaty of Sevres, which was opposed on the Ottomans after they had lost World War I, created a situation in which the territorial continuity and political unity of the Ottoman Empire’s successor state, Türkiye, was heavily endangered. In reaction to this, the Turks, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, fought the War of Independence in which they managed to stave off total Western domination. The military success of the Turks allowed them to enforce a second round of negotiations that would be more favorable. On July 24, 1923, this led to the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne, which formed the basis for the establishment of the Turkish Republic.<sup>35</sup>

After having (geo-)politically consolidated Türkiye, Atatürk – inspired by Western modernity – proceeded to implement several modernizing reforms that nationalized, secularized, and westernized the nation. With his famous catch phrase ‘Peace at Home, Peace in the World’, Atatürk followed an independent, non-expansionist foreign policy, that was

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<sup>33</sup> Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York 2009) introduction xxv-xxviii.

<sup>34</sup> Ozan Özacı, ‘Introduction’, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864* (Oxford, 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198852964.003.0001> (December 7, 2022) p. 3,5,9,12.

<sup>35</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Treaty of Lausanne." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 17, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Lausanne-1923>. (December 1, 2022).

mainly focused on Türkiye's survival.<sup>36</sup> Within this context, Atatürk distanced the Turkish Republic of its heritage as the predecessor state of the Ottoman Empire. In an interview with the French paper 'Le Petit Parisien' Atatürk stated that: 'The new Türkiye has nothing to do with the old Türkiye. The Ottoman government is history. A new Türkiye is born.'<sup>37</sup> Atatürk's vision of the Turkish Republic entailed a new socially constructed identity. Atatürk expected everyone within the borders of the Turkish Republic to be a 'Turk', which disenfranchised certain parts of the populace, that identified themselves with a different ethnicity. The origin of Türkiye's political struggle with 'The Kurdish Question' – which still plays a central role in Turkish (foreign)-policy – can also be traced back to this period.

Atatürk's ideology i.e., 'Kemalism', were largely continued by his successor İsmet İnönü and isolationism would remain the keyword in Turkish foreign policy. When European powers went to war again in 1939, Ankara decided to adopt a neutral position by signing a treaty of mutual assistance with Britain and France and a treaty of nonaggression with Nazi Germany. It was not until the end of the war, that Türkiye officially chose a side by declaring war on Germany and even this was only done because it was a formal requirement to join the United-Nations.<sup>38</sup>

In the aftermath of the Second World War two superpowers emerged that would divide the international community in two blocs and create a Cold War for decennia to come. This time Türkiye could not play the neutrality card. Considering their historic regional rivalry with the Russians and the expansionist nature of the Soviet-Union, Ankara felt obliged to join the Western allies. Türkiye's move towards the West created a situation in which Turkish foreign policy was heavily influenced by the leading power in the West, the U.S. even to the point that several – Third World – nations accused Türkiye of being 'lackeys of the Americans'.<sup>39</sup> The close bilateral ties with the U.S. yielded Türkiye many economic benefits like the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan.

Türkiye's move towards the West created the opportunity to be admitted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1955 and join the European Union's predecessor, the

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<sup>36</sup> Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Turkish Foreign Policy During Atatürk's Era' <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkish-foreign-policy-during-aturks-era.en.mfa> (December 1, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> *İşte Atatürk*, 'Mustafa Kemal'in Petit Parisien Muhabirine Verdigi Mulakat' (November 3, 1922) <https://isteataturk.com/g/icerik/Mustafa-Kemal-in-Petit-Parisien-Muhabirine-Verdigi-Mulakat-1922/832> (December 23, 2022)

<sup>38</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, ed. 'Turkey: A Country Study.' (January 1995) <http://countrystudies.us/turkey/15.htm> (November 28, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> CIA, FOIA Archive, General CIA Records, 'Afro-Asian Conference Developments' CIA-RDP91T01172R000300370005-5 <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP91T01172R000300370005-5.pdf.1>.

European Community (EC) in 1964. It was during this period, that Türkiye took on the strategic role of both a diplomatic bridge and military barrier between East and West. An example of this was Türkiye's active involvement in both NATO and its Middle East equivalent the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). By providing the alliances with territories for headquarters, strategical locations for army bases and troops, Türkiye played an important role in containing Soviet advancements during the Cold War.<sup>40</sup> The relationship with the West was only seriously jeopardized once during the Cold War, when Türkiye invaded the island of Cyprus in 1974 as reaction to initiatives to unify Cyprus under Greek rule (*enosis*).<sup>41</sup>

With the ending of the Cold War in the late 1980's the international community once again found itself in a reconfiguration leading to changes in the foreign policies of many countries. Professor Mustafa Aydın has postulated, that Türkiye was one of the countries that was most influenced by the ending of the Cold War. Türkiye's regional influence and national security relied on its close partnership with the West, which in turn was based on Cold War dynamics. Türkiye's relation with the USA remained relatively good. With the Cold War coming to an end however, Ankara's role and value within the Western fold was now less clear.

Confronted with the conflict-ridden surroundings of Türkiye, shifting geopolitical power dynamics, the increasing militancy of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and a stagnant economy, the 8<sup>th</sup> President of the Turkish Republic had his work cut out for him. To tackle Türkiye's economic problems, Özal implemented reforms, that opened the door to a neo-liberal market economy.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he sought rapprochement towards the Kurds by challenging Ankara's traditional 'denying' stance towards the Kurdish identity.<sup>43</sup> Under Özal's rule Ankara also reconsidered their regional isolationism for a policy, that was geared towards having a more prominent regional influence. Being an aficionado of Ottoman history himself, one could say that Özal introduced a sort of 'proto'-Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish politics, which would later be cultivated and expanded on under Erdoğan's AKP-rule.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, ed. 'Turkey: A Country Study.'

<sup>41</sup> John Sakkas, Nataliya Zhukova, 'The Soviet Union, Turkey and the Cyprus Problem, 1967-1974'.

<sup>42</sup> Ziya, Öniş. "Turgut Özal and His Economic Legacy: Turkish Neo-Liberalism in Critical Perspective." Middle Eastern Studies 40, no. 4 (2004): 113–34, there 113. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289930>

<sup>43</sup> Ataman, Muhittin. "Özal Leadership and Restructuring of Turkish Ethnic Policy in the 1980s." Middle Eastern Studies 38, no. 4 (2002): 123–42, there 123. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284261>

<sup>44</sup> Alexander Murinson. "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign." Middle Eastern Studies 42, no. 6 (2006): 945–64, there 945. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284512>

## Neo-Ottomanism under AKP-Rule

When the Justice and Development Party (AKP) advanced to power in 2002, many revolutionary policies were introduced. The AKP would introduce a new political ideology, based on Türkiye's heritage as the successor state of the once influential Islamic Ottoman Empire. The Neo-Ottoman ideology envisions a central role for Türkiye in regions, that were formerly within the sphere of influence of the Ottomans, namely the Middle East, the Balkans and Central-Asia.<sup>45</sup> In order to achieve this, Erdoğan's former political advisor and Türkiye's former Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, presented the theoretical framework of 'Strategic Depth'.<sup>46</sup> This doctrine was supplemented by Davutoğlu's concept of 'Zero Problems with the Neighbors', in which emphasis was put on conflict mitigation and cooperation. In this context economic cooperation and diplomacy were ought to be the glue, that held Türkiye's new foreign policy strategy together.<sup>47</sup> Davutoğlu also saw opportunity to prolong the historic role of the Turkish Republic to serve as a bridge between the West and the East.<sup>48</sup>

The soft power approach to increase Türkiye's influence was promising in nature. This doctrine eventually proved to be too idealistic in the conflict ridden and complex political landscape of the Middle East. Ali Askerov stated that: 'The policy did not have a power of sustainability due to the various old, new and emerging problems around Türkiye and hence, the government had to give it up gradually and take a new course of foreign policy, based on more 'realistic' approaches to defend its national interests'.<sup>49</sup> Erdoğan would eventually replace Davutoğlu's doctrine with a more assertive, militaristic and 'realist' approach i.e., 'Strategic Autonomy', to reach his Neo-Ottoman ambitions.<sup>50</sup> From there, Ankara strived to take on the role of a regional order builder. In the next section I will present some events and dynamics, that drove Erdoğan's shift in policy and the implications of this renewed approach on Türkiye's foreign policy, geopolitical position, and deteriorating relationship with West.

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<sup>45</sup> Gabriela Özel Volfová, Gabriela Özel. 'Turkey's Middle Eastern Endeavors: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP', 493-494.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, 'Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu' <http://www.altinicizdiklerim.com/resimler/StratejikDerinlik.pdf>, 2-6.

<sup>47</sup> Ali Askerov, 'Turkey's "Zero Problems with the Neighbors" Policy: Was it Realistic?' *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 4 no. 2, June 2017, 149-167, 167. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2347798917694746>

<sup>48</sup> Göktürk, Tüysüzoğlu, 'Strategic Depth: A Neo-Ottomanist Interpretation of Turkish Eurasianism' *Mediterranean Quarterly*. 25. (2014) 85-104, there 104. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-2685776>

<sup>49</sup> Ali Askerov, 'Turkey's "Zero Problems with the Neighbors" Policy: Was it Realistic?'

<sup>50</sup> Nienke van Heukelingen and Bob Deen, 'Beyond Turkey's "zero problems" policy: Motives, means and impact of the interventions in Syria, Libya and the South Caucasus', 1-2. (January 2022)

[https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Policy\\_brief\\_Beyond\\_Turkeys\\_zero\\_problems\\_policy.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Policy_brief_Beyond_Turkeys_zero_problems_policy.pdf) (December 1, 2022).

The first key shifting point can be traced back to the Arab Spring, which caused significant challenges for Ankara's foreign policy. The Arab spring enabled Kurdish militias to further their interests in the region. By capitalizing on the power vacuum, that arose in the effected countries, specifically Syria and Iraq, Kurdish ambitions of creating an autonomous region was gaining momentum. The weakening of the Syrian state provided Kurdish militias like the People's Defense Units (YPG) with more organizational freedom. Although some of the Kurdish militias (like the PKK) are internationally recognized terrorist organizations, their fight against ISIS forces in Syria won them substantial sympathy from the West, in particular the United-States. From Turkish perspective these Kurdish militias form a direct threat to homeland safety.<sup>51</sup> Western sympathy towards the Kurdish cause for independence is seen by the Turks as treason and the issue – more than once – led to internal friction within NATO.<sup>52</sup>

The Arab Spring furthermore caused an influx of refugees migrating to Türkiye, which caused substantial political and social friction within the country. To suppress Kurdish advancements and mitigate the national pressure caused by the refugee crisis, Erdoğan sought to carry out military interventions near its southern borders in Syria. With operation Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch and Peace Spring, Türkiye launched unprecedented campaigns, that were in stark contrast with the former 'Zero Problems with the Neighbors' policy.<sup>53</sup> Türkiye's military interventions on its Eastern border with Iraq can also be seen in this light. Here, Ankara has intensified its military presence in the last decade to neutralize the PKK.<sup>54</sup>

The second event, that influenced Erdoğan's foreign policy shift, was the attempted – but failed – coup d'état in 2016. On the night of July 15, a section of the Turkish military led by the former commander of the Turkish Air Force, Akin Öztürk, attempted to forcefully end AKP-rule and oust President Erdoğan.<sup>55</sup> In the aftermath of July 15, Erdoğan blamed the US-based, Turkish, Muslim religious preacher Fethullah Gülen of masterminding the coup. This resulted in Erdoğan's crackdown on the alleged shadow-government, ran by so-called 'Gülenists', which led to – somewhat impromptu – prosecutions of judges, army personnel,

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<sup>51</sup> Michael J. Totten, 'The TROUBLE WITH TURKEY: Erdoğan, ISIS, and the Kurds' *World Affairs* 178, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 5-12, 5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24888109>

<sup>52</sup> Michael Crowley, Steven Erlanger, 'For NATO, Turkey is a Disruptive Ally' (May 30, 2022) <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/30/us/politics/turkey-nato-russia.html> (October 18, 2022).

<sup>53</sup> Solace Global, 'Operation Peace Spring: A New Syrian Frontline?' (October 10, 2019) <https://www.solaceglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Solace-Global-Operation-Peace-Spring-A-New-Syrian-Frontline.pdf> (October 15).

<sup>54</sup> Michael Knights, 'Turkey's War in Northern Iraq: By the Numbers' (July 28, 2022) <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/turkeys-war-northern-iraq-numbers> (December 4, 2022).

<sup>55</sup> Reuters, 'Turkey jails ex-air force commander for life in coup case: DHA' (June 20, 2019) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-coup-idUSKCN1TLIH4> (December 1, 2022).

journalists, teachers etc. Erdoğan's harsh crackdown on the attempted coup damaged on the one hand Türkiye's longstanding and problematic bid to join the European Union.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand his actions fueled conspiracy theories and existing anti-Erdoğan sentiments in the West.

In turn Erdoğan used the lack of moral and political support from the West to fuel his anti-Western rhetoric and accused Washington of plotting against Türkiye by facilitating the conspirators.<sup>57</sup> Journalist Murat Sofuoğlu stated that the 'deafening silence of NATO-allies' after the failed coup made Erdoğan realize, that Ankara could not trust its NATO allies. Sofuoğlu furthermore mentions the lack of support from the Gulf states, who – except Türkiye's ally Qatar – presented a similar attitude to much of the Western nations.<sup>58</sup> This is particularly relevant for the discussion regarding both the feasibility of Davutoğlu's soft power strategy and the reason why Erdoğan abandoned this approach. The incident showed the lack of political capital and soft power Erdoğan's Türkiye had in former (Arab) Ottoman states.

It is important to mention that Sofuoğlu wrote his article for the Turkish state-owned broadcasting company 'TRT World'. Since Erdoğan has a firm grip on the broadcasting company, it is likely that the article depicts an 'AKP-certified' narrative. One could say that the article provides insight to the post-coup political discourse, that was present in Ankara. The failed coup d'état fueled sentiments of vigilance and distrust within Ankara towards both Western and Middle Eastern nations.<sup>59</sup> This in turn stimulated more independent, assertive and militaristic sentiments within Turkish foreign policy.

From this point on the already problematic relationship between Erdoğan and its traditional allies in the West now fell into a vicious cycle of mutual distrust. Feeling betrayed by the West, Erdoğan recalibrated its traditional stance towards the West and ought it necessary to pursue a more assertive geo-political stance by seeking alternative venues to reach Ankara's policy goals. In turn this caused more agitation within the West, leading to further deterioration. An example of this was Türkiye's decision to purchase S-400 missile defense systems in 2017 from NATO's longtime adversary Russia, after Ankara's bid to purchase American-made Patriot systems had failed. Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar stated that, because of

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<sup>56</sup> Robin Emmott, 'Turkey's EU membership bid evaporating, Commission says' (October 6, 2020) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-eu-democracy-idUSKBN26R2NH> (October 18, 2022).

<sup>57</sup> H.A. Hellyer, 'Turkish-Western Relations After the Attempted Coup' (July 29, 2016) <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/turkish-western-relations-after-the-attempted-coup/> (December 2, 2022).

<sup>58</sup> Murat Sofuoğlu, 'How the July 15 coup attempt has impacted Turkey's foreign policy' (July 12, 2021) <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-the-july-15-coup-attempt-has-impacted-turkey-s-foreign-policy-48296> (December 26, 2022).

<sup>59</sup> Murat Sofuoğlu, 'How the July 15 coup attempt has impacted Turkey's foreign policy'.



Türkiye's security concerns, the purchase 'was not an option but rather a necessity'. Türkiye's move towards Putin caused a backfire in NATO, which led Türkiye to being excluded from the USA led F-35 fighter jet program.<sup>60</sup>

Under Erdoğan's rule, Ankara's policies led to substantial friction within NATO the last years, which sparked a broader discussion regarding Türkiye's membership in the alliance. Türkiye's shift from a secular, liberal and democratic political system to an Islamic, conservative, authoritarian configuration – coupled with its complicated relationship with NATO's adversary and increasingly militaristic posture – created both a political bifurcation and a cultural rift with NATO. The once unquestionable status of Türkiye in NATO is now challenged, with some parties even calling the country a 'Disruptive Ally'.<sup>61</sup> And according to journalist Aslı Aydintaşbaş Türkiye's deteriorating relationship with the West has reached a point of no return.<sup>62</sup>

In a recent speech during a ceremony for the 21<sup>st</sup> Foundation Anniversary of the AKP, Erdoğan stated that: 'Türkiye builds its 2023 vision no longer on shortcomings in democracy and development being redressed but rather on the goal of being one of the biggest in the world in terms of politics and economy'.<sup>63</sup> Erdoğan's statement affirms Aydintasbas's statement and depicts the current political paradigm in Ankara. Firstly, the critique stemming from the West regarding Türkiye's faltering democracy – a hampering factor in Türkiye's bid to join the EU – will no longer take a central place in the country's political considerations. The quote furthermore refers to 'Vision 2023', which is an economy based political doctrine, that Ankara has been pursuing in the last decade. Within the framework of 'Vision 2023' Türkiye strives to become an independent political and economic powerhouse (ideally) before the 100-year anniversary of the Turkish Republic in 2023.<sup>64</sup> Looking at Türkiye's current economic problems, it is safe to say that 'Vision 2023' did not live up to the expectations of Erdoğan. As

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<sup>60</sup> Suzan Fraser, 'AP Explains: Why NATO member Turkey wants Russian missiles' (July 18, 2019) <https://apnews.com/article/2ec55ffb87ec494095560a1e062faf80> (October 17, 2022).

<sup>61</sup> Michael Crowley, Steven Erlanger, 'For NATO, Turkey is a Disruptive Ally' (May 30, 2022) <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/30/us/politics/turkey-nato-russia.html> (October 18, 2022).

<sup>62</sup> Aslı, Aydintaşbaş, 'Turkey Will Not Return to the Western Fold' (May 19, 2021) <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2021-05-19/turkey-will-not-return-western-fold>

<sup>63</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 'Türkiye builds its 2023 vision on the goal of being one of the biggest in the world in terms of politics and economy' (May 15, 2022) <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/139097/-turkiye-builds-its-2023-vision-on-the-goal-of-being-one-of-the-biggest-in-the-world-in-terms-of-politics-and-economy-> (November 12, 2022).

<sup>64</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Speech entitled: 'Vision 2023: Turkey's Foreign Policy Objectives' delivered by H.E. Ahmet Davutoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the Turkey Investor Conference: The road to 2023 organized by Goldman Sachs (London, 22.11.2011)' (November 22, 2011) <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled- vision-2023 -turkey s-foreign-policy-objectives -delivered-by-h e -ahmet-davutoglu -minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa> (December 1, 2022).

a political statement however, the pursuit of ‘Vision 2023’ depicts Ankara’s commitment to reinvigorate its Ottoman legacy.

Erdoğan’s new posture as an assertive Neo-Ottoman ‘order builder’ spurs Ankara to proactively pursue its manifold interests. Aside from Türkiye’s aforementioned goal of mitigating Kurdish advancements, Ankara strives to fill the gap, that was created by the withdrawal of the US from the Middle East in recent years. Within this context Ankara is engaged in a battle for regional supremacy with other states like the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Saudi-Arabia, Russia and – to a certain extent – China in Central-Asia.<sup>65</sup>

The rivalry with Russia is worth special mentioning, because Erdoğan and Putin are both directly and indirectly entangled in complicated (proxy-)wars spanning from the Black Sea and the Caucasus to the Levant. Hence, Türkiye is attempting to present itself as an independent regional player capable of rivaling the influence of Western and non-Western power brokers. In the next section of this thesis, I will analyze in what respect Türkiye’s renewed posture is related to the emergence of their domestic drone industry.

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<sup>65</sup> Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydin, Evren Balta, Kaan Kutlu Atac, Hasret Dikici Bilgi and Arne Strand, ‘Turkey as a regional security actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region’(2021) no 2., 1-68, 17. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/7820-turkey-as-a-regional-security-actor-in-the-black-sea-the-mediterranean-and-the-levant-region#author-details>

## Chapter 2. The rise of the Turkish drone industry

*'The whole world is a customer.'*<sup>66</sup>

Standing proudly next to the newest addition of the Turkish drone fleet 'the Akinci', the CTO of Baykar Technologies stated that 'the whole world is a customer'. Selçuk Bayraktar was referring to the international attention Baykar had received after one of their drones, the TB2, had helped Ukrainian defense forces in their fight against the Russian invasion. Although a slight exaggeration, Selçuk Bayraktar's quote does hold a core of truth. The Turkish drone sector has become a booming industry in which many nations have big interest. A mere decade ago Türkiye was nowhere near being a leading drone power, which begs the question of why and how Türkiye achieved this success.

Türkiye's current position in the drone industry is largely due to the accomplishments of Baykar Technologies. Any explanation of Türkiye's place in the international drone industry should begin with a brief developmental history of the way in which the manufacturer of Türkiye's flagship TB2 drone acquired its current position. In 1984 Senior Mechanical Engineer Özdemir Bayraktar founded the (then) automotive parts company Baykar Makina. The company's main goal was to provide the Turkish automotive industry with enough parts to ensure a localized automotive industry, which was not dependent on foreign entities.<sup>67</sup>

Özdemir Bayraktar's son Selçuk Bayraktar proceeded to develop his own drone technologies.<sup>68</sup> He demonstrated these technologies to a group of Turkish officials in 2005 and stated, that – with the support of the government – Türkiye could acquire a leading position in the industry.<sup>69</sup> In hindsight Selçuk Bayraktar's prediction was spot on, but his plea came a bit too early for the Turkish government who – at the time – still had its eyes on American and Israeli weaponry and a pending Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI)-led drone program.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Naila Bagirova, 'Exclusive: After Ukraine, 'whole world' is a customer for Turkish drone, maker says' (May 30, 2022) <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-after-ukraine-whole-world-is-customer-turkish-drone-maker-says-2022-05-30/> (November 9, 2022).

<sup>67</sup> Owen LeGrone, 'The Rise of Turkey's Baykar Technologies, Part I' (September 4, 2022) [https://www.tearline.mil/public\\_page/uav-turkey-facilities/](https://www.tearline.mil/public_page/uav-turkey-facilities/) (November 7, 2022).

<sup>68</sup> Owen LeGrone, 'The Rise of Turkey's Baykar Technologies, Part 1'.

<sup>69</sup> Baykar Technologies, '2005 Ekim: Selçuk Bayraktar Mini IHA Ucus Demosu kapanis konusmasi' (January 28, 2016) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlEYq2DRdP4> (November 8, 2022).

<sup>70</sup> Umar Farooq, 'The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power' (May 14, 2019) <https://theintercept.com/2019/05/14/turkey-second-drone-age/> (November 7, 2022).

Türkiye's reliance on Western drones started in 1996, when they received a batch of unarmed drones from the U.S. firm General Atomics. The Turkish government deployed the GNAT 750s drones on its south-eastern border in their on-going dispute against the PKK. Ten years later Türkiye ordered 10 unarmed Heron drones from Israel. This cooperation also proved to be difficult.<sup>71</sup> It took 5 years for the Heron drones to be delivered and Ankara accused Tel Aviv of intentionally sabotaging the drones as there would be problems with the intelligence system.<sup>72</sup>

Ankara would eventually replace the Heron drone with its domestic counterpart the Anka drone, which was produced by the Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI). These unarmed drones provided Ankara with much needed intelligence regarding enemy movements and operations. As stated by the former officer in the Turkish Special Forces Command Necdet Özçelik however, translating the acquired intelligence to increased military effectiveness proved to be a difficult task for the Turkish military.<sup>73</sup> By the time Turkish military had received and processed its drone intel, their adversaries had often changed positions and relocated themselves. This is a plausible explanation considering that the PKK's way of fighting is characterized by guerrilla tactics.<sup>74</sup> The military shortcoming mentioned above, created the need for drones which were not only capable of providing intelligence, but also had the capability of neutralizing enemy targets on sight, like the American built MQ-9 Reaper and its predecessor the MQ-1 Predator.<sup>75</sup>

In their attempt to obtain American attack drones, the Turks were met with heavy resistance. With the periodically volatile relationship between Israel and Erdoğan's Türkiye, Washington cited concerns that Türkiye could pose a security problem for Israel and therefore decided to reject Ankara's bid to obtain American attack drones. American concerns were not totally unsubstantiated if we for instance look at Erdoğan's 'one minute' incident at the world economic forum in 2009.<sup>76</sup> Here Erdoğan was openly critical about Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine, and Erdoğan would reiterate his critique towards Israel at several points in the

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<sup>71</sup> Umar Farooq, 'The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power'.

<sup>72</sup> Itamar Eichner, 'Turkey accuses Israel of selling them defective drones' (June 24, 2018)

<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-5295266.00.html> (November 23, 2022).

<sup>73</sup> Umar Farooq, 'The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power'.

<sup>74</sup> Margarita Konaev and Burak Kadercan, 'Old Dogs, New Tricks: Urban Warfare In Turkey's War With The PKK' (January 3, 2018) <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/old-dogs-new-tricks-urban-warfare-turkeys-war-pkk/> (November 25, 2022).

<sup>75</sup> Farooq, 'The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and became a Killer Drone Power'

<sup>76</sup> Gaza: The Case for Middle East Peace, Davos Annual Meeting 2009, YouTube (January 29, 2009) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR4zRbPy2kY> (December 1, 2022), minute 1:01-1:04.

next decade.<sup>77</sup> Türkiye's failure to acquire adequate military technologies and overarching concern over foreign dependency, would ultimately create the fertile soil in which domestic drone producers such as Baykar Technologies could present itself as a viable alternative to Western drone technologies.<sup>78</sup>

In the ten years that passed after Selçuk Bayraktar presented his self-made drone to Turkish officials, the nationalistic Baykar family joined forces to transform Baykar Makina, into a UAV-producing enterprise. Baykar partnered with a larger Turkish defense firm, Kale Kalip, to help develop its designs. From that point onward Baykar would slowly but surely achieve commercial successes and make name for itself in the Turkish defense sector. In 2007 Baykar produced and delivered its first Mini UAV to the Turkish military. Two years later Baykar would produce a 'Tactical' UAV, the 'Caldiran', which delivered them a contract in 2010 to develop the Caldiran into the now renowned TB2 drone. The Medium-Altitude Long-Endurance (MALE) TB2 included several ground-breaking innovations, such as a triple-redundant flight control system and the capacity to take off, land and taxi autonomously. It was also the first Turkish UAV to be armed with air-to-ground missiles. By 2017 the TB2 had become the go-to UCAV of the Turkish armed security services in their battle against the PKK.<sup>79</sup>

Being the most popular attack drone – both in the Turkish armed security services and the international market – the TB2 is currently the leading model of the Turkish drone industry. The Turkish drone industry however, produces many other drones as well. Looking at the catalogues of Baykar Technologies, one can find several drones with different qualities and attributes. Examples are the Bayraktar Akinci, a larger drone capable of carrying heavier payloads.<sup>80</sup> Baykar is currently also developing the Bayraktar TB3, which is a naval version of the TB2 that is specially designed to be deployed on amphibious assault ships and aircraft carriers. Another unmanned combat aircraft, expected to go in service in 2023, is the 'fighter-jet like' Kizilelma drone. With its high maneuverability and operational speed, the Kizilelma allows its operator to perform fighter jet like strikes from afar.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> United Nations, Turkey – President Addresses General Debate, 74<sup>th</sup> Session, YouTube (September 30, 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bve1yt0SEb4> (November 29, 2022), minute 23:00-25:00.

<sup>78</sup> Diğdem Soyaltin-Collela and Tolga Demiryol, 'Unusual middle power activism and regime survival: Turkey's drone warfare and its regime-boosting effects' *Third World Quarterly* 2022, 1-20,7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2158080>

<sup>79</sup> Owen LeGrone, 'The Rise of Turkey's Baykar Technologies'.

<sup>80</sup> Baykar Technology, 'Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Systems' <https://baykartech.com/en/unmanned-aerial-vehicle-systems/> (December 17, 2022).

<sup>81</sup> Baykar Technology, 'Our Future' <https://baykartech.com/en/bayraktar-kizilelma-fighter-uav/> (December 18, 2022).

Naturally the Turkish drone industry does not only consist of Baykar Technologies. Baykar's biggest competitor, Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), also develops attack drones, which are used on a large scale by the Turkish Armed Forces. When TAI-built Anka, mentioned in the former paragraph, was first introduced in 2010, it was only capable of reconnaissance and surveillance missions. In the ten years that passed however, TAI expanded its Anka-line by adding several drones capable of carrying out specific tasks. Prominent examples are the Anka-S and the Aksungur. The Anka-S is equipped with a SATCOM system that allows the drone to carry out satellite-controlled airstrikes.<sup>82</sup> The Aksungür is a high payload carrying drone that can be seen as the competitor of the Akinci drone, built by Baykar.<sup>83</sup>

Hence, the Turkish drone industry is mainly dominated by the competition between Baykar and TAI, who – in a way – push each other to improve and broaden their arsenals. The models mentioned above are examples of flagship drones, that have emerged out of this competition. These models, however, are only a fraction of the entire catalogue of the Turkish drone industry, which consists of many more models ranging from unmanned attack helicopters to so called (mini) suicide drones.<sup>84</sup> It becomes clear that the Turkish drone industry aims to provide a complementary and diverse arsenal of drones, which are deployable in different circumstances across varying categories.

As of today, Turkish drones are almost constantly present in the sky over the country's southeast border. According to government sources cited by Farooq, from 2016 onwards, Turkish TB2's – carrying Turkish-made guided bombs – have taken out a substantial amount of Ankara's opponents in Syria and northern Iraq, including prominent PKK leaders.<sup>85</sup> This has made the TB2 a symbol of national pride across Turkish society.<sup>86</sup>

It is plausible that, the strong performance of the TB2 at the national level made Ankara realize that their domestically produced drones could also serve as a lucrative and influence-increasing export product. With the help of aggressive marketing strategies, based on mass-

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<sup>82</sup> Turkish Aerospace, 'Anka' <https://www.tusas.com/en/products/uav/operative-strategic-uav-systems/anka> (December 18, 2022).

<sup>83</sup> Turkish Aerospace, 'Aksungur' <https://www.tusas.com/en/products/uav/high-payload-capacity-uas/aksungur> (December 18, 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Paul Iddon, 'Turkey's Drones Are Coming In All Sizes These Days' (October, 2020) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2020/10/04/turkeys-drones-are-coming-in-all-sizes-these-days/?sh=22ee1282004e> (December 18, 2022).

<sup>85</sup> Umar Farooq, 'The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power'.

<sup>86</sup> Diğdem Soyaltin-Collela and Tolga Demiryol, 'Unusual middle power activism and regime survival: Turkey's drone warfare and its regime-boosting', 8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2158080>

media coverage,<sup>87</sup> and intensive governmental support – in the form of tax and export duty exemptions – the TB2 acquired international acclaim in recent years.<sup>88</sup> The international success of the Turkish drone industry can hence be seen as the product of a symbiotic cooperation between state and company.

On the sidelines of Türkiye’s biggest technology exhibition, Teknofest, the CEO of Baykar Technologies stated that, the company's export revenue had reached 98 percent this year and that the Bayraktar TB2 has become the world's most exported fighter drone. The TB2 is currently exported to 24 countries, with many more countries wanting to purchase Turkish drones. Baykar is having a difficult time in keeping up with the international demand for its popular drone.<sup>89</sup> It is likely however, that many of these countries – to a certain extent – will be met in their needs at some point, considering Selçuk Bayraktar’s statement mentioned in the introduction of this chapter.<sup>90</sup> The statement of Baykar’s CTO is supported by the fact, that the company has massively increased its production capacity in recent years. Baykar plans to raise production in 2023 to 500 TB2 and 40 Akinci drones.<sup>91</sup>

The success of Türkiye’s drones provide the sector a special place in the country’s arms industry. Ankara’s goal of modernizing and autonomizing its armed forces created a substantial sales market for domestic arms companies in the last decade. Many of these companies were focused on the national market.<sup>92</sup> Now that Turkish drones have – quite literally – taken off in the international market, Ankara holds an economic asset that could offer some help in achieving the – for now unrealistic – economic goals set-out a decade ago in ‘Vision 2023’.

Premium drone technologies such as the TB2 were previously offered only by Western countries such as the USA, who on the one hand, charge substantially more for their drones and on the other hand, set stricter criteria for potential buyers. The American MQ-9 Reaper for example, has a price tag of approximately 32 million USD which is substantially more

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<sup>87</sup> TRT world, ‘Decoded: Turkey’s Drone Power’ <https://www.trtworld.com/video/others/decoded-turkeys-drone-power/5f90120e46e7130017c16ccf> (December 29, 2022).

<sup>88</sup> Owen LeGrone, ‘The Rise of Turkey’s Baykar Technologies, Part 1’.

<sup>89</sup> Orhan Coşkun, ‘Exclusive: Turkey sells battle-tested drones to UAE as regional rivals mend ties’ (September 21, 2022) <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/exclusive-turkey-sells-battle-tested-drones-uae-regional-rivals-mend-ties-2022-09-21/> (November 9, 2022).

<sup>90</sup> Naila Bagirova, ‘Exclusive: After Ukraine, ‘whole world’ is a customer for Turkish drone, maker says’ (May 30, 2022) <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-after-ukraine-whole-world-is-customer-turkish-drone-maker-says-2022-05-30/> (November 9, 2022).

<sup>91</sup> Middle East Monitor, ‘Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drone being exported to 24 countries’.

<sup>92</sup> Emile Bouvier, ‘Turkey. The Arms Industry on the Fast Track to Autonomy’ (October 27, 2021) <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/turkey-the-arms-industry-on-the-fast-track-to-autonomy.5142> (December 14, 2022).

expensive than its Turkish counterpart which costs 4 million USD.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore the sales policy of the arms market leader, the USA, is much more regulated and restrictive than Ankara's. The conservative sales policies of the United-States had allowed Israel – who follows a less restrictive sales policy – to dominate the international drone market in the last two decades.<sup>94</sup>

With the rise of Turkish drones in recent years, the balance of power within the drone industry has been rearranged in favor of Ankara. Besides Türkiye and Israel, the only major drone producing country that follows a less restrictive sales approach, is China. In the last ten years the Chinese have sold their Wing Loong I & II models 'en masse' to other nations. According to experts however, Chinese drones are not as capable as the American Reaper and the Turkish TB2.<sup>95</sup> Until Türkiye entered the market, the luxury of having premium attack drones was only meant for countries with large defense budgets and foreign policy goals, that did not collide with the interests of the West. The Turkish drone industry now offers an opportunity for developing countries, with smaller defense budgets and less powerful armies, to have 'top of the bill' advanced drone technology at their disposal. This provides Ankara a valuable position in the international arms industry and could change the nature of future warfare according to military experts.<sup>96</sup>

The cultivation of Türkiye's drone industry can be placed within Ankara's longstanding broader ambition of creating an independent arms industry and achieving more autonomy.<sup>97</sup> The U.S. arms embargos, following Türkiye's intervention in Cyprus during the Cold War, as well as Türkiye's failed bid to obtain American MQ-9 Reaper attack drones and Patriot missile defense systems, showcased a problematic lacune between Ankara's goals and possibilities.<sup>98</sup> Pursuing a more assertive foreign policy based on Neo-Ottomanism, in a conflict-ridden region, becomes difficult, when one has no access to key military hardware. As long as there

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<sup>93</sup> David Hambling, 'Why The Air Force Needs A Cheaper Reaper' (June 10, 2020) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2020/06/10/why-the-air-force-needs-a-cheaper-reaper/> (November 13, 2022).

<sup>94</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, 'Techno-Geopolitics and the Turkish Way of Drone Warfare' (March 2022) 1-9, 5. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Techno-Geopolitics-and-the-Turkish-Way-of-Drone-Warfare.pdf> (January 3, 2023).

<sup>95</sup> Joanna Frew, 'New research shows rise in number of states developing armed drones' (May 17, 2018) <https://dronewars.net/2018/05/17/new-research-shows-rise-in-number-of-states-deploying-armed-drones/> (November 13, 2022).

<sup>96</sup> Jack Detsch, 'The U.S. Army Goes to School on Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Off-the-shelf air power changes the battlefield of the future'. (March 30, 2021) <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/30/army-pentagon-nagorno-karabakh-drones/> (November 11, 2022).

<sup>97</sup> Diğdem Soyaltin-Collela and Tolga Demiryol, 'Unusual middle power activism and regime survival: Turkey's drone warfare and its regime-boosting effects' 6-7.

<sup>98</sup> Emile Bouvier, 'Turkey. The Arms Industry on the Fast Track to Autonomy'.



are diverging interests and ideologies present, the dynamic between Türkiye and the West on this matter will remain problematic. In the last decade therefore, Türkiye has made considerable advancements across different sections to supply its armed forces services with domestically produced military hardware.

As an example, Türkiye decided in 2015 to build its own amphibious assault ship, the TCG Anadolu (L-400). Türkiye is a nation that touches the Aegean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea. Therefore, the possession of a maritime mobile military basis in the form of an amphibious/aircraft-carrier ship is of importance to acquire dominance in former Ottoman territories. Being a country with little experience in building amphibious assault ships and aircraft carriers, the construction of the TCG was carried out by a consortium consisting of the Turkish shipbuilding company ‘Sedef’ and the experienced Spanish state-owned shipbuilding company ‘Navantia’.<sup>99</sup>

The TCG Anadolu is equipped with weapon systems built by the Turkish arms firms Aselsan and Havelsan.<sup>100</sup> The TCG was originally designed in such a way, that it could be reconfigured to carry ‘Short Take-off Vertical Landing’ (STOVL) aircrafts. Within this context, the TCG was supposed to carry American F-35B fighter jets build by the American arms company Lockheed Martin. However, Erdoğan’s disruptive actions – specifically his purchase of Russian S-400 systems in 2017 – caused the American senate to exclude Ankara from the Joint Strike Fighter Program under the ‘Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act’ (CAATSA). Citing concerns regarding the incompatibility of Russian weapon systems with NATO’s military infrastructure, Türkiye was told that – if they would keep the S-400 system – it would never get F35 fighter jets.<sup>101</sup>

This left Ankara in a rather awkward situation of owning an aircraft carrier specially designed to accommodate the F35-B without having the actual aircraft at its disposal. To find an answer to this problem, Erdoğan turned towards his domestic drone industry, more specifically to Baykar Technologies. The TCG is now rebranded as the world’s first drone carrier vessel and carries the TB3 and the Kizilelma, which are both designed to land and take

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<sup>99</sup> University of Plymouth, ‘ Turkey signs contract with Navantia-Sedef for the construction of a light aircraft carrier’ (May 11, 2015) <http://blogs.plymouth.ac.uk/dcscs/2015/05/11/turkey-signs-contract-with-navantia-sedef-for-the-construction-of-a-light-aircraft-carrier/> (December 15, 2022).

<sup>100</sup> Hürriyet Daily News, ‘Turkey builds indigenous helicopter ship to be ‘national flagship’ in 2021.’ (January 5, 2016) <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-builds-indigenous-helicopter-ship-to-be-national-flagship-in-2021-93398> (December 13, 2022).

<sup>101</sup> Aaron Mehta, ‘Turkey officially kicked out of F-35 program, costing US half a billion dollars’ (July 17, 2019) <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2019/07/17/turkey-officially-kicked-out-of-f-35-program/> (December 13, 2022).

off in small areas like the helicopter landing dock of the TCG.<sup>102</sup> The TCG case depicts several interlocking dynamics, namely Erdoğan's relentless chase towards achieving his Neo-Ottoman ambitions, the deteriorating effect of these ambitions on Türkiye's relationship with the West and the added value of the Turkish drone industry in mitigating the negative implications of this deterioration.

With the international success of Türkiye's drone industry in mind, it would be hard for anyone to deny, that the Turkish arms industry has made major leaps in the last decade. As the TCG case has shown however, decoupling from long-standing industry-leading allies like the United-States does bring its challenges. Despite Ankara's ambitions of creating an autonomous industry, Turkish arms companies are still quite reliant on foreign technology and practically all Turkish military hardware contains foreign parts to some extent. One example can be found in Türkiye's lack of ability to produce well-functioning engines, which is a recurrent theme across all sections of its arms industry according to political researcher Emile Bouvier.<sup>103</sup>

The extent to which this poses problems for Türkiye's strategic autonomy goals becomes clear, when we look at Türkiye struggles in rolling out one of their newest addition to its armed forces, the Altay battle tank. The Altay was originally set out to go in service by 2020. The engine of the Altay would be produced by a German engine manufacturer. Due to political friction between Berlin and Ankara following the latter's armed interventions in Syria however, the German government imposed an unofficial arms embargo. As a result, Germany stopped producing engines for the Altay, which forced Ankara to postpone the production of the Altay and look for a new partner to power its highly anticipated battle tank, namely South-Korea.<sup>104</sup>

Likewise, Türkiye's domestic drones – up until now – have also been reliant on foreign engines. The TB2 for example was traditionally equipped with the 'Rotax 912' engine, produced by the Austrian commercial engine manufacturer 'Bombardier Recreational Products' (BRP). BRP stopped delivering their engines – which were built for civil purposes – to Türkiye in 2020, due to concerns over the way their motors were used. The issue came to

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<sup>102</sup> Tayfun Özberk, 'Türkiye's Drone Carrier TCG Anadolu Starts Official Sea Trials' (June 23, 2022) <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/06/turkiyes-drone-carrier-tcg-anadolu-starts-official-sea-trials/> (December 14, 2022).

<sup>103</sup> Emile Bouvier, 'Turkey. The Arms Industry on the Fast Track to Autonomy'.

<sup>104</sup> Levent Kenez, 'Turkey's national tank cannot be produced because there's no engine, according to government officials' (June 28, 2022) <https://nordicmonitor.com/2022/06/turkish-national-tank-cannot-be-produced-because-there-is-no-engine-according-to-government-officials/> (December 28, 2022).

the fore after the Armenian Ministry of Defense released photographs of downed TB2 drones containing the Rotax engine built by BRP.<sup>105</sup>

Recognizing the military liability, which comes with dependency on Western built motors, Ankara has intensified its efforts in recent years to resolve the issue. In this context, Ankara has taken a two-pronged approach. On the one hand Türkiye now seeks manufacturers, which bring a lower risk of diplomatic complications as is the case with Türkiye's move towards South-Korea for the Altay. On the other hand, Türkiye seeks to build more structural relationships based on strategic and manufactural reciprocity. An example is the agreement signed in February 2022 by Erdoğan and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky to accommodate more extensive cooperation between the arms industries of Türkiye and Ukraine regarding 'high technologies, aviation and space'. This cooperation has provided a win-win situation for both parties. Türkiye's receives Ukrainian engines and Ukraine receives Turkish drones, whilst both parties exchange their technological knowledge and expertise.<sup>106</sup> This relatively new dynamic between Kiev and Ankara – on which I will elaborate more in the next chapter – partly explains Türkiye's involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian War in which the Turkish-built TB2 has played a significant role.

It would probably take Türkiye many more years to create a truly autonomous arms industry. Ankara's efforts of building strategic autonomy, however, have created a reality in which American arms exports have dropped by 81% in the last decade. Ankara – with the help of its drone industry – has managed to become the 14<sup>th</sup> largest arms exporter in the world.<sup>107</sup> Within this context, Türkiye's drone industry can be seen as the culmination of Ankara's efforts to independently acquire technologies, that could possibly allow them to become a regional power. In the next chapter, I will analyze in what way Ankara utilizes its domestic drone industry to realize its Neo-Ottoman ambitions.

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<sup>105</sup> Overt Defense, 'Bombardier Recreational Products Suspends Aircraft Engine Export over UCAV Use Concerns' (October 28, 2020) <https://www.overtdefense.com/2020/10/28/bombardier-recreational-products-suspends-aircraft-engine-exports-over-ucav-use-concerns/> (December 29, 2022).

<sup>106</sup> Arda Mevlutoğlu, 'Turkish-Ukrainian Defense Cooperation: Drones, Engines, and More' (December 22, 2022) <https://politicstoday.org/turkish-ukrainian-defense-cooperation-drones-engines-and-more/> (December 30, 2022).

<sup>107</sup> Ibidem.

## Chapter 3. Bayraktar Diplomacy

### Syria, the birthplace of Bayraktar Diplomacy

To understand how Türkiye's drone industry aids Ankara in achieving its Neo-Ottoman ambitions, one must analyze the effect of said industry on both Türkiye's military and non-military interventions. I will start of this chapter by looking at Ankara's military interventions, whereby Ankara's interventions in Syria – especially Operation Peace Spring – will provide the premier case study. Since this was the first time Ankara successfully deployed its drones as an integral part of their overall military strategy to mitigate the interests of Ankara's regional rivals, the United-States who supported the Kurds and Russia who – in contrast to Ankara – supported the Assad-regime.<sup>108</sup>

Türkiye's first intervention in Syria, Operation Euphrates Shield (OES), was initiated on August 2016 and ended in March 2017.<sup>109</sup> The goal was to create a safe buffer zone in Northern Syria and neutralize armed militias and terrorist organizations such as the PKK, YPG and ISIS. To achieve this, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF, consisting of 4.000 troops) cooperated with 'Free Syrian Army' forces (FSA, consisting of 7.000).<sup>110</sup> The main military strategy for OES was based on traditional warfare tactics in which ground units consisting of tanks, artillery and TAF/FSA infantry troops were supplemented with air support. Within this context of OES, the TAF used its indigenous drones to acquire intelligence as part of their 'search, find and destroy' strategy.

Ankara's military strategy was sufficient enough to consider OES a – partially – successful intervention because they had accomplished to create the envisaged buffer zone in North-Syria and had managed to hurt ISIS. Nevertheless, several points of improvement could be identified in the wake of OES, according to the Turkish think tank SETA. For example, Ankara had failed to push back PKK/YPG forces to the East of the Euphrates which was an important objective.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, OES forces struggled to deal with 'improvised explosives' i.e., mines which led to Turkish soldiers losing their lives. Additionally, the TAF suffered considerable damages to their military hardware and – because their opponents relied heavily on anti-tank rockets – Turkish tanks proved extra vulnerable.

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<sup>108</sup> Francesco Siccardi, 'How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy' (September 2021), 1-40, 16,17. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Siccardi\\_-\\_Turkey\\_Syria-V3.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Siccardi_-_Turkey_Syria-V3.pdf) (January 5, 2023).

<sup>109</sup> Francesco Siccardi, 'How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy',4.

<sup>110</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, Merve Seren and Necdet Özcelik, 'Operation Euphrates Shield: Implementation and Lessons Learned' (2017), 1-54, 10,22. [https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2017/11/R97\\_Euphrates.pdf](https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2017/11/R97_Euphrates.pdf) (January 5, 2023).

<sup>111</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş et al, 'Operation Euphrates Shield' 31.

It is important to note that although the TAF were already in possession of Turkish UAV's, their drone wielding experience was limited to anti-terror and intelligence gathering activities at the time of OES. Regarding the use of drones, the SETA report subscribed to the potential of UAV's and stated that national resources should be allocated for the development of – among other things – air defense and UAV platforms.<sup>112</sup> In the aftermath of OES, Ankara would proceed to do just that, and Ankara's follow up intervention in Operation Olive Branch (OOB) would see a greater role for Turkish drones.

OOB was initiated in January 2018 and would last 3 months. The goal was to remove YPG's presence from the Afrin region in Northern-Syria, deter the cooperation between Kurdish forces and the United-States, and create a location for relocating Syrian refugees that were hosted by Türkiye.<sup>113</sup> In contrast to OES, OOB was a more 'air force' focused intervention in which the TB2 'provided critical tactical support to the Turkish Armed Forces' according to the Turkish news agency 'Sabah'.<sup>114</sup> Security analyst Metin Gürcan ascribes to this by stating that within the first 48 hours of the operation, Türkiye effectively deployed 72 combat aircrafts that struck a total of 108 targets. Within this context he postulates that the deployment of armed drones can be considered game changers in the military effectiveness of the TAF during OOB. 'Out of a total of 2.391 YPG militants eliminated by the TAF and the indigenous components of the cross-border campaign, 449 YPG militants were directly neutralized by these tactical armed drones.' The TB2 was furthermore used to perform target acquisition for other military platforms hence the drone was involved in the elimination of 1.129 targets.<sup>115</sup>

Within this context, the TB2 contributed significantly to the effectiveness of OOB without exposing the TAF's military hardware and armed personnel to significant risks. From an operational perspective OOB proved to be more successful than its predecessor intervention, in part due to the greater role of the TB2.<sup>116</sup> Although OOB was more effective on the military level, the operation did not yield the regional and (geo-)political outcome Ankara had envisaged. However, Ankara's third intervention in Syria, Operation Peace Spring (OPS), would provide the Turks exactly that.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibidem, 11,25,27,44-45.

<sup>113</sup> Francesco Siccardi, 'How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy',5.

<sup>114</sup> Sabah, 'Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 drones enable swift, precise victory against YPG/PKK in Syria's Afrin' (April 19, 2019) <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/04/19/turkeys-bayraktar-tb2-drones-enable-swift-precise-victory-against-ypgpkk-in-syrias-afrin> (January 5, 2023).

<sup>115</sup> Metin Gürcan, 'Assessing the Post-July 15 Turkish Military: A Comparative Analysis of The Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch Operations',383.

[https://tasam.org/Files/Icerik/File/yeni\\_dunya\\_ekonomi\\_ve\\_guvenlik\\_mimarisi\\_IGK2019\\_5-372-397\\_pdf\\_c12caaae-499d-4afa-9aa5-d5f99fb2c2c7.pdf](https://tasam.org/Files/Icerik/File/yeni_dunya_ekonomi_ve_guvenlik_mimarisi_IGK2019_5-372-397_pdf_c12caaae-499d-4afa-9aa5-d5f99fb2c2c7.pdf) (January 5, 2023).

<sup>116</sup> Metin Gürcan, 'Assessing the Post-July 15 Turkish Military', 389,395.

OPS was officially initiated in October 2019 and consisted of two phases. During the first phase the TAF and their proxies pushed back Kurdish forces from Türkiye's borders. The hostilities initially ended after ten days, when Türkiye managed to reach ceasefire agreements with both the United-States and Russia.<sup>117</sup> This initial de-escalation phase would abruptly come to an end in February 2020 when an airstrike – carried out by either Assad forces or their patrons in Moscow – killed 33 Turkish soldiers and wounded 30 others. This event would ultimately push Ankara towards drastically intensifying their military efforts in Syria.<sup>118</sup>

According to defense expert Bahri Mert Demirel, Ankara's novel military strategy ushered in a new era in which Turkish drones would take center stage in Türkiye's military success. Within this context the TAF 'for the first time in the world' used drones as the primary element in air strikes.<sup>119</sup> Turkish drones such as the TB2 and the Anka-S enabled the TAF to conduct lethal air strikes and lessened the need for ground attacks and manned fighter aircrafts such as the F-16. According to researcher Ali Bakir, Türkiye's drone campaign – which only lasted a few days – dealt a crippling blow to Assad's armed forces. The intervention saw the elimination of 3.000 of Assad's forces, 151 tanks, eight helicopters, three drones, three fighter jets, around 100 armored military vehicles and trucks, 86 cannons and howitzers and eight aerial defense systems, including the renowned Russian 'Pantsir' units.<sup>120</sup>

But how could Türkiye's drones be so effective in Syria? A recurring theme within this discussion is the synergy between Türkiye's attack drones and other domestically produced technologies such as the 'KORAL' long-range Electronic Warfare Systems (EWS), which is produced by the Turkish arms company Aselsan.<sup>121</sup> By providing the TAF superior tracking and jamming capabilities, 'KORAL' rendered enemy defense systems such as the aforementioned 'Pantsir' practically useless, hence providing the fertile soil for Turkish drones to carry out accurate strikes.<sup>122</sup> The somewhat baffling speed and efficacy of Türkiye's drone intervention allowed Erdoğan to end the operation within a mere week and renegotiate a

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<sup>117</sup> Francesco Siccardi, 'How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy', 5.

<sup>118</sup> Ali Bakir, 'The fight for Syria's skies: Turkey challenges Russia with new drone doctrine' (March 26, 2020) [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350236344\\_The\\_fight\\_for\\_Syria%27s\\_skies\\_Turkey\\_challenges\\_Russia\\_with\\_new\\_drone\\_doctrine](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350236344_The_fight_for_Syria%27s_skies_Turkey_challenges_Russia_with_new_drone_doctrine) (January 6, 2023).

<sup>119</sup> Faruk Zorlu, Turkey's drone use puts forward new military doctrine' (May 5, 2020) <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/science-technology/turkey-s-drone-use-puts-forward-new-military-doctrine/1755210> (January 6, 2023).

<sup>120</sup> Ali Bakir, 'The fight for Syria's skies: Turkey challenges Russia with new drone doctrine' 1.

<sup>121</sup> Sabah, 'ASELSAN radar karistirici KORAL'i TSK'ya teslim etti' (February 23, 2016) <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/02/23/aselsan-radar-karistirici-korali-tskya-teslim-etti> (January 2, 2023).

<sup>122</sup> Faruk Zorlu, Turkey's drone use puts forward new military doctrine'.

ceasefire with Moscow.<sup>123</sup> According to research analyst Francesco Siccardi, Ankara's success in Syria boosted the country's image and international role. He states that:

*The operations have secured a seat for Turkey at the negotiating table with Russia and the United-States. On these occasions, Ankara has portrayed itself as a power in the middle – the indispensable partner for both Moscow and Washington to reach effective agreements in the region.*<sup>124</sup>

Türkiye's successful intervention in Syria – in which Turkish drone have played a paramount role – has allowed the Turks to suppress both Kurdish advancements and the influx of Syrian refugees. With less risk of casualties, Türkiye's drone intervention allowed Ankara to present itself as a military power capable of rivaling major powerbrokers, such as Russia and the United-States. Considering the outcome of Ankara's interventions in Syria and the crucial role Turkish drones would eventually play in achieving military success, one could ask the question, what more could Erdoğan have wanted from his 'flying Neo-Ottoman diplomats'?

### **Culmination of Bayraktar Diplomacy through direct military interventions**

It is likely that Türkiye's successful drone intervention in Syria made Ankara realize that they were 'on to something' because Operation Peace Spring would set the military precedent for Ankara's further interventions and Neo-Ottoman ambitions. After OPS, the next armed conflict in which Turkish drones took center stage, was the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an ongoing territorial border dispute between two former Soviet states Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute also has an international element to it because both countries are supported by regional players. While Ankara has supported the Azerbaijani government, Armenia was aided by the Russians.<sup>125</sup> On the surface Ankara's support for Azerbaijan can be explained by the country's problematic relationship – to say the least – with Armenia and historically friendly relationship with Azerbaijan. The well-known expression within Turkish and Azerbaijani society 'One nation, two states' is a clear depiction of the cordiality between Ankara and Baku.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Francesco Siccardi, 'How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy', 6.

<sup>124</sup> Ibidem, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Cory Welt, Andrew S. Bowen, 'Azerbaijan and Armenia: The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict', 1-23,2,5. (January 7, 2021) <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R46651.pdf> (December 25, 2023).

<sup>126</sup> T.C. Bursa Valiliği, 'IKI DEVLET BIR MILLET' <http://www.bursa.gov.tr/iki-devlet-bir-millet> (January 2, 2023).

To come to a more meaningful explanation of Ankara's intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh however, one must look at Türkiye's Neo-Ottoman centered foreign policy. Within the framework of Neo-Ottomanism, Türkiye has heightened its – pre-existing – interests in Central-Asia. Ankara's historical interest in Central-Asia stems from the linguistic and cultural ties it holds with other so called 'Turkic' nations. Within this context the pan-Turkic ideology – which ought to unite all Turkic peoples – has influenced the rulers of both the Ottoman-Empire and the Turkish Republic. In recent years, Ankara has rebranded Pan-Turkism to challenge the influence of both Russia and China in the region. By putting a greater emphasis on Islam and anti-Western sentiments, Erdoğan made 'Pan-Turkism' more congruent with the Neo-Ottoman ideology.<sup>127</sup> Within the expansionist framework of Neo-Ottomanism, Türkiye has sought to broaden and deepen its political, diplomatic, and economic ties with Turkic nations such as Azerbaijan.

By extension, the relationship with Azerbaijan also provides an important strategic dimension because Baku plays a significant role in Türkiye's energy security. Azerbaijan is Türkiye's main supplier of gas, and the country could furthermore provide a possible gateway– via the Caspian Sea – to Turkmenistan, a country with tremendous gas reserves.<sup>128</sup> Now that we have established how Ankara's motivation to be involved in Nagorno-Karabakh is related to its Neo-Ottoman ambitions and both soft and hard power considerations, we can analyze how Ankara has used its drones to strengthen its Neo-Ottoman posture in Central Asia.

The Second Nagorno Karabakh War was won by Azerbaijan and to explain their military success, many experts point to the asymmetric balance of power between the Armenian army and Azerbaijan's. Within this framework, the gas-rich and wealthier Azerbaijan has been able to build a stronger military than Armenia in recent decades.<sup>129</sup> More specific explanations for Azerbaijan's military success point to the way Baku has deployed its extensive drone arsenal. These drones were provided by both Türkiye and Israel. However, it is important to note that the manner in which both countries have offered their drones to Azerbaijan is very different. Israel provided its drones in a more standard transactional manner while Türkiye did the exact opposite.

Within the framework of expanding the Neo-Ottoman power base and creating

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<sup>127</sup> Paul Globe, 'Neo-Ottomanism Edging Out Pan-Turkism in Central Asia' (March 5, 2020) <https://jamestown.org/program/neo-ottomanism-edging-out-pan-turkism-in-central-asia/> (January 4, 2023).

<sup>128</sup> Genevieve Donnellon-May, 'Turkey's Growing Influence in Central Asia' (October 13, 2022) <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/turkeys-growing-influence-in-central-asia/> (October 22, 2022).

<sup>129</sup> Uzi Rubin, 'The Second Nagorno-Karabakh-War: A Milestone in Military Affairs', BESA Center (December 16, 2020) 1-17,5. <https://besacenter.org/nagorno-karabakh-war-milestone/> (January 6, 2023).



structural alliances, Ankara stands to gain from getting its Turkish drones to perform as well as possible. Within this context, Türkiye has made available to Baku not only its drones but also the drone warfare strategies that make them so effective. Parenthetically, in the case of Azerbaijan, this intensive cooperation is part of a longer development in which Ankara – in the last two decades or so – has helped Azerbaijan in their "army building" process by sharing their military know. Within the more specific framework of Türkiye's way of conducting drone warfare however, Ankara has also provided specialized military personnel and military hardware that work synergistically with drones according to researchers Hülya Kınık and Sinem.<sup>130</sup>

Using Türkiye's drone warfare doctrine, the Azerbaijani military managed to defuse a substantial amount of the Armenian military hardware. Anti-aircraft systems designed to fend off air strikes, proved hopeless against the "KORAL" system which allowed drones such as the TB2 free-range on multiple occasions. This in turn enabled the destruction of many land-based equipment on the Armenian side, which ensured that the Azerbaijani army had an advantage on the ground as well.<sup>131</sup> How effective this strategy has proven to be, becomes evident when we look at the various estimates that have been made regarding the damage done to the Armenian army. Various sources mention that the Armenian army lost about 40% of its military hardware.<sup>132</sup> According to military analyst Stijn Mitzer, the TB2 has – among other things – neutralized 88 Tanks, 33 armored vehicles, 143 towed artillery units, 61 rocket launchers, 21 surface-to-air missile systems and 7 radar systems, a remarkable military feat considering the war only lasted 44 days.<sup>133</sup>

The Nagorno-Karabakh case shows us how Türkiye with the help of its drone industry – and concomitant drone warfare strategy – can export military success to the regimes it favors. By delivering a substantial contribution to Baku's military success, Ankara has effectively shifted the balance of power in the Caucasus and send a message to the rest of Central-Asia that its Neo-Ottoman narrative is backed by realist hard power.

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<sup>130</sup> Hülya, Kınık, and Sinem Çelik. 'The Role of Turkish Drones in Azerbaijan's Increasing Military Effectiveness: An Assessment of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.' *Insight Turkey* 23, no. 4 (2021): 169-191, 182,185.  
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A688054777/AONE?u=anon~5b938b7a&sid=googleScholar&xid=52fe3fc3> (January 7, 2023).

<sup>131</sup> Uzi Rubin, 'The Second Nagorno-Karabakh-War: A Milestone in Military Affairs', 11,13.

<sup>132</sup> Hülya Kınık and Sinem Çelik. 'The Role of Turkish Drones in Azerbaijan's Increasing Military Effectiveness: An Assessment of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War', 182.

<sup>133</sup> Oryx, 'A Monument Of Victory: The Bayraktar TB2 Kill List' (February 23, 2022)  
<https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/12/a-monument-of-victory-bayraktar-tb2.html> (January 3, 2023).

Within the framework of Neo-Ottomanism, Ankara's goal is also to gain a dominant position in the Mediterranean. Ankara has reinvigorated the so called 'Blue Homeland' doctrine in recent years, which seeks to increase Turkish influence in the Mediterranean, thereby acquiring a military advantage and access to fossil fuel.<sup>134</sup> Türkiye's Aegean coast and military presence on the island of Cyprus already provides Ankara a certain amount of staying power in the region. From a maritime perspective however, Ankara's grip on the area is weakened by the many Greek islands near Türkiye's shore. Although small, these islands provide Athens legal authority over large areas of the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>135</sup> The strategic dilemma described above, coupled with Ankara's economic interests in Libya – stemming from existing investments and the country's oil reserves – provide the main reasonings behind Erdoğan's intensified involvement in the 'Second Libyan Civil War' in recent years.<sup>136</sup>

After Libya's former dictator Muammar Gaddafi got executed during the Arab Spring in 2011, the country got divided in two camps, namely, the internationally recognized government of Libya, the 'Government of National Accord' (GNA), and its main disputant, the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by general Haftar. To capitalize on the power vacuum that ensued after Gadhafi's death, several regional powers became involved in the conflict. Ankara aligned itself with the GNA, while its regional rivals the United Arab Emirates and Russia, supported the LNA.<sup>137</sup>

In the early stages of the war, LNA-forces led by general Haftar made remarkable progress by seizing key military points and annexing large swaths of territory.<sup>138</sup> With the extensive support provided by the modern military hardware of its UAE allies, it seemed like the LNA was gaining momentum in achieving political and military dominance in Libya. From January 2020 onwards however, the tide had started to turn according to Middle East Institute (MEI) scholars Jason Pack and Wolfgang Pustzai.<sup>139</sup> The GNA had signed a (controversial) maritime deal that enabled Ankara to co-claim the waters along the Libyan coast in return for extensive military support. From Erdoğan's perspective, connecting Libya's coast with

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<sup>134</sup> Kareem Fahim, 'Amid Mediterranean tensions, retired Turkish admiral grabs the spotlight touting supremacy at sea' (September 27, 2020) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-greece-blue-homeland/2020/09/26/15cf7afe-fc3b-11ea-830c-a160b331ca62\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-greece-blue-homeland/2020/09/26/15cf7afe-fc3b-11ea-830c-a160b331ca62_story.html) (October 20, 2022).

<sup>135</sup> International Institute for Law of the Sea Studies, 'Maritime boundaries between Greece and Cyprus' (May 29, 2021) <http://iilss.net/maritime-boundaries-between-greece-and-cyprus/> (January 4, 2023).

<sup>136</sup> Jason Pack, 'Turkey doubles down on Libya' (December 10, 2019) <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-doubles-down-libya> (November 22, 2022).

<sup>137</sup> Kali Robinson, 'Who's Who in Libya's War?' (June 18, 2020) <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whos-who-libyas-war> (January 4, 2023).

<sup>138</sup> Jason Pack, 'Turkey doubles down on Libya'.

<sup>139</sup> Jason Pack & Wolfgang Pustzai, 'Turning the Tide: How Turkey Won the War for Tripoli' (November 10, 2020) <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turning-tide-how-turkey-won-war-tripoli#pt1> (November 22, 2022).

Türkiye's South-Western coast, would provide a maritime corridor that would support his ambitions of expanding his influence in the region and extracting gas from the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>140</sup>

According to the MEI paper 'the determinative factors that swayed the course of the War for Tripoli were novel military, technological and diplomatic phenomena'. Within this context it is postulated that the definitive engagements of the war were fought aerially and were masterminded and executed by foreign technologies. Türkiye's aerial support was 'different' from aerial assistance offered by patrons to their proxies in other civil wars and decisive for the GNA coalition's fighting fortunes'.<sup>141</sup>

After Ankara decided to drastically intensify its support for the GNA-forces, the Libyan battleground was flooded with Turkish military-drones that were less susceptible to jamming. The bulk of these Turkish drones consisted of Bayraktar TB2 drones which were supplemented with a few TAI Anka-S drones. With a payload of 55kg the TB2 – that is operated from a ground control station with a range of 150km – served as an ad hoc reconnaissance and target-eliminating vehicle. Whereas the Anka-S drone – which delivers a heavier payload (200kg) and has a longer range provided by satellite connection (SATCOM) – was mainly used to target LNA logistics convoys. Operated by Turkish specialists, these drones formed an operational efficiency that was tough to beat for the LNA.<sup>142</sup>

It is important to mention that the success of Turkish drones would not have been possible without the presence of a few important enabling factors. The first one being the aforementioned synergy between Turkish drones and the 'KORAL' system which similarly to 'Operation Peace Spring', provided the fertile soil for Turkish drones to carry out accurate strikes. Furthermore, it is stated that the military strategy of Turkish armed personnel and their operational proficiency played a significant role in Türkiye's success. Military analyst Can Kasapoğlu ascribes to this point by stating that 'For some time, the Turkish army has been developing a robotic-warfare capacity with innovative concepts of operations (CONOPS) and smart weaponry'.<sup>143</sup> Within this context, Turkish defense planners do not see drones as mere 'targeted killing' assets, but as a quintessential component for the success of their overall battle network. Türkiye's way of drone warfare is a key driver of Ankara's military progress.<sup>144</sup> According to Kasapoğlu the Turkish way of drone warfare is marked by three features, namely,

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<sup>140</sup> Jason Pack, 'Turkey doubles down on Libya'.

<sup>141</sup> Jason Pack & Wolfgang Puzstai, 'Turning the Tide: How Turkey Won the War for Tripoli'.

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>143</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, 'Techno-Geopolitics and the Turkish Way of Drone Warfare' 2.

<sup>144</sup> Ibidem. 2-3.

gaining an edge on information superiority through unmanned systems, suppressing enemy air defenses by unmanned systems and lastly, conducting systematic drone strikes to destroy a broad array of land-warfare targets.<sup>145</sup>

The aforementioned points are congruent with one of the conceptions presented in the historiography of this thesis which states that Turkish drones, such as the TB2, are effective but should not be seen as a miracle weapon capable of dominating any battlefield.<sup>146</sup> However, when deployed with correct intent and under the right circumstances – which the ‘Turkish way of drone warfare’ seems to be able to create – Turkish drones are capable of pushing conflicts towards favorable outcomes. This allows Ankara to conduct military interventions that are more independent and precise, but at the same less casualty prone and expensive.<sup>147</sup> Which is a positive development considering Ankara’s Neo-Ottoman ambitions.

The Libyan case demonstrates how Türkiye’s drone industry has allowed Ankara to further its interests in two former regions within the sphere of influence of the Ottoman Empire, namely, the Mediterranean and North-Africa. Türkiye’s way of drone warfare has enabled Ankara to defeat regional competitors such as the UAE and Russia on one hand, while acquiring maritime rights of Libyan waters on the other. With a favorable ‘risk to reward’ ratio, Türkiye’s drone intervention in Libya allowed Ankara to pursue its Neo-Ottoman ambitions in the Mediterranean.

### **Bayraktar Diplomacy as a geopolitical influencer and alliance builder**

Ankara’s involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian War can be explained by a threefold motivation, namely, making a political gesture towards NATO, containing its regional rival Putin and reinforcing its structural cooperation with Kiev thereby solidifying the continuity of its domestic drone industry. Ankara’s efforts towards reviving the Ottoman Empire have reinvigorated the historic and complex rivalry between Türkiye and Russia. As mentioned in chapter 1, Erdoğan and Putin are at opposing ends in several wars spanning from the Levant to the Caucasus – and now – the Crimea. If Putin succeeds in annexing the Crimea, it will provide the Kremlin a stronger hold on the – supposedly gas rich – Black Sea.<sup>148</sup> Sharing maritime borders with both warring parties, makes the Russo-Ukrainian War – from the Turkish perspective – a conflict within the borders of Ankara’s sphere of influence. If Putin succeeds

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<sup>145</sup> Ibidem, 3-4.

<sup>146</sup> Aaron Stein, ‘The TB2: The Value of a cheap and ‘good enough’ drone’.

<sup>147</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, ‘Techno-Geopolitics and the Turkish Way of Drone Warfare’ 2.

<sup>148</sup> Kristian Átland (2021) Redrawing borders, reshaping orders: Russia’s quest for dominance in the Black Sea region, *European Security*, 30:2, 305-324, 316-318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2021.1872546>

in Ukraine, it could have a ripple effect on Türkiye's regional position which is something that Ankara would certainly like to prevent.

Furthermore, this thesis presents a narrative in which Türkiye's goal of pursuing its Neo-Ottoman foreign policy has complicated its relationship with the West. Ankara might be a 'disruptive ally', but this does not mean that Türkiye seeks to abandon the Western fold. Western nations have issued full blown support to President Zelensky by providing military support, applying political and economic pressure on Russia. Türkiye's position is a bit more ambiguous because Ankara has deep economic ties with Russia. Erdoğan abstained from boycotting Russia and presented itself as a sort of mediator between Putin, Ukraine, and the West.<sup>149</sup> However, by supporting Ukraine militarily (with drones) Ankara could still assist Ukrainian defense efforts and make a political gesture towards NATO and the West.

But what role did Turkish drones play in the conflict up until now, and how/why did these drones end up in Ukraine in the first place? Ukraine received its first batch of TB2's in 2019, well before the drone had acquired international acclaim for its contribution in the Russo-Ukrainian War.<sup>150</sup> At the basis of this transaction lies Türkiye's aforementioned goal of creating structural cooperation agreements, in this case with Ukraine by leveraging its drone industry. The intensive military cooperation between Ankara and Kiev resulted in the creation of several 'Joined Ventures' such as the 'Black Sea Shield' company, consisting of Baykar Technology and the Ukrainian state-owned arms trading company 'Ukrspesexport'. According to researcher Arda Mevlütoğlu, the core focus of this JV was to 'develop, manufacture and trade turbine engines for drones, missiles and electronic warfare systems, and guided weapons'.<sup>151</sup>

As part of the inheritance of the Soviet-Union, Ukraine owns two major engine and turbine production enterprises namely, Ivchenko-Progress and Motor Sich. This makes Ukraine a valuable partner for Türkiye considering the many difficulties Ankara has had throughout the years in propelling their domestically produced military vehicles. Ukraine has benefitted from the cooperation with Türkiye by acquiring access to top of the bill drones (including the possibility to produce these drones on their own soil). Although now less effective, the presence

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<sup>149</sup> Tacan Ildem, 'A balancing act: Turkey's misunderstood position on Ukraine' (November 9, 2022) <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/a-balancing-act-turkeys-misunderstood-position-on-ukraine/> (December 27, 2022).

<sup>150</sup> Defense Express, 'Ukrainian Navy has Received First Unit of Turkish-Produced Bayraktar TB2 UCAV System' (July 18, 2021) [https://en.defence-ua.com/news/ukrainian\\_navy\\_has\\_received\\_first\\_unit\\_of\\_turkish\\_produced\\_bayraktar\\_tb2\\_ucav\\_system-1942.html](https://en.defence-ua.com/news/ukrainian_navy_has_received_first_unit_of_turkish_produced_bayraktar_tb2_ucav_system-1942.html) (January 3, 2023).

<sup>151</sup> Arda Mevlutoğlu, 'Turkish-Ukrainian Defense Cooperation: Drones, Engines, and More'.

of Turkish drones was a real military asset during the early stages of Ukraine's resistance.<sup>152</sup> With the help of Turkish drones, Ukrainian defense forces were able to take out an array of Russian military hardware ranging from tanks to helicopters, artillery pieces, naval crafts etc. The drones furthermore aided Ukraine in cutting of – the already problematic – supply chain of the Russians.<sup>153</sup> Hence, the cooperation between Türkiye and Ukraine has proved to be a fruitful one for both sides.

The dynamic described above is precisely what Ankara seeks to achieve with its drone industry, namely, win-win situations that lead to structural relationships based on reciprocity and interdependence. Military analyst Can Kasapoğlu states that Türkiye strives to build techno-geopolitical ecosystems. This means that Türkiye views its drone industry not only as a mere revenue generator, but more so as a vector to insert Turkish military power into conflicts they have interests in and build strategic bonds.<sup>154</sup> The Russo-Ukrainian case shows how Türkiye's drone industry aids Ankara in presenting itself as a geopolitical influencer, defending its regional interests (by containing Putin in the Black Sea), and building a structural alliance with Ukraine to solidify the continuation of its arms industry.

Within the context of building structural alliances and creating so called techno geopolitical ecosystems and expanding Erdoğan's Neo-Ottoman influence sphere, Ankara has also heightened its interactions with the African continent. Although several initiatives were already put in place in the past to open up Turkish foreign policy towards Africa, the last few years were marked by a special emphasis on what Ankara calls 'peace and security cooperation'.<sup>155</sup> This led to Türkiye enlarging its security footprint in Africa in recent years, which – among other things – resulted in Defense Industry Cooperation (SSI) agreements with more than 25 African countries.<sup>156</sup> Türkiye's overarching goal is to provide a stable sales market for its domestic arms industry and increase Ankara's political influence in the region.

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<sup>152</sup> Vikram Mittal, 'The Ukrainian Military Is Changing Its Tactics With Bayraktar TB2 Drones' (June 23, 2022) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/vikrammittal/2022/06/23/ukrainian-military-is-changing-its-tactics-with-the-bayraktar-tb2-drones/?sh=7e2d3dd31ec0> (January 1, 2023).

<sup>153</sup> Yagil Henkin, "The 'Big Three' Revisited: Initial Lessons from 200 Days of War in Ukraine." Expeditions with MCUP 2022 (2022): 1-36, 13-14, 18-19 <https://doi.org/10.36304/ExpwMCUP.2022.13> (January 3, 2023).

<sup>154</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, 'Techno-Geopolitics and the Turkish Way of Drone Warfare' (March 2022) 1-9, 6. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Techno-Geopolitics-and-the-Turkish-Way-of-Drone-Warfare.pdf> (January 3, 2023).

<sup>155</sup> Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Turkey and The African Union' <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-and-the-african-union.en.mfa> (October 20, 2022).

<sup>156</sup> Nebahat Tanriverdi Yaşar, 'Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU', 1-7, 4. (June 30, 2022) <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/unpacking-turkeys-security-footprint-in-africa> (October 21, 2022).

Within this context, Türkiye has not shied away from meddling in conflicts such as the Tigray War in Ethiopia.<sup>157</sup> In the last two years, the peoples of Africa's second most-populated country Ethiopia, have been embroiled in a violent civil war stemming from the conflict between president Abiy's National Defence Force (ENDF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).<sup>158</sup> The Tigray War – which already took the lives of approximately half a million people – took a new turn when president Abiy signed a security pact with Erdoğan. President Abiy benefitted from this pact by acquiring Turkish attack drones in the form of the TB2, which provided the ENDF asymmetrical aerial superiority against TPLF forces who – already – lacked the ability to counter and defend against aerial attacks.<sup>159</sup>

President Erdoğan also benefitted from the pact in manyfold ways. The most obvious one being, the positive effect on Türkiye's economy by broadening and deepening the sales market of the Turkish arms industry. More importantly within the context of Neo-Ottomanism however, Erdoğan could present Türkiye as a viable alternative to Africa's more – for lack of better terms – traditional 'patrons' such as France. From the Turkish perspective, the military pact between President Erdoğan and President Abiy could send the message to African leaders that, befriending Ankara opens the possibility for African nations to find non-Western solutions for their political and/or military needs.<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, Türkiye's drone industry aids Ankara in another way, namely, Erdoğan uses Turkish drones such as the TB2 (and other military hardware) as leverage to eradicate 'Gülenist' elements from Africa. It is stated that Erdoğan's political opponent Fetullah Gulen has established a network of schools across the world to spread his ideology. As part of the cooperation between Ankara and Addis Ababa, Erdoğan has allegedly requested the transfer of Gülenist schools to the Turkish state led Maarif Foundation. According to journalist Levent Kenez, Erdoğan has leveraged its drones in a similar way to persuade other African nations such as Chad, Burkina Faso, and Niger.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Dan Sabbagh, 'Ethiopia-Turkey pact fuels speculation about drone use in Tigray war' (November 4, 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/04/ethiopia-turkey-pact-fuels-speculation-about-drone-use-in-tigray-war> (October 22, 2022).

<sup>158</sup> Rachel Chason, 'Fighting erupts near Tigray border, dashing hopes of peace in Ethiopia' (August 24, 2022) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/24/ethiopia-fighting-tplf-war-tigray/> (December 23, 2022).

<sup>159</sup> Joshua Dunne, 'Turkish drones are destroying Ethiopia's promise of peace' (October 25, 2022) <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/turkish-drones-are-destroying-ethiopias-promise-of-peace/> (December 24, 2022).

<sup>160</sup> Nebahat Tanriverdi Yaşar, 'Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU', 6.

<sup>161</sup> Levent Kenez, 'Erdoğan uses 'drone diplomacy' to silence opponents abroad' (September 28, 2022) <https://nordicmonitor.com/2022/09/Erdoğan-uses-drone-diplomacy-to-silence-opponents-abroad/> (December 22, 2022).

The African case – and more particularly, the Ethiopian case – shows us how Türkiye’s drone industry provides Ankara economic gains and more importantly (geo-)political influence on the African continent. With Turkish drones at the forefront, it can be said that Ankara’s flying diplomats are solidifying Türkiye’s Neo-Ottoman posture as a regional power on the African continent.

Baykar recently sold 20 drones to the United Arab Emirates, which at first glance could be an odd move by a company that has close ties to the Turkish government. After all, Türkiye and the UAE – together with its close ally Saudi-Arabia – can be seen as competitors in the struggle for political dominance and Sunni primacy in the Islamic world. The two countries have been embroiled in several conflicts in recent decades.<sup>162</sup> One example can be found in the aforementioned Libyan conflict where Türkiye and the UAE have supported opposing parties in a bloody proxy war. However, the two countries have recently sought rapprochement and Türkiye has leveraged its drone industry to make a political gesture. What could have spurred the Turks, to allow the UAE to cut the queue, by promptly delivering them 20 units of the highly sought after Baykar drones?

According to Levent Kenez, the motivation behind this move can be found in Erdoğan’s battle against his former companion and current political dissident, Sedat Peker, who has been residing in Dubai since May 2021. Enjoying the political protection of the UAE, Peker started a smear campaign by publishing information about the corruption of the Turkish government, its support for jihadists in Syria, and involvement with drug gangs. Because information like this could ruin Erdoğan’s upcoming electoral chances, Kenez argues that the Turkish government directed the UAE to silence Peker in exchange for Turkish drones. The country that formerly used Peker to damage Türkiye’s international status, now muted Peker to the extent that one tweet could land him a one-way ticket out of Dubai.<sup>163</sup> The Peker case shows how valuable of a foreign policy asset Turkish drones are. It shows how Erdoğan – without the use of direct (military) violence – leverages its drones to contain political opponents who negatively influence Ankara’s international status, while building new partnerships with nation-states that were formerly opposing Türkiye.

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<sup>162</sup> Michael B. Bishku, ‘Turkey and the United Arab Emirates: From Cooperation to Rivalry’ *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* (February 24, 2022) vol. 9, issue 2, 184-199

<https://doi.org/10.1177/23477989221078492>

<sup>163</sup> Levent Kenez, ‘Erdoğan uses ‘drone diplomacy’ to silence opponents abroad’.



## Possible implications of ‘Bayraktar Diplomacy’ on Ankara’s international standing

*‘... drones allow presidents to punt on questions of war and peace by choosing an option that appears to offer a middle course, but actually has a variety of long-term consequences...’.*<sup>164</sup>

So far, we have determined, that Ankara’s drone industry has provided the country a substantial amount of direct, non-direct, military and non-military interventionist capabilities. From a (neo-)realist perspective this can hardly be seen as nothing but a success, especially considering Ankara’s Neo-Ottomanist goal of playing a greater regional (geo-)political role. Within this context it is plausible that Ankara’s staunchest current allies, for example, Azerbaijan, Qatar, and Pakistan are welcoming towards Ankara’s role as a drone power. But what are the implications of ‘Bayraktar Diplomacy’ on Türkiye’s international standing in the rest of the international community?

The quote mentioned above comes from a policy analysis written by former U.S. Army colonel Ann Wright in which she critiques the drone policies of the U.S. government. On the surface, drones offer a low risk, high effectiveness, alternative to having boots on the ground, which ultimately lowers the threshold to intervene. The extensive use of drone interventions however, also comes with its downsides. Wright states that drones can damage its wielder’s credibility and trustworthiness, which in turn has seriously weakened U.S. influence in the Middle East and South Asia.<sup>165</sup> It is plausible that Türkiye’s drone interventionism could have similar effects in regions where they wish to have a dominant presence. How for example, could Ankara – within the framework of Neo-Ottomanism – present its Islamism, while their drones bomb Muslim countries such as Syria, Iraq and Libya? It is likely that this could have a long-term negative impact regarding the credibility of Ankara’s Neo-Ottoman narrative.

Diplomatic correspondent Ken Moriyasu states that Türkiye’s ‘newfound confidence’ stems from its newly acquired position as an international arms dealer and that Ankara’s ‘defense diplomacy’ has elevated the country’s international status.<sup>166</sup> Within this context Türkiye’s drone industry serves as the flagship sector but the industry’s effect on Türkiye’s international status is not all positive. Ankara’s drones and anarchistic sales policy has already

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<sup>164</sup> Ann Wright, ‘Killer Drones and the Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy’ (June 2017) <https://afsa.org/killer-drones-and-militarization-us-foreign-policy> (November 11, 2022).

<sup>165</sup> Ann Wright, ‘Killer Drones and the Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy’.

<sup>166</sup> Ken Moriyasu, ‘Turkey learns that hard power is a global common currency: Defense diplomacy elevates Ankara’s status on the international stage’ (December 22, 2022) <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/ac-turkey-defense-journal/turkey-learns-that-hard-power-is-a-global-common-currency-defense-diplomacy-elevates-ankaras-status-on-the-international-stage/> (January 10, 2023).

generated international critique and diplomatic issues. One example can be derived from Ankara's drone sales to the two rivaling North-African countries Morocco and Algeria.

In 2021 'The Polisario Front' – an opposition organization backed by Algeria in the disputed Western Sahara territory – accused the Moroccan air force of conducting TB2 drone strikes after a decades-long truce. In reaction, Algeria condemned the 'targeted executions committed using advanced weapons of war against innocent civilians'. The event led to friction between Ankara and Algiers.<sup>167</sup> This incident was extra problematic for Ankara because the Turkish government has longstanding friendly relations with the two nations that were formerly within the Ottoman sphere of influence. To appease Algiers, Türkiye's ambassador in Algeria, Mahinur Özdemir, offered Algeria the opportunity to purchase Turkish drones. According to Middle East Eye, the Algerians decided, 'after months-long negotiations and inspections', to purchase 10 units of the Anka-S drone, produced by Turkish Aerospace Inc.<sup>168</sup>

On the one hand the Morocco-Algeria case holds a certain amount of paradoxicality, because Türkiye's drone sales to Morocco created friction with Algeria and Ankara resolved this by also selling drones to Algeria. On the other hand it shows how much of a powerful asset Türkiye's drones can be. However, the case also shows the difficulties that come with Türkiye's new position as a leading drone developer and how its sales can have negative ramifications for their existing relationships.

There is great concern from the international community that the Turkish 'no questions asked' policy can put drones in the hands of parties that have little regard for human rights violations. A recent example, that substantiates these concerns can be derived from the Tigray War. According to U.N. investigations, both the Ethiopian government (ENDF) and its opponent (TPLF) have committed severe crimes against humanities. Within this context, U.N. lawyer Steven Ratner states, that the photographic evidence has showed that Turkish drones were used to carry out the strikes of the Ethiopian government.<sup>169</sup> Türkiye's contribution to the Tigray War caused much international critique and was widely reported in the media.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Umar Farooq, 'The Drone Problem': How the U.S. Has Struggled to Curb Turkey, a Key Exporter of Armed Drones'.

<sup>168</sup> Middle East Eye, 'Algeria nears deal with Turkey to buy Anka drones' (October 19, 2022) <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/algeria-turkey-anka-drones-nears-deal> (November 12, 2022).

<sup>169</sup> United Nations Addresses Ethiopia Tigray Drone Strikes, YouTube (October 28, 2022) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avYB18V1qYE> (January 9, 2023)

<sup>170</sup> Dan Sabbagh, 'Ethiopia-Turkey pact fuels speculation about drone use in Tigray war'.

Ankara's drone support to president Abiy also evoked feelings of retaliation and unrest within Ethiopian society. This ultimately forced the Turkish embassy in Ethiopia to move to Kenia.<sup>171</sup>

The TB2's potential role as a facilitator for – or exacerbator of – human rights violations are linked to other conflicts as well, like the Libyan Civil War. Before the 'en masse' introduction of Turkish drones, the conflict was primarily a 'low intensity, low-technology conflict' according to journalist Umar Farooq. However, from the moment Ankara introduced drones such as the TB2 to support the GNA against Haftar's LNA forces – who in turn had Chinese Wing Loong drones – the conflict evolved into a high-tech bloody war which led to substantial increases in civilian casualties.<sup>172</sup>

Ankara's contribution to the worldwide death of civilians and crimes against humanity is especially problematic because the country strives to implement a quote on quote 'Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy'. Within this context Türkiye wants to be a contributor to 'peace, prosperity, and stability around the world'.<sup>173</sup> This seems like a goal, that is hard to reconcile with the Ankara's contribution to exporting drone warfare across the globe.

Following Türkiye's support to Azerbaijan, just over a year ago, top U.S. Senator Bob Menendez stated that, 'Turkey's drone sales are dangerous, destabilizing and a threat to peace and human rights'. He called for a thorough investigation regarding the possible use of American parts in Turkish made drones.<sup>174</sup> One could say that the American reaction to Türkiye's drone policy is hypocritical. On the one hand, because The Pentagon – quite literally – invented the concept of drone warfare and has killed thousands of people (including civilians) with drone strikes throughout the years.<sup>175</sup> On the other hand, because the same senators that critique Ankara for its drone policies, are particularly quiet when it comes to Israel's role in drone proliferation according to drone experts Stijn Mitzer and Joost Oliemans, Tel Aviv has

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<sup>171</sup> Fehim Taştekin, 'Ripple effects from drone sales force Turkey to move Ethiopian embassy' (January 21, 2022) <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/01/ripple-effects-drone-sales-force-turkey-move-ethiopian-embassy> (January 10, 2023).

<sup>172</sup> Umar Farooq, 'The Drone Problem': How the U.S. Has Struggled to Curb Turkey, a Key Exporter of Armed Drones' (July 12, 2022) <https://www.propublica.org/article/bayraktar-tb2-drone-turkey-exports> (November 10, 2022).

<sup>173</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Türkiye's Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy: A Synopsis' <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa> (January 10, 2023).

<sup>174</sup> Middle East Eye, 'Top US senator introduced amendment to track US drone parts to Turkey' (November 5, 2021) <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/top-us-senator-introduces-legislation-track-us-drone-parts-turkey> (January 9, 2023).

<sup>175</sup> The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 'Drone Warfare' <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/projects/drone-war> (January 7, 2023).

supplied drones to Ethiopia and Azerbaijan, which technically should make them as guilty as Türkiye, when it comes to worsening armed conflicts.<sup>176</sup>

Double standard or not, Senator Menendez's statement reflects Washington's position on Türkiye's drone policy. The U.S. policy is not unique, as other parties in the West also follow a similar stance. Canada for example has also decried Ankara's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh war and revoked standing arms export licenses to the country.<sup>177</sup> As mentioned earlier, Germany already imposed an unofficial arms embargo on Türkiye following their intervention in Syria, and the Austrian company BRP which manufactures motors, boycotted Türkiye for supplying drones to Azerbaijan after the company had received national political pressure. It can be concluded that Türkiye's militaristic foreign policy – in which its drone industry is central – will in the longer term put ever more pressure on the already difficult relationship between Ankara and the West.

Considering Türkiye's current Neo-Ottoman and anti-Western foreign policy stance, previous examples might not directly alarm Ankara, but Bayraktar Diplomacy does not only have the potential to damage Türkiye's relationship with Western nations. The Kremlin for example had already voiced its dissatisfaction about the presence of Turkish drones in Ukraine and one could imagine that Putin was not very amused to hear the 'Bayraktar song'.<sup>178</sup> Ankara's Bayraktar Diplomacy could therefore further complicate its – somewhat bi-polar – relationship with Russia that is marked by both economic cooperation and military conflict.<sup>179</sup>

Although speculative in nature, Ankara's Bayraktar Diplomacy could also cause future problems for its relationship with another major power China. Ankara and Beijing already hold different positions in many regional conflicts and Turkish drones and Chinese drones have crossed paths in several conflicts like the Libyan war.<sup>180</sup> One could also imagine a scenario in which Erdoğan's possible drone proliferating policies in the predominantly Islamic Central-Asian nations could aggravate Beijing, who views Islamic fanaticism near its border and

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<sup>176</sup> Stijn Mitzer and Joost Oliemans, 'Double Standards: Who in Washington Is Targeting Turkey's Drone Programme? And Why?' (February 1, 2022) <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/american-duplicity-who-in-washington-is.html> (January 8, 2023).

<sup>177</sup> Levon Sevunts, 'Canada cancels permits for high-tech arms exports to Turkey' (April 12, 2021) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/arms-sales-turkey-canada-1.5984453> (January 10, 2023).

<sup>178</sup> Reuters, 'Kremlin says Turkish drones risk establishing situation in east Ukraine' (October 27, 2021) [https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/kremlin-says-turkish-drones-risk-destabilising-situation-east-ukraine-2021-10-27/?utm\\_source](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/kremlin-says-turkish-drones-risk-destabilising-situation-east-ukraine-2021-10-27/?utm_source) (January 8, 2023).

<sup>179</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Turkey and Russia's Complicated Relationship' (March 8, 2022) <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/turkey-and-russias-complicated-relationship> (January 11, 2023).

<sup>180</sup> Merics, 'Turkey-China relations: Ankara must balance complications on many fronts', 1-93, 88,89. (August 18, 2022) <https://merics.org/en/turkey-china-relations-ankara-must-balance-complications-many-fronts> (January 11, 2023).

Islamic separatism within its border as a threat.<sup>181</sup> This could in turn hurt economic cooperation between Ankara and Beijing.

To conclude this paragraph, Bayraktar Diplomacy – on the short term – has delivered Ankara a substantial amount of hard power. As became clear in the current situation in Ukraine, Turkish drones cannot provide endless success. It is just a matter of time before other nations either catch on to Ankara's drone warfare or develop similar strategies that would take away Ankara's military – and diplomatic – advantage. In the meantime, Ankara's drone policies could have long-term deleterious effects on Türkiye's international standing and its relationships with both Western and non-Western regimes across the globe. Within this context, Bayraktar Diplomacy could hurt Ankara's credibility regarding its Neo-Ottoman narrative as the patron of Islam and its goal of presenting an 'Enterprising and Humanitarian' foreign policy. Coupled with the ever-ambiguous relationship with the West, the bi-polar dynamic with Russia and often capricious interactions with other countries, Erdoğan would be wise to deploy his flying Neo-Ottoman diplomats a bit more carefully.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis examined how Türkiye uses its new drone industry to achieve its foreign policy goals, which are inspired by Neo-Ottomanism. To come to a conclusive answer to this question, this thesis first outlined the ways in which Türkiye's foreign policy has evolved and how Neo-Ottomanism took root in Ankara. This showed us, that in the period between the founding of the republic in 2023 and the end of the Cold War Ankara maintained the policies implemented by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This so-called "Kemalism" was characterized by a foreign policy, which was non-expansive, domestically oriented, and strongly connected with the West.

When the Cold War ended, Türkiye's value to the West became less obvious and the Turks themselves also gradually began to rethink their isolated existence in their own region. President Özal introduced a form of 'Proto' Neo-Ottomanism in which the Ottoman past and Islam began to play a somewhat larger role for the first time since the founding of the Turkish Republic. This development continued extensively when the AK Party came to power. Under Erdoğan's rule new political doctrines were introduced, which were intended to make Türkiye play a greater role at regional as well as geo-political level. This evolved into the current foreign policy of Neo-Ottomanism in which Türkiye strives to have an autonomous and leading role

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<sup>181</sup> Bernardo Mariani, 'China's role and interests in Central Asia', 1-9, 4,7. (October 2013) <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/172938/chinas-role-and-interests-in-central-asia.pdf> (January 10, 2023).

in the Middle East and other areas previously within the sphere of influence of the Ottoman Empire.

Ankara first tried to achieve its intended goal of greater influence through a soft power approach. This proved too fragile to be successful. The outbreak of the Arab Spring, the failed coup d'etat in 2016 and the ever more deteriorating relation with the West drove Erdoğan to approach his Neo-Ottoman goals from a more hard power approach. In this approach a greater role for the country's national arms industry emerged. The envisioned military autonomy resulted in the development of a highly sophisticated drone industry, where Baykar Technologies paved the way with their Bayraktar TB2 drone as leading model. From its interventions in Syria onwards, Ankara utilized its drones more and more as a foreign policy asset. Especially the Turkish way of conducting drone warfare – which revolves on a network approach of military hardware with affordable high quality (attack) drones in a central controlling role – has enabled Türkiye to export a military success product to areas and regimes, where they have or want political and economic interests. Within this framework, Turkish drones have increased both Türkiye's military and non-military, direct and non-direct interventionist capabilities to support their Neo-Ottomanist goals.

In the Syrian conflict, Turkish drones enabled the TAF to achieve a convincing victory. Here Türkiye established itself as a country, capable of representing and defending its regional interests against major powers like the United States and Russia. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, deployment of Turkish drones was further optimized and assisted the Azerbaijani army successfully to secure a favorable outcome to Ankara. Türkiye's drone assistance helped curb Russia's influence in the region and added strength to Ankara's Neo-Ottoman narrative in Central Asia. In the Russo-Ukrainian war, Turkish drone technology helped strengthen ties between Ankara and Kiev and containing Putin, which had a positive effect on Türkiye's image in the West.

In Libya, drones were the decisive factor in defeating Haftar's forces – who were backed by regional rivals, the United Arab Emirates and Russia – allowing Ankara to strengthen its (geo)political position in the Mediterranean and secure its economic interests. On the rest of the African continent, Turkish drones aid Ankara in presenting itself as a viable 'non-Western' alternative to Africa's traditional 'partners'. Deplorable as it may be, Erdoğan's contribution to President Abiy's recent victory against the Tigray rebellion in Ethiopia could have very well proved to other African nations, that Ankara can be a valuable partner.

The case studies discussed in this thesis, have showed how Turkish drones allow Ankara to establish structural military alliances, to influence military conflicts to positive outcomes, to compete with regional rivals and to present Türkiye as a serious player at virtually every negotiating table from the Caucasus and the Krim to the Mediterranean Sea. This drone diplomacy, referred to as Bayraktar Diplomacy after its leading Bayraktar TB2 drone, has taken a prominent place in Ankara's foreign policy and allows the country to back its assertive posture with hard power. Hence, from a realist perspective one could say, that Türkiye's flying diplomats are currently an invaluable foreign policy asset for 'sultan' Erdoğan's Neo-Ottomanist goals.

Despite the unmistakable success story, Ankara's Bayraktar Diplomacy does not come without drawbacks. Türkiye's reliance on drone interventions and militarism in general could have serious long term deleterious effects on the country's position in the international community. We have already seen a regression in Türkiye's relationship with the West but Bayraktar Diplomacy could have a ripple effect on Türkiye's status in other regions of the globe as well. Within this context it would be advisable for Türkiye to look not only at the immediate gains its drone industry could yield them but instead, look at more sustainable ways to increase the country's sphere of influence.

Finally, more research could be done to if and how Turkish drones could stimulate instead of deteriorate Ankara's relationship with the West. The TAF has proved that its drones can be highly effective against NATO's most prominent adversary, Russia. The Western market could be a profitable market for both Türkiye's drone and arms industry in general. This could decrease the risk of Türkiye proliferating its drones to questionable actors and could create a win-win situation in which both the West and Türkiye come out as beneficiaries.

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