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## Humans in the Loop of Autonomous Weapons / *Dr. Birol Akduman*



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# Human-in-the-Loop or Human-Out-of-the-Game

## Autonomous Weapons and Strategic Stability

*Dr. Birol AKDUMAN**

In the fields The U.S. Indo-Pacific commander says, if Beijing moves on Taiwan, he'll turn the Strait into an "unmanned hellscape."[1] It's not bluster. Washington is funding thousands of attritable autonomous systems;[2] the Air Force has already flown live AI dogfights in an X-62A test jet;[3] and NATO is rewriting its AI playbook.[4] Beijing, meanwhile, is racing toward "intelligentized warfare," planning for machine-speed operations and unveiling a flying "drone mothership" designed to spew swarms.[5] In this environment, the old comfort—humans as the final safety—starts to look fragile. The question is no longer ethical. It's strategic: how far can we push autonomy without collapsing deterrence into miscalculation?
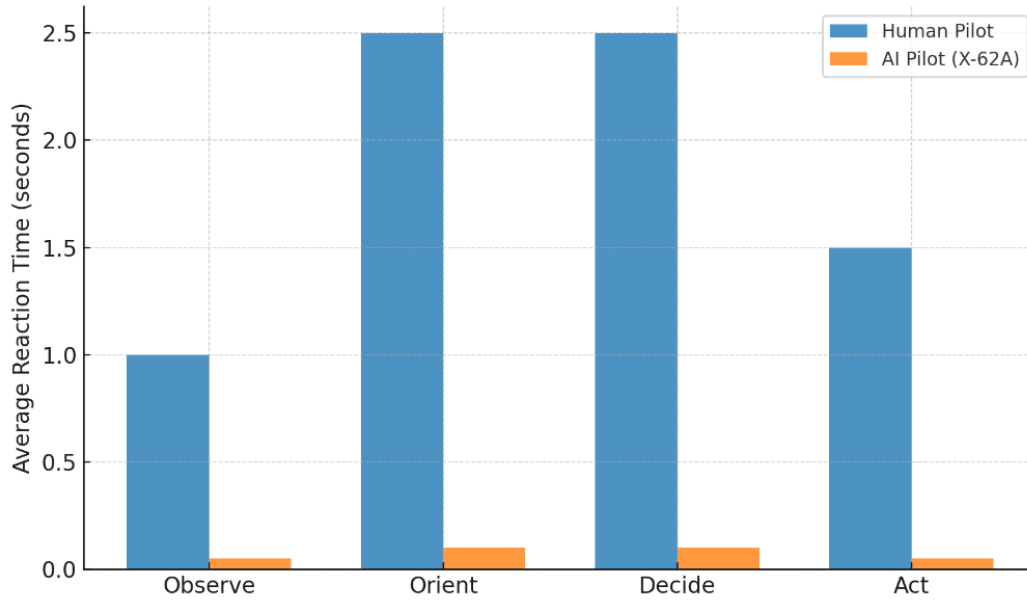


**Figure 1.** Decision-Cycle Compression—Human vs. AI Reaction Times in Air Combat

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1 Ellen Nakashima, "The U.S. Military Plans an 'Unmanned Hellscape' to Deter China," Washington Post, June 10, 2024.
2 Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks, "The Urgency to Innovate," keynote, Aug. 28, 2023; and "Unpacking the Replicator Initiative," Sept. 6, 2023, U.S. DoD.
3 U.S. Air Force Research Laboratory, "USAF Test Pilot School and DARPA Announce Breakthrough in Aerospace Machine Learning," Apr. 17, 2024; and USAF, "SecAF Kendall Experiences VISTA," May 3, 2024.
4 NATO, "Summary of NATO's Revised Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy," July 10, 2024; and "NATO Releases Revised AI Strategy," July 10, 2024.
5 The Times (London), "Chinese Poised to Launch 'Drone Mothership'," June 2025; Damien Pine, "China Has Developed the Largest Drone Carrier," Live Science, May 29, 2025.

What happens when the firing chain accelerates from minutes to milliseconds? In 2024, the USAF's AI pilot reacted to inbound threats in roughly a third of a second—machine-reflex speed—and then learned from its own dogfights.[6] This compresses crisis. It shrinks the window for leaders to verify sensors, call counterparts, or simply breathe—raising the odds that a localized clash rushes toward a theater-wide exchange.[7]

**From Replicator to Swarms: Western and Eastern Pathways to Autonomous Power**

The Pentagon's Replicator initiative promises "multiple thousands" of autonomous systems across air, sea, and land within two years.[8] By design, this is not exquisite steel but affordable mass—machines good enough to saturate, scout, jam, and, when needed, strike. The Air Force's Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) program formalizes the concept: loyal-wingmen that fly with F-35s and NGAD, networked but increasingly self-directed.[9] At sea, Sea Hunter and its successors suggest months-long, crewless stalking of submarines—a capability that could tempt conventional counter-force against nuclear assets.[10]

| Program | Domain | Role / Mission | Range / Endurance | Autonomy Mode | Maturity | Notes / Risks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Replicator | Multi-domain (air/sea/land) | Massed attritable drones for ISR, strike, EW | Short–medium (attritable systems) | Semi-autonomous, scalable swarms | Early acquisition (aim: 2025–26 fielding) | Industrial bottlenecks; supply chain risk |
| CCA (Collaborative Combat Aircraft) | Air | Loyal-wingmen with F-35, NGAD | 2,000+ km class | Human-on-the-loop, growing AI autonomy | Prototype / flight tests ongoing | Integration with manned jets; ROE concerns |
| Sea Hunter / MDUSV | Maritime | Unmanned surface vessel for ASW, ISR, logistics | Months at sea | High nav autonomy; remote oversight | Operational prototypes tested | Counter-force temptation vs. SSBNs |
| Manta Ray UUV (DARPA) | Undersea | Long-endurance unmanned undersea vehicle | Multi-month seabed ops | Autonomous navigation, modular payloads | Prototype sea trials in 2024 | Potential ASW destabilization |
| Skyborg (precursor) | Air | AI "brain" for low-cost UCAVs | Tactical range | AI pilot core, supervised | Ended as feeder for CCA | Lessons feeding CCA autonomy stack |

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[6] AFRL, "Breakthrough in Aerospace ML," 2024.
[7] RAND, Strategic Competition in the Age of AI (2024).
[8] Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks, "The Urgency to Innovate," keynote, Aug. 28, 2023; and "Unpacking the Replicator Initiative," Sept. 6, 2023, U.S. DoD.
[9] Congressional Research Service, U.S. Air Force Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA), IF12740, Jan. 22, 2025.
[10] DARPA, "ACTUV 'Sea Hunter' Prototype Transitions to ONR," Jan. 30, 2018; MARAD, SEA HUNTER and Maritime Autonomous Behaviors, 2018.

**Table 1.** Flagship U.S. Autonomy Programs—Role, Range, Mission, Maturity

Beijing's doctrine is explicit: by 2035, the PLA should be largely "intelligentized," with AI stitched through C2, ISR, and strike complexes.[11] Its defense white-papers and open-source analysis point to a strategy of decision-cycle dominance—overwhelm with speed, volume, and deception[12]. The swarming record was set years ago (119 drones),[13] but the more consequential step is airborne launch platforms: the Jiu Tian "drone mothership," unveiled at Zhuhai and now preparing for flight tests, reportedly carries ~100 loitering munitions for synchronized release.[13]



**Figure 2.** China's "Jiu Tian" aerial 'drone mothership,' displayed at Zhuhai Airshow, designed with internal bays capable of launching swarms of loitering munitions.

The implication is that if the first fifteen minutes of a Taiwan conflict unfold in a fog of autonomous salvos, human-on-the-loop control may be too slow to have tactical relevance—yet removing humans altogether risks catastrophic error. This tension lies at the very core of strategic instability.

NATO's revised AI strategy (2024) moves beyond aspiration to mechanisms: robust testing, adversarial-use protection, and rapid fielding through DIANA and defense funds.[14] Meanwhile, Europe's Sky Shield—a layered, integrated air-and-missile defense—quietly assumes

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[11] U.S. DoD, Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC 2024, ch. on intelligentized warfare.
[12] Joshua Baughman, "The Path to China's Intelligentized Warfare," Cyber Defense Review 9, no. 3 (2024); CNA, The PLA and Intelligent Warfare (2021).
[13] Times, "Drone Mothership," 2025.
[14] NATO, "Revised AI Strategy," 2024.

AI-directed cueing across Patriot, IRIS-T, and Arrow-3 umbrellas.[15] Sweden is pushing true swarms into NATO exercises.[16] This is not about sermons on "responsible AI"; it's about availability, interoperability, and logistics under fire.

**Where Humans Already Slipped Toward the Sidelines**

The Libya Kargu-2 episode—an autonomous loitering munition "engaging retreating personnel" in 2020, per a UN panel—remains contested in detail but telling in direction.[17] Even if the precise degree of autonomy is debated, the incident underscores a core risk: misidentification at machine speed. In parallel, adversarial AI research shows how tiny pixel perturbations or poisoned data can flip classifier outputs—and thus target choices.[18]

Russia's Poseidon—a nuclear-powered autonomous undersea vehicle—is built to bypass missile defenses and terrorize coasts. Serious analysts treat it as real enough to affect force planning.[19] U.S. and allied advances in autonomous ASW could, in turn, imperil the perceived survivability of adversary SSBNs. When second-strike forces look vulnerable, "use-it-or-lose-it" pressures mount—a pathway to early, inadvertent nuclear escalation.[20] And then there's the "hellscape" concept: flood a theater with drones to buy time. The logic is sound; the implementation is hard; the escalation ladder is steeper.

**Industrial Realities Behind "Affordable Mass"**

The promise of "multiple thousands" of autonomous systems under the Pentagon's Replicator banner is meant to overwhelm adversaries with volume rather than exquisite single platforms. But American oversight bodies have repeatedly warned that defense-industrial bottlenecks could make such timelines illusory. A June 2025 Government Accountability Office assessment found that while prototypes proliferated, the Department of Defense "continues to face challenges fielding capabilities at speed," citing brittle supply chains for microelectronics and shortages in test infrastructure.[21] Similar warnings echo in RAND analyses of "attritable

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[15] Reuters, "Neutral Switzerland Joins European Sky Shield," Apr. 10, 2024; and July 9, 2024 follow-up.

[16] Business Insider, "Swarms of Military Drones Will Be Part of NATO's Arsenal," Apr. 2025.

[17] United Nations Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya, S/2021/229.

[18] DARPA, "Guaranteeing AI Robustness Against Deception (GARD)," program overview; DoD OT&E note on GARD.

[19] Congressional Research Service, Russia's Nuclear Weapons: Doctrine, Forces, and Modernization, R45861 (2020), section on "Poseidon AUV."

[20] Caitlin Talmadge, "Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States," International Security 41, no. 4 (2017): 50–92; Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The New Era of Counterforce," International Security 41, no. 4 (2017).

[21] U.S. Government Accountability Office, Weapon Systems Annual Assessment 2025: DOD Continues to Face Challenges Fielding Capabilities at Speed, GAO-25-106121 (June 2025).

autonomy," which conclude that scaling thousands of expendables requires not just funding but robust production surge capacity and sustained sustainment budgets.[22] In other words, "affordable mass" risks remaining a slide-deck slogan if it cannot be reconciled with the material realities of production, logistics, and trained personnel.

This is not a uniquely American problem. European NATO members, despite accelerating defense budgets after 2022, confront analogous industrial lag. A 2024 SIPRI survey emphasized that simply raising expenditures by 17 percent across Europe "does not automatically translate into fieldable combat power," with munitions stockpiles and maintenance throughput remaining persistent weak spots.[23] For autonomy in particular, software supply chains and trusted electronics sources are critical vulnerabilities. The irony is stark: the very autonomy meant to cushion industrial fragility also exposes defense establishments to supply-chain fragility of a new order.

## Alliance Adaptation in Practice

NATO has tried to move beyond aspirational statements toward practical adoption. The alliance's revised Artificial Intelligence Strategy in 2024 formalized testing, evaluation, verification, and validation (TEVV) as a core requirement, alongside resilience against adversarial use.[24] By 2025, NATO had not only issued guidance but also procured coalition-scale AI-enabled decision-support systems for operational use, shrinking integration windows from years to months.[25] These systems are already being tested in collective defense contexts, with exercises simulating heavily contested electromagnetic environments.

Europe's Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) likewise embodies the pragmatic turn. ESSI participants have agreed to integrate Patriot, IRIS-T, and Arrow-3 interceptors into a layered umbrella where automated cueing will be indispensable for defeating swarms or massed salvos.[26] Neutral Switzerland's accession in 2024 underscored the broad political legitimacy of this project. NATO's Task Force X, meanwhile, experimented with unmanned systems to patrol seabed infrastructure after the Nord Stream pipeline sabotage.[27] These developments indicate that

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[22] RAND Corporation, Attritable Autonomy and Mass in Great Power Competition, Research Report (Santa Monica, CA: 2024).

[23] SIPRI, Trends in World Military Expenditure 2024, April 2025.

[24] NATO, Summary of NATO's Revised AI Strategy, July 10, 2024.

[25] Financial Times, "NATO Acquires AI Military System from Palantir," April 18, 2025.

[26] Reuters, "Switzerland Joins ESSI," 2024.

[27] Business Insider, "NATO Task Force X Deploys Drones to Protect Undersea Infrastructure," July 2024.

autonomy is not only a theoretical concept but is being woven into alliance operations where human persistence would be prohibitively costly or risky.
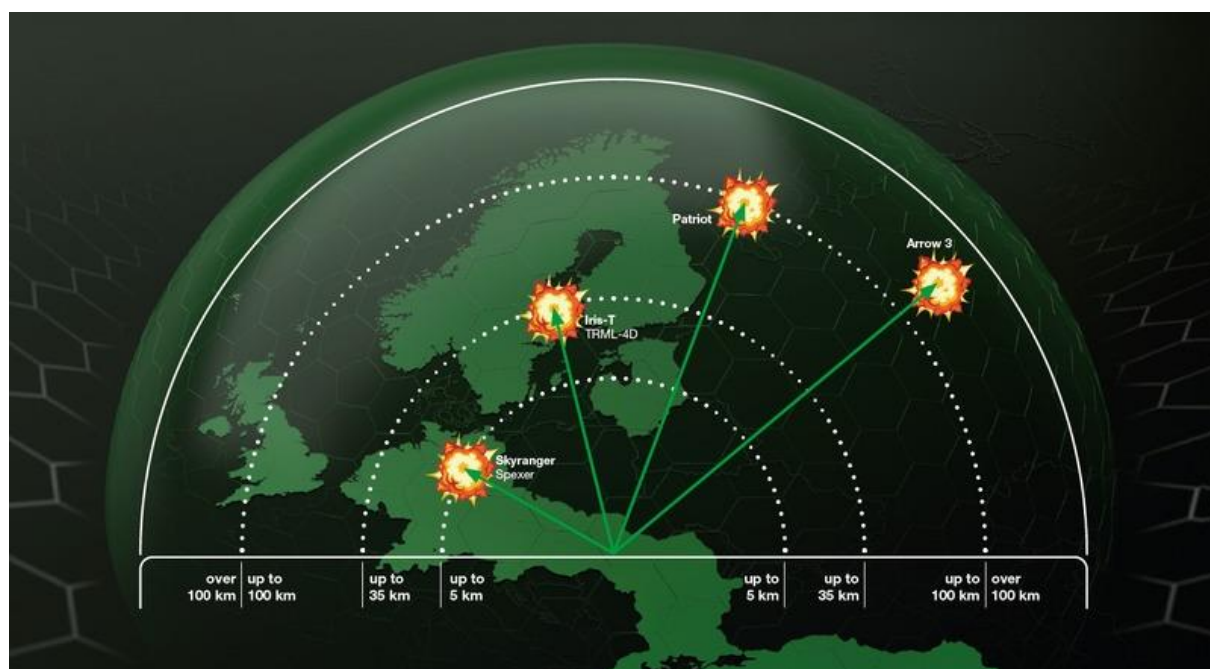


**Figure 3.** European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI): schematic of coverage layers.

**The Nuclear Entanglement Problem**

The most destabilizing frontier remains under the waves. Extra-large unmanned undersea vehicles (XLUUVs), exemplified by DARPA's Manta Ray, demonstrated multi-month endurance and modular payload bays in 2024 trials.[28] While marketed for ISR and logistics, such platforms could, with little adaptation, provide continuous localization of ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). For nuclear stability, perception matters as much as reality: if Moscow or Beijing believe their second-strike forces are being persistently trailed by autonomous hunters, "use-it-or-lose-it" pressures mount.

The Russian Poseidon project, a nuclear-powered autonomous torpedo reportedly capable of traversing oceans to deliver multi-megaton warheads against coastal cities, further erodes stability.[29] Although analysts debate its feasibility, the weapon's very announcement forces NATO planners to contemplate counters, including autonomous ASW systems that themselves risk being interpreted as counter-force threats. In such a feedback loop, autonomy becomes not a stabilizer but a multiplier of mistrust.

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[28] DARPA, "Manta Ray UUV Prototype Completes In-Water Testing," May 1, 2024.
[29] CRS, Russia's Nuclear Weapons (2022).

**Figure 4.** Russian Arctic military installations along the Northern Sea Route—home waters for SSBN patrols and the projected deployment area for Poseidon autonomous systems.

**The Western Pacific as Test Bed**

Strategists increasingly acknowledge that the Western Pacific will be the first large-scale laboratory for autonomy. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command leaders have publicly floated the concept of creating an "unmanned hellscape" in the Taiwan Strait to deter or delay a Chinese assault.[30] Independent assessments by think tanks like CNAS and CNA suggest that defending Taiwan with swarms could require "tens of thousands" of attritable drones, meshed across domains for ISR, jamming, and anti-ship targeting.[31] Beijing, for its part, has demonstrated airborne "drone motherships" designed to release swarms of loitering munitions, explicitly aiming to outrun human-speed command cycles.[32]

This dynamic points to a grim reality: the "first fifteen minutes" of a Taiwan crisis may be decided largely by partially autonomous salvos, not deliberative command decisions. In such a scenario, escalation control hinges less on intentions than on the resilience of autonomous architectures under jamming, spoofing, and classifier brittleness.

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[30] Josh Rogin, "The U.S. Military Plans a 'Hellscape' to Deter China," Washington Post, June 10, 2024.
[31] Stacie Pettyjohn et al., Swarms over the Strait: Drone Warfare in a Future Fight to Defend Taiwan (CNAS, 2024).
[32] The Times, "Drone Mothership," 2025.
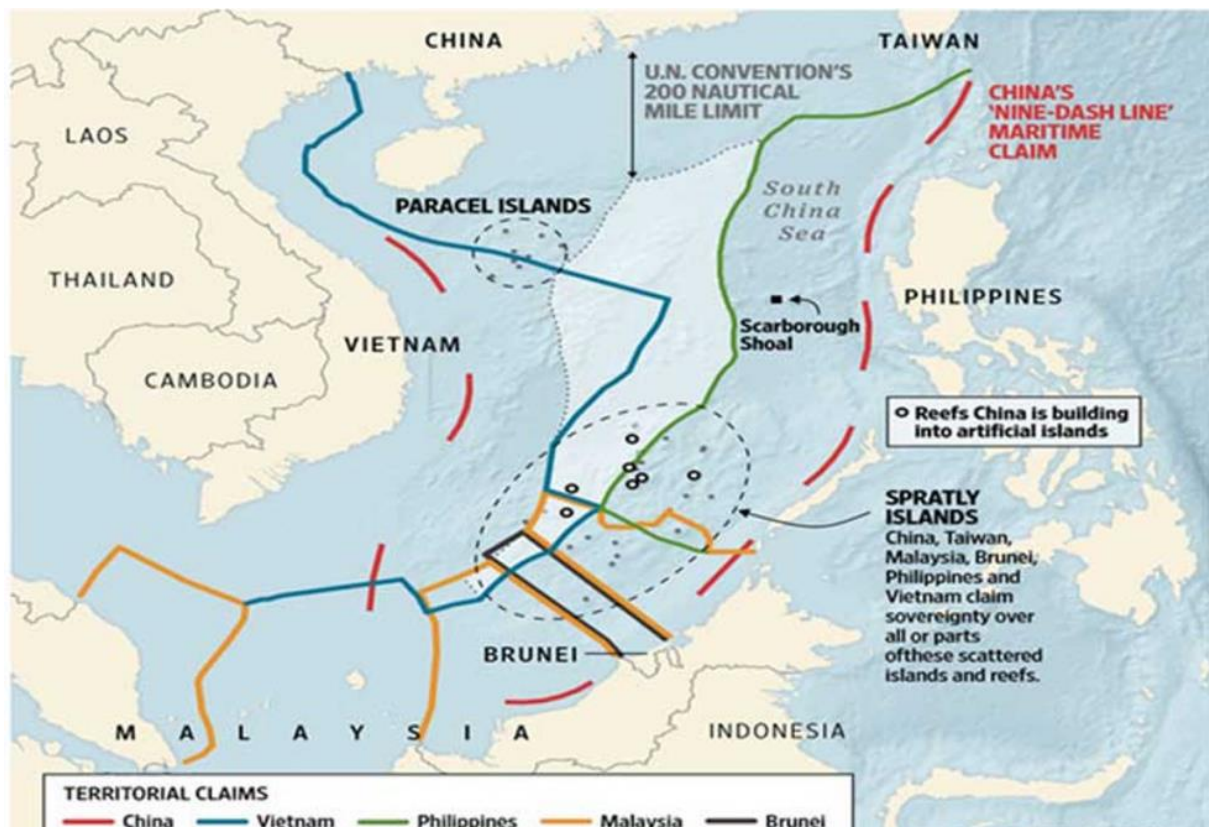
**Figure 5.** Territorial claims in the South China Sea, including China's "Nine-Dash Line" and contested zones relevant to autonomy-at-scale scenarios.

## Guardrails That Matter

Western doctrine insists on meaningful human control, but in practice the only guardrails that reliably "bite" are technical. The U.S. DoD Directive 3000.09 (rev. 2023) mandates that systems must include operator-understandability, abort modes, and geofenced restrictions.[33] The OUSD(R&E)'s 2025 DT&E Guidebook goes further, requiring adversarial red-team testing and lifecycle verification for AI-enabled weapons.[34] NATO's DIANA accelerator has embedded such requirements into funded projects.[5] These measures translate principle into code: fail-closed modes when classifiers disagree, hard stops tied to targeting confidence thresholds, and pre-delegated hold-fire conditions under comms degradation.

This shift shows that slogans about 'humans in the loop' are no longer sufficient in the face of machine-speed engagements. What can keep pace are architectures that fail safe, signal clearly, and still run fast enough to deny adversaries easy exploitation.

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[33] U.S. Department of Defense, DoD Directive 3000.09: Autonomy in Weapon Systems, January 25, 2023.
[34] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (R&E), Developmental Test & Evaluation of AI-Enabled Systems Guidebook, February 26, 2025.

**Final Reflections on Autonomy in Conflict**

The trajectory of autonomy is no longer speculative; it is already shaping force design, procurement, and alliance planning. Over the next few years, human–machine teaming will become routine in exercises, counter-swarm capabilities will harden into budget lines, and undersea autonomy will shift from prototypes to persistent patrols. NATO will bend its TEVV machinery toward air defense saturation and seabed protection; China will scale intelligentized command-and-control and airborne swarm launchers; and the United States will confront whether its "affordable mass" rhetoric can be reconciled with industrial constraints.

The central stability variable is not the existence of autonomy per se, but how autonomous counter-force interacts with fragile command judgments under time pressure. If the opening quarter-hour of a Taiwan crisis devolves into a partially autonomous exchange, the decisive factor will be which side preserves meaningful human vetoes without surrendering tempo. Ultimately, the ability to keep humans in decision-making while machines race ahead will decide whether autonomy reinforces deterrence or triggers catastrophe.

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**About the Author**

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# Lübnan Silah ve Egemenlik Kavşağında: İsrail Tehditleri ve İç Savaş Gölgesi

*Dr. Gulshan Y. Sağlam*

Lübnan bugün, siyasi, güvenlik, ekonomik ve toplumsal tarihinin en karmaşık evrelerinden birini yaşamaktadır. Ülke, artan İsrail tehditleri ile derin iç dönüşümlerin kesiştiği kritik bir kavşakta dururken, ağır bir ekonomik kriz ve köklü siyasi ile mezhepsel bölünmelerle karşı karşıyadır. Bu durum, Lübnan devletinin ulusal egemenliğini ve güvenliğini koruma kapasitesine dair temel soruları gündeme getirmekte; uluslararası ve bölgesel baskılar silahın kontrolü veya tasfiyesini talep ederken, iç savaş riskinin, devlet ile Hizbullah arasındaki ilişki netleşmediği sürece devam ettiği gözlemlenmektedir. Esas sorun, merkezi soruya indirgenebilir: Lübnan, ulusal egemenliğini ve güvenliğini koruma gereklilikleri ile silahın tekelinin sağlanması için uluslararası ve bölgesel baskılar arasında nasıl bir denge kurabilir ve aynı zamanda olası bir iç savaşı önleyebilir? Bu soruların önemi, İsrail'in mevcut silahı kendi saldırılarını meşrulaştırmak için bir gerekçe olarak kullanması ve Lübnan-Suriye sınırında çatışma tehdidini sürekli gündemde tutması ile artmaktadır.

2024 yazında yaşanan savaş, Hizbullah'ın silahının yarattığı iç istikrar üzerindeki karmaşıklıkları açıkça ortaya koymuştur. Bu savaş, büyük insan ve maddi kayıplara yol açarken, "devlet dışı silah" sorununu yeniden gündeme taşımıştır. Savaş sırasında, parti başta Genel Sekreterler Hasan Nasrallah ve Haşim Safaeddin olmak üzere lider kadrolarında ağır kayıplar yaşamış ve askeri altyapısı ciddi darbeler almıştır; özellikle operasyonlarının omurgasını oluşturan "Er-Rızvan" biriminin tesisleri yok edilmiştir. Ayrıca Suriye üzerinden tedarik hatları, Suriye rejiminin çöküşü ile daralmış ve İran desteği, uygulanan yaptırımlar ve uluslararası baskılar nedeniyle azalmıştır. Bu durum, Hizbullah'ın bağımsız bir direniş hareketi olarak devam etme kapasitesini yeniden değerlendirmesine ve Şii taban içerisinde silahın korunmasının maliyetleri ve insan kayıpları ışığında tartışılmasına yol açmıştır.

Bu gelişmeler, 2025 Şubat'ında ordu komutanı General Joseph Aoun'un cumhurbaşkanı seçilmesi ve önceki uluslararası yargıç Nawaf Salam'ın başkanlığında hükümetin kurulması ile eş zamanlıdır. "Halk, Ordu ve Direniş" sloganı, yemin konuşması ve bakanlık bildirisinde yer almamış; bu, devletin silah tekelini doğrulama, ulusal egemenliği yeniden tesis etme ve iç reformları uygulama yönünde resmi bir değişim olarak yorumlanmıştır. Bu çerçevede, Taif Anlaşması ve Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi 1701 sayılı kararının tam olarak

uygulanması hedeflenmiştir. Bu dönüşüm, Hristiyan, Sünni ve Dürzi güçler tarafından geniş bir şekilde karşılanırken, Hizbullah'a yakın Şii çevreler ve parti, bu yönelimi kendi kurucu rolüne ve Taif sonrası siyasi anlaşmalarına yönelik doğrudan bir meydan okuma olarak görmüştür.

Resmî düzeyde, Lübnan hükümeti 5 ve 7 Ağustos 2025 tarihli Bakanlar Kurulu toplantılarında silahın tekelleştirilmesi kararını almış ve ordunun bu kararın uygulanması için bir eylem planı hazırlamasını görevlendirmiştir. Plan taslağı, Ağustos ayı sonunda sunulacak ve yıl sonuna kadar uygulanması hedeflenmiştir. Bu adım, özellikle ABD ve Fransa tarafından yapılan uluslararası baskılara ve Lübnan makamlarının ikna edici değerlendirmelerine yanıt olarak atılmıştır. Aynı dönemde ABD elçisi Thomas Barrack, Hizbullah'ın silahlarının devlet kurumları içinde sınırlandırılması mekanizmalarını içeren bir öneri sunmuş, orta ve hafif silahların iç mesele olarak bırakılmasını ve İsrail'e yönelik tehdit oluşturan balistik füzeler ve insansız hava araçlarının teslimini öngörmüştür. Karşılığında, ABD'nin İsrail'e güney Lübnan'dan çekilmesi için baskı yapacağı taahhüt edilmiştir ama aynı zamanda Israilin ne yapacagi kotrol edemez. Ancak Hizbullah, herhangi bir teslim tarihine karşı tutumunu korumuş, bu adımın garanti olmadan Lübnan'ı İsrail ihlallerine açık hale getireceğini savunmuştur. Bu tutum, Şeyh Naim Kasım tarafından 1978, 1982 ve 2006 Temmuz Savaşı deneyimlerine dayanılarak doğrulanmıştır; zira İsrail, fırsat bulduğu her anda Lübnan egemenliğini ihlal etmekten çekinmemektedir. Washington da İsrail'in tehditleri konusunda herhangi bir garanti sunmamıştır.

Bölgesel açıdan, Suudi Arabistan, Lübnan ve Suriye arasındaki ilişkileri gözetmekte, Şam'daki yeni otoritenin Lübnan sınırlarına saygı göstermesini ve Lübnan devleti ile ordusu ile iş birliği içinde silah kaçakçılığı ve diğer yasa dışı faaliyetleri önlemeyi koordine etmektedir. Bu durum, Lübnan'ın Suriye sınırları üzerindeki kontrolünü güçlendirmekte ve sınırların resmi olarak belirlenmesi sürecine katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu bölgesel ve uluslararası değişim, iç dönüşümle paralel olarak, Lübnan'a kaotik durumu sona erdirme ve zayıf devletten güçlü, istikrarlı ve egemen bir devlet inşa etme fırsatı sunmaktadır.

ABD elçisi Thomas Barrack'ın hazırladığı belge, 1701 sayılı kararın uygulanmasının bir parçası olarak, Hizbullah'ın silahlarının devlet kurumlarına entegrasyonu için pratik bir çerçeve sunmuş, orta ve hafif silahların Lübnan iç meselesi olarak kalmasını öngörmüş ve İsrail'e tehdit oluşturan füzeler ile insansız hava araçlarının teslimini içermiştir. Belge, sürecin aşamalı olarak yürütülmesi gerektiğini, mevcut askeri ve siyasi durumun gözetilmesi gerektiğini ve uyumu sağlamak için uluslararası ve bölgesel garantilerin sağlanmasının önemini

vurgulamıştır. Ayrıca belge, silahların kademeli teslimi ile ABD'nin İsrail üzerinde Güney Lübnan'dan çekilmesi için eş zamanlı baskı uygulamasını bağlamış; fakat bu baskı fiilen gerçekleşmemiş ve Hizbullah, gerçek garantiler olmadan silah teslimine karşı olduğunu teyit etmiştir.

Bu durum, Lübnan ordusunun UNIFIL ile iş birliği içinde oynadığı merkezi rol ile kesişmektedir. Ordu, tüm Lübnan topraklarının kontrolünü sağlamakta, özellikle güneyde, temel dayanak konumundadır. UNIFIL ise sınırların kontrolü ve tırmanışın önlenmesinde bir destek unsurudur; fakat İsrail ihlallerini sürekli önlemedeki kapasitesi sınırlıdır. Buradan çıkan ikinci varsayım şudur: Uluslararası destekle ordunun güçlendirilmesi ve konuşlandırılması, Lübnan egemenliğinin yeniden tesisinde gerekli bir adım olabilir; ancak bu, ordunun iç çekişmeler ve bölgesel baskılar karşısında tarafsızlığını ve birliğini koruma kapasitesine bağlıdır.

Hizbullah'ın silah tartışmasını, İsrail'in kapsamlı projelerinden bağımsız anlamak mümkün değildir. 1948'den beri İsrail, güvenlik tehdidi söylemiyle askeri nüfuzunu meşrulaştırmış, genişleme politikalarını sadece Lübnan'da değil, Gazze, Suriye, Yemen, İran ve bölgedeki diğer ülkelerde sürdürmüştür. Ayrıca Türkiye ve Pakistan gibi ülkelere yönelik tehditler ile bu projeyi genişletme eğilimindedir. İsrail'in uluslararası platformlarda Hizbullah silahını gündeme taşıma ısrarı, Lübnan'ın istikrarını sağlama kaygısından değil, bölgesel dengeleri kendi lehine yeniden şekillendirme arzusundan kaynaklanmaktadır.

Durumu daha da karmaşıklaştıran unsur, uluslararası farklılıklardır. ABD, Hizbullah'ı İran etkisinin bir uzantısı olarak görüp doğrudan kısıtlamaya çalışırken, Fransa pragmatik bir yaklaşım benimseyerek Lübnan'ın istikrarı ile farklı taraflarla ilişkilerini dengelemeye çalışmaktadır. Bölgesel düzeyde ise Lübnan, bölgedeki çatışma ağının bir parçası olduğundan, ulusal egemenlik ve silah tartışmaları bu çatışmaların güvenlik üzerindeki etkileri göz önünde bulundurularak ele alınmalıdır.

Burada öne çıkan temel sorular şunlardır: Lübnan, ordu rolünü güçlendirerek tam egemenliğini sağlama ve Hizbullah'ın silahını elinde tutmasını engelleme arasında nasıl bir denge kurabilir? Silah teslimi Hizbullah'ın mı yoksa İran'ın askeri kanadının mı sorumluluğundadır? İsrail tehditlerini, mevcut durumu meşrulaştırmak için kullanmaya devam edecek mi? Çözüm, karmaşık iç ve dış uzlaşılarla mı mümkündür, bu durumda uzlaşı doğası nedir? Egemenlik kavramının, iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası etkileşimler ışığında yeniden

tanımlanması gerekiyor mu? Devlet, silahın tekelini sağlayabilir ve kurumlarıyla ilişkilendirebilir mi? Bu çabalar başarısız olursa, Lübnan iç ve dış baskılar ile İsrail'in fırsatçılığının ve İran'ın ek baskı aracı olarak kullanmasının etkisi altında kalır mı?

Tüm bu çerçevede, Lübnan kritik bir kavşaktadır: Ya yeni bir siyasal sözleşme ile ülkeyi koruma ve devlet inşası, silahın devlet tekelinde olması ve egemenliğin yeniden tesisini sağlayacak; bu, sürdürülebilir iç istikrar için temel şarttır; ya da iç ve dış baskıların, İsrail tehditlerinin ve Hizbullah silahının bölgesel baskı aracı olarak kalmasının etkisi altında kalacak, ülke daha fazla parçalanma ve erozyona maruz kalacaktır. Lübnan'ın geleceği, mevcut krizini güçlü ve istikrarlı bir devlet inşa etme fırsatına dönüştürme kapasitesine bağlıdır. Bu strateji, iç diyalog, uluslararası garantiler ve bölgesel dönüşümler arasında dengelenmiş bir ulusal strateji ile mümkün olacak ve ülkenin egemenliğini korurken iç çatışmalara veya dış istismara yol açmayacaktır. Sonuç olarak, İsrail bir savaş bahanesi kazanırken, İran baskı kartını güçlendirir ve Lübnan fırsatını kaybetme riskiyle karşı karşıya kalır.

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# Avrupa Birliği'nin Güvenlikleştirilmesinde Paris Güvenlik Okulu izleri

*Arda Atakan Yığın*

Bireyleri ve toplumları sürekli etkileyen, farkında olunmasa dahi iç içe yaşanan ve önemi araştırıldıkça artan "güvenlik" kavramı; son yüz yıl içerisinde birçok değişikliğe uğramıştır. Güvenlik tanımının bu değişimi evrimsel bir süreç olmakla birlikte ilerleyen ve geliştirilen bir alan haline gelmiştir. 20. Yüzyıl öncesine kadar dar kapsamlı olarak kullanılan bu tanım, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasındaki Avrupa'da varlığını daha da hissettirmeye başlamıştır. Özellikle iki kutuplu soğuk savaş konjektürü bu alanda yeni teori ve yaklaşımları da beraberinde getirmiştir. Paris Güvenlik Okulu, 1990'larda ortaya çıkan eleştirel güvenlik çalışmaları hareketinin bir parçası olarak ortaya çıkmış ve güvenliğin anlamı ve pratiği üzerine alternatif ve yenilikçi bakış açıları sunmuştur. Bir diğer yandan Avrupa Birliği için birçok güvenlikleştirme pratiği bulunmakta ve sivil bir oluşumun güvenlikleştirilmesi uzun bir süreç olmuştur. Bu makalede Avrupa Birliği bünyesinde gerçekleştirilen güvenlikleştirme adımlarının; Paris Güvenlik Okulu çerçevesince uyumluluğu değerlendirilmeye çalışılacak.

Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlikleştirme uygulamalarını anlayabilmek için öncelikle bu çalışmanın teorik temelini oluşturan Paris Okulu'nun temel ilkelerini incelemek gerekmektedir. Uluslararası ilişkilerde güvenlik kavramı çoğunlukla devlet merkezli, kriz odaklı ve askerî temelli bir yaklaşımla değerlendirilmiştir (Heise, 2024). İkinci Dünya savaşı sonrasında değişime uğrayan güvenlik kavramı, soğuk savaşın sona ermesiyle birlikte bir kez daha değişmeye başlamıştır. Bu değişim; realizm, liberalizm ve İngiliz Okulu gibi klasik uluslararası ilişkiler teorilerinden de farklı olarak kendisine has bir alanda gelişmeye başlamasıdır. Bir başka deyişle bu değişim, güvenliğin yalnızca dış unsurların oluşturduğu tehditlere verilen yanıtlarla sınırlı olmadığı anlayışıdır (Langwald, 2021). Tek bir etmene bağlı kalınmadan değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini vurgulayan bu kavram, soğuk savaştan sonra günlük yaşama indirgenen, karmaşık, görünmez ve ayrıntılı bir noktaya dönüşmüştür (Langwald, 2021). Güvenlik algısındaki bu değişim, bu alanda araştırma ve çalışmaların devam etmesine ve akademide yeni bir yaklaşımın oluşmasına yol açmıştır (Heise, 2024). Bu akademik çalışmalar sonucunda ortaya çıkan Paris Okulu, özellikle güvenlik ve güvenlikleştirmenin yaşadığı değişime odaklanmaktadır. Güvenlik ve güvenlikleştirme, özellikle teknik derinlik kazanırken, aynı zamanda yaşamın her alanında hissedilir hale gelmiş, basitleşmiş ve profesyonelleşmiştir (Bigo, 2002). Didier Bigo öncülüğünde geliştirilen Paris Güvenlik Okulu'nun diğer klasik güvenlik yaklaşımlarından ve haleflerinden en temel farkı eleştirel bir yaklaşım izlemesidir. Reddedilen en önemli halef ise Kopenhag Okulu'nun güvenlik algısıdır. Kopenhag Okulu'nun

yaklaşımına göre herhangi bir gelişmenin, dış unsurun veya toplum içerisindeki iç karışıklığın, o toplum için tehdit olarak sayılabilmesindeki temel etmen, devlet yönetim mekanizması veya elitlerin yapacağı konuşma ve söylevlere dayanmaktadır. Yani, yetkili kişiler tehdit olduğunu tartışıp, ortak bir karar ile açıkladığı takdirde tehdit vardır. Devlet içerisinde karar verici elitler, siyasi açıklama veya halka sesleniş gibi kanallar üzerinden herhangi bir gelişmeyi tehdit olarak ilan etmediği sürece o devlet; güvenlik tehlikesi altında olmadığını varsayarak varlığını devam ettirecek ve spesifik önlemler almayacaktır. Bu davranış biçimi Kopenhag Okulu'nun temelini oluşturmaktadır. Kopenhag Okulu'na bir tepki niteliği taşıyan Paris Güvenlik Okulu da söylem merkezli güvenlik oluşturma süreçleri yerine, güvenliği pratikler ve uygulamalar aracılığıyla inşa etmeyi kendisine amaç edinmiştir (Langwald, 2021). Başka bir deyişle Paris Okulu, güvenliği inşa etmede sadece belirli şahıslara indirgemek yerine sistemsel geniş bir doktrine evrimleştirme çabası gütmektedir. Ancak Didier Bigo liderliğinde kurulan bu okul sadece söylevi reddederek küçük bir alanda durmamakta olup, onu akademide ve güvenlik doktrinlerinde asıl zenginleştiren unsurlardan biri dayandığı temellendirmelerdir. Bu noktada Paris Okulu'nun temel teorik temeli Michel Foucault'a dayanmaktadır. Foucault'un yönetimsellik kavramı, bu okulun temel taşıdır (Bigo, 2002). Bu kavram, iktidarı kontrol etmenin ve yönetmenin, açıkça baskı veya zorlama yerine toplumdaki bireylerin davranışlarına göre tasarlandığını açıklamaktadır (Sezal, 2019). Başka bir deyişle Foucault güvenliği, herhangi bir toplumdaki bireylerin belirli bir anda ne yapacaklarını tahmin etmeye ve bu bilgiye dayanarak bir güç yaratmaya dayandırır (Sezal, 2019). Bu, güvenliğin aktif bir uygulama aracı olarak işlev gördüğü, potansiyel davranışların ortaya çıkmasından önce yönlendirmeyi ve yönetmeyi amaçladığı anlamına gelir. Bu sayede bireyler hakkında oluşturulan veri havuzu, stratejik bir kaynağa dönüştürülmekle birlikte; basit eylemler bile gücün kullanıldığı ve düzenlemenin sürdürüldüğü noktalar haline gelir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında güvenlik; yalnızca siyasi iktidar çemberindekileri değil, aynı zamanda toplumun her köşesindeki bireyleri de normalleştiren ve tanımlayan bir düzendir (Heise, 2024). Bu noktada "toplumun her köşesi" tanımlaması için nüfus analizi de önem arz eden bir yöntem olarak öne sürülmektedir. Nüfus analizi, toplumun birçok noktasına ulaşmak için farklı parametreler ve algoritmalar kullanır (Langwald, 2021). Bu güvenlik yöntemi, tehditlere karşı mücadelede ve toplumu şekillendirmede etkili bir unsurdur.

Paris Okulu; nüfus yönetiminin yanı sıra, Pierre Bourdieu tarafından geliştirilen habitus ve alan tanımlarından da destek almaktadır. Pierre Bourdieu'nun alan kavramı; bireylerin ve kurumların güçleri ve dinamikleriyle etkileşime girdiği bir ortamdır. Alan

tanımındaki aktörler, konumlarını fırsatlarla güçlendirmeye çalışırlar (Langwald, 2021). Habitus ise, belirli bir alandaki bireyler ve kurumlar gibi unsurların düşünme, eylem ve deneyimlerinin toplamını ifade eder (Sezal, 2019). Bigo'ya (2002) göre, habitus, belirli bir alandaki içgüdüsel bir yaklaşımı temsil eder ve her aktör kendi habitus çerçevesini üretir. Paris Okulu, alan ve habitus terimlerini temelde harmanlar. Böylelikle güvenlik ve güvenlikleştirme tanımlarını yalnızca devlet elitlerinin söylemine dayandırmanın yanı sıra, belirli bir bölgedeki unsurların reflekslerini ve tepkilerini de inceler. Paris Okulu, güvenlik ve güvenlikleştirme sürecinin yalnızca bunlarla değil, aynı zamanda teknokratik karar ve verilerin günlük pratiklerle harmanlanmasıyla da oluştuğunu açıklar (Heise, 2024). Bu yaklaşımla, olası bir tehdit unsurunu tespit etmek için alanda uzmanlık gerektiren bir yapı ortaya çıkmıştır (Langwald, 2021). Bu uzmanlık, bürokratlar, sınır görevlileri, saha araştırmacıları vb. ilgili alanda eğitimli bilgili bireylerden oluşur. Bu şekilde, güvenlikleştirme süreci devlet elitleri tarafından kabul edilip ilan edilmesine gerek kalmadan uygulanabilir. Paris Okulu, elitlere kıyasla uzman kadroları tercih eder, ancak "güvenlik" kavramının tamamını bu kadrolara dayatmaz. Bu kadrolara ek olarak, protokoller, kurumlar, analizler, veriler ve istihbarat ağları gibi birçok kaynaktan da yararlanır. Farklı fırsatları bir arada kullanarak, dağınık ancak ortak bir amaca hizmet eden bir mekanizma inşa edilir (Heise, 2024). Belirli bir alandan ne kadar çok veri ve uzmanlık sağlanırsa, güvenlikleştirme o kadar sağlam temellere oturtulur. Paris Okulu'nun bu uygulamasıyla, güvenlikleştirmenin merkez veya merkezde konumlanmış herhangi bir elit tarafından yaratılıp ifade edilmesi gereken bir yapı yerine, ortak bir ağ üzerinden kurulması sağlanır. Bu yapıyla güvenlik, son derece kritik ve istisnai bir durum olmaktan çıkıp, günlük yaşama indirgenmiş, sıradan bir yapı haline gelir (Langwald, 2021). Günlük yaşamdaki sınır kontrolleri, devlet görevlilerinin devriyeleri ve elektronik bilgi sistemleri, günlük yaşama indirgenen güvenlikleştirme örneklerinden sayılabilir. Güvenlikleştirmenin yanı sıra, Paris Okulu güvensizlik kavramına değinmektedir (Langwald, 2021). Bu durum, ortak bir ağda toplanan farklı güvenlik unsurlarından kaynaklanan tehdit algısıyla şekillenir (Heise, 2024). Örnek olarak; mülteci, azınlık, göçmen ve suçlu gibi statülere sahip kişilerin izlenmesi, siyasi sürecin dışında bir risk unsuru yaratır ve bu da güvenlikleştirme olasılığını doğurur (Langwald, 2021). Böylelikle Paris Okulu güvensizlik üzerinden güvenlik üreten bir okul olma özelliği de taşımaktadır.

Bigo tarafından tasarlanan Banopticon modeli bu noktada önemlidir. Michel Foucault tarafından geliştirilen Panopticon modelinden farklı olarak geliştirilen Banopticon, seçici bir yaklaşım izlemektedir (Balcı and Kocaman, 2022). Foucault'nun Panopticon modeli,

toplumdaki bireyleri sürekli izleyerek kontrol sağlayan bir yapıdır ve buna bağlı olarak dairesel bir hapishane modeli de vardır. Dairesel bir hapishanede, ortadaki merkez, dairenin sınırındaki mahkûmları gözetlemektedir. Bu bağlamda, dış merkezli bir kontrol mekanizması yerine, bireyler kendi geliştirdikleri bir kontrol davranışı yaratırlar (Heise, 2024). Bu bağlamda, toplumdaki herkes gözetim altındadır. Ancak Banopticon, yalnızca izlenmesi gereken unsurların izlenmesi ve takip edilmesi gerektiğini açıklar (Bigo, 2002). İzleneceklerin izlenmesindeki tercihler, etnik köken, vatandaşlık ve aktif statü gibi ayrımcılık yaratabilecek kategorilere dayanmaktadır (Langwald, 2021). Başka bir deyişle Banopticon, genellikle gözlem yapmaz; aksine, güvenlikleştirmede önleyici bir unsur olarak kabul edilir (Sezal, 2019).

Paris Güvenlik Okulu tarafından uygulanan bu gibi çeşitli güvenlik yaklaşımları, güvenlikleştirmenin mikro düzeye kadar inebileceğini göstermektedir. Mikro izleme, birçok teknik analize de olanak tanır ve yalnızca söylemlere dayalı kalmamasını sağlar. Sonuç olarak Paris Okulu, güvenliği ve güvenlikleştirme mekanizmasını birçok farklı unsurla günlük hayata entegre eder ve ağ tabanlı bir bütün oluşturur. Tehdit algısı, bu unsurlara ilişkin analiz ve veriler çerçevesinde hesaplanır.

Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlikleştirilmesi ise tarihten bu yana uzun soluklu bir süreç olmuştur. Uzun soluklu olmasının en önemli nedenlerinden birisi, AB'nin temeli olan AKÇT(Avrupa Kömür ve Çelik Topluluğu)'nin sivil bir yapı olarak kurulmuş olmasıdır. Günümüz AB'sinin ilk adımları, siyasetten, dış politikadan ve askerî yöntemlerden imtina ederek ekonomik çıkarlar çerçevesince oluşmuştur. 1957 yılında imzalanıp 1958 yılında uygulamaya konan Roma Antlaşması ile EURATOM (Avrupa Atom Enerjisi Topluluğu) ve AET (Avrupa Ekonomik Topluluğu) ile üye devletlerde müşterek alanların pekiştirilmesi mihenk taşıdır. Devam eden süreçte 3 ana koldan varlığını devam ettiren AET, AKÇT ve EURATOM; 1965 yılı içerisinde imzalanan Brüksel Antlaşması ile tek bir komisyon yapısında birleşti ve AT (Avrupa Toplulukları) olarak anılmaya başlandı.

İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında ekonomisi toparlanan Avrupa'ya göç hareketleri başlamıştır. Her ne kadar soğuk savaş sürecinde olunsa dahi özellikle Sovyet Bloğu'nda bulunmayan, Batı Avrupa'ya çalışma ve refah için göç eden ciddi bir nüfus bulunmaktadır (Léonard, 2010). Ancak 1980'li yıllara kadar bu göç artışı durmamakla birlikte artış göstermiş ve genel olarak Avrupa'da huzursuzluğa ve endişeye neden olmuştur (Léonard, 2010). Artan göç akışı kontrol edilmek istenmiş ve Avrupa bütünleşmesi ile güvenlik oluşumu adı altında ortak bir sınır oluşturma fikirleriyle birlikte tartışılmıştır. Bu göç akışının yükseldiği dönemler, 1985'te başlayan ve 1995'te uygulamaya konulan Schengen süreci ile aynı zamana denk

gelmektedir. Avrupa Birliği'nin ortak sınırlarının kuruluşunun başlangıcı olarak kabul edilen Schengen Anlaşması, ilk olarak 1985'te Batı Almanya, Hollanda, Lüksemburg, Belçika ve Fransa tarafından imzalanmıştır. Buna ek olarak imzacı devletler iç sınırlardaki kontrollerin kademeli olarak kaldırılmasını onaylamış ve oluşturulan ortak sınır içinde vatandaşların serbest dolaşım hakkı konusunda anlaşmışlardır. 1995 yılında Schengen Gündemi'nin uygulamaya konulması ve birleşik bir sınır denetim mekanizmasının oluşturulması, Schengen vatandaşı olmayanlar için giriş kontrollerinin güçlendirilmesi, usul standartlarının uyumlu hale getirilmesi, AB vatandaşlarının güvenliğinin artırılması, ulusal polis kuvvetleri, yargı organları ve sınır yetkilileri arasında işbirliğinin teşvik edilmesi ve sınır kontrol mekanizmalarının temel bileşenleri olarak ileri bilgi teknolojilerinin kullanılması amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir (European Commission, 2008).

Schengen haricinde bir diğer önemli gelişme 1992'de imzalanıp 1993'te yürürlüğe giren Maastricht Antlaşması'dır. Bu antlaşma Avrupa Birliği'nin fiili kurucusu olmuştur. Maastricht, Ekonomik ve siyasi hedefleri pekiştirmenin yanı sıra, antlaşma, Ortak Dış ve Güvenlik Politikası'nı oluşturarak AB'nin kurumsal çerçevesini önemli ölçüde genişletip, güvenlik ve dış politikayı Birliğin gündeminin resmi ve aktif unsurları haline getirmiştir. Ortak Dış ve Güvenlik Politikası'nın AB çerçevesine dahil edilmesi bir dönüm noktası olmuş ve AB'ye üye devletler arasında dış politika koordinasyonu, kolektif bir uluslararası kimlik oluşturulması ve tutarlı güvenlik stratejileri geliştirilmesi taahhüdünü yerleştirmiştir (Duquette, 2001). Amsterdam Antlaşması ile AB'nin küresel kriz yönetiminde daha etkili bir şekilde yer alması sağlanması hedeflenmiştir (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997). Aynı zamanda NATO ile stratejik uyumun devamını sağlamayı amaçlayan Avrupa Güvenlik ve Savunma Politikası'nı (AGSP) tanıtarak bu yapıyı yeniden tanımlamıştır.

Amsterdam Antlaşması'nın önemli bir hukuki gelişmesi, Schengen Müktesebatı'nın AB mevzuatına resmi olarak entegre edilmesiydi. Cardiff Zirvesiyle de Amsterdam Antlaşması içerisindeki maddelere olumlu yönde pekiştirilmiştir (Yılmaz & Kaplan, 2023). Buna paralel olarak AB, iç güvenliği artırmaya odaklanan bir dizi reform başlattı. Bu reformlar arasında suç faaliyetlerini caydırma mekanizmaları oluşturmak, düzensiz göç sorununu ele almak, sınır gözetimini güçlendirmek ve krizlere karşı kurumsal tepkiyi iyileştirmek yer almaktaydı. 1998'deki Cardiff Zirvesi, Amsterdam Antlaşması'nın güvenlik gündemiyle uyumlu stratejik bir yol haritasının izlenmesi ve serbest dolaşımın korunmasının ve AB'nin suçla mücadeledeki rolünün artırılmasının öneminin vurgulanması yoluyla bu gelişmelere daha fazla ivme kazandırdı (Yılmaz ve Kaplan, 2023). Bu ivme ile AB, birçok anlaşma imzalamış, kurumlar

kurmuş ve zirveler yapmıştır. Bunlardan en önemli 4 anlaşma ve zirve: göç, iltica, dış sınır güvenliği ve iç güvenlik alanında müşterek hareketi öngören Tampere programı; yine aynı başlıkların tartışıldığı Sevilla Zirvesi, NATO'nun kaynaklarına erişim kolaylığı sağlayan Berlin Plus Antlaşması ve AB'nin kurumsal yapısını geliştiren Nice kurucu antlaşması olarak sıralanabilir. 2004 yılına gelindiğinde kurulan FRONTEX (Avrupa Sınır ve Sahil Güvenlik Ajansı), ENISA (Avrupa Birliği Siber Güvenlik Ajansı) ve EDA (Avrupa Savunma Ajansı) AB'nin sivil yollardan korunumunu bir üst seviyeye taşımıştır.

2004 yılında kurulan FRONTEX, Avrupa Birliği'nin temel savunma mekanizmalarından biri haline gelmiştir. FRONTEX, 2005 yılından bu yana aktif bir Avrupa Birliği ajansıdır (Turgay, 2021). FRONTEX'in temel görevi, Avrupa Birliği'nin dış sınırlarında güvenliği sağlamak, sınır geçişlerini kontrol etmek ve çeşitli yasadışı faaliyetlere karşı önlemler almaktır (Zhong and Carrapiço, 2023). FRONTEX, kuruluşundan bu yana Avrupa Birliği'nin değerlerine, normlarına, antlaşmalarına ve yasalarına bağlı bir ajans olarak varlığını sürdürmüştür. Faaliyetlerini Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlik çıkarları çerçevesinde şekillendirmiştir. Ayrıca, kuruluşunda etkili olduğu Schengen süreci kapsamında FRONTEX, yalnızca Avrupa Birliği üye ülkelerini değil, aynı zamanda Schengen üye ülkelerini de sınır koruması ve yönetimi konusunda desteklemektedir.

Schengen'i de kapsayan bu kurum, sınır ve göç politikalarının yanı sıra Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlik kapasitesinin artırılmasına da katkıda bulunan bir kurumdur. FRONTEX, güvenlik desteğine duyulan ihtiyaç nedeniyle kurulmuş olsa da, göçün güvenlikleştirilmesini sağlayan bir mekanizma oluşturmuştur (Léonard ve Kaunert, 2023). Avrupa Birliği sivil bir kuruluş olduğu gibi, FRONTEX de sivil bir kuruluştur. Ancak, devriyeler, ileri teknoloji, ekipman ve göçü güvence altına almak için operasyonel alanlar gibi askeri uygulamaları sivil bir organizasyona entegre eden bir yapıdır (Léonard ve Kaunert, 2023).

FRONTEX, EDA ve ENISA'nın, AB bünyesinde kurulumu ardından buna benzer güvenlik kapasitesini arttıracak olan kuruluşlar veya uluslararası ortaklıklar ilerleyen yıllarda eklenmiştir. Rusya'nın Kırım'ı ilhakı sonrasında Avrupa Birliği'nin Ukrayna'da barışı koruma üzerine görevlendirdiği EUMAM misyonu, Rusya ve Ukrayna arasında başlayan savaş ile EPF (Avrupa Barış Fonu)'nin aktifleştirilmesi olabilir. En son gelişmelerden biri olan ve 2025 yılı içerisinde başlatılan SAFE (Avrupa için Güvenlik Eylemi) ve "Re-Arm Europe" çerçevesinde 150 milyar Euro'luk savunma bütçesinin sağlanması da Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlikleştirilmesinde önemli bir katkısı bulunmaktadır (Jankowicz, 2025).

Sonuç olarak Paris Güvenlik Okulu ve Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlikleştirilmesi hususunda ilk benzerlikler 1957 yılındaki Roma Antlaşması ile kurulan EURATOM ve AET olarak kabul edilebilir. Bunun nedeni Paris Güvenlik Okulu'ndaki nüfus ve yönetim ilişkisinin, her bir AB üye devletine uyarlanmış olmasıdır. Paris Okulu'nda olduğu gibi nüfusa yayılma ve derine inme için AB, kendi üye nüfusunda ek ortaklık alanları oluşturarak kimlik analizini genişletmiştir. İlerleyen süreçte Avrupa Birliği'nin sivil bir oluşum olarak kurulması; güvenlik ihtiyaçlarını da erteleyen bir unsur olmuştur. Ancak 1980'li yıllarda bu ihtiyacı kendi bünyesinde hissetmeye başlamıştır. Avrupa'ya artan göç ve devamında oluşan düzensiz göç dalgaları önemli planlamaları ve sistemsel kontrol mekanizmalarının ihtiyacını ortaya koymuştur. 1980'li yıllara kadar Avrupa Birliği ile Paris Güvenlik Okulu'nun eşleştiği alanlar göreceli şekilde dar kapsamlı kalmıştır.

Schengen sürecinde AB'nin üye devletleri birçok antlaşma, zirve, mutabakat ve kuruluşla müşterek hareketliliği arttırmaya çalışmıştır. 2004 yılı, sadece Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlik pratikleri için değil, Paris Güvenlik Okulu'nun da eleştirel yaklaşımı için önemli bir noktadır. 2004 yılına kadarki süreçte Avrupa Birliği dış sınırları muhafaza eden sivil bir oluşumu, yani FRONTEX'i kurmak üzere zemin hazırlayarak altyapı oluşturmuştur. Pierre Bourdieu'dan yola çıkılarak; Avrupa Birliği birçok antlaşma, zirve ve ek sözleşme yapmasıyla birlikte AB'ye ait özel bir "alan" ve "habitus" oluşturmuştur. Ek olarak Michel Foucault'un yönetimsellik kavramı ve Paris Okulu'nun teknokratik ihtiyaçları 2004 ve sonrasında karşılanmaya başlanmıştır. Teknokratik ihtiyaçlar spesifik olarak ihtiyaç alanına göre oluşturulan kurum ve kuruluşlardaki uzman personel, ekipman ve ihtiyaca yönelik geliştirilen saha çözümlemelerini kapsamaktadır.

Bu gelişmeler yine Paris Güvenlik okulu ile örtüşmektedir çünkü Paris Okulu güvenliği elitler yerine uzman personel ve oluşturulan güvenlik mekanizmasına indirger. Avrupa Birliği de 2004 yılından 2025 yılına kadarki süreçte teknokratik çözümlemelerle birlikte ortak bir ağ oluşturma çabası yer edinmiştir. Bütün bu gelişmeler ışığında Avrupa Birliği'nin güvenlikleştirme pratikleri, Paris Güvenlik Okulu'nun yöntem ve eleştirileri doğrultusunda örnekleri bulunmakta ve birçok alanda uymaktadır.

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# Welfare Beyond Equality: A Critique of Social Justice and the Use of Distributive Welfare as a Tool

*Alperen Gaygısız*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social justice is a concept that has been widely discussed in academic and public spheres, yet it remains a complex and multifaceted idea. At its core, social justice is predicated on the belief that all individuals should have equal access to the resources and opportunities necessary for a fulfilling life. However, the specific mechanisms by which this goal can be achieved are often subject to much debate. One approach that has been proposed is the use of distributive welfare programs, which aim to redistribute wealth and resources from the wealthy to the poor in order to reduce economic inequality.

The principles of social justice reject the notion that resource allocation should be determined solely by the free market. Instead, they argue that a just society must ensure that the distribution of resources is equitable and does not discriminate against certain individuals or groups. Furthermore, philosophers such as Rawls argue that the justification for the welfare state is rooted in its ability to promote justice, rather than simply its efficiency.

In this essay, we will critically examine the concept of social justice and the use of distributive welfare programs as a tool for achieving it. In the first section, we will define social justice and explore its underlying premises, goals, and principles. We will also examine the work of Rawls and his impact on the discourse surrounding social justice. In the second section, we will delve into the issues that arise when using distributive welfare as a tool for achieving social justice. This will include a discussion of issues surrounding social justice and its core premises, as well as the challenges of implementing distributive welfare programs in practice to achieve social justice. Finally, we will consider whether a compromise between justice and efficiency can be reached in the context of an ideal welfare system.

Overall, this work aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the relationship between social justice and distributive welfare. Through a critical analysis of the key concepts and issues, we aim to shed light on the complexities of this topic and contribute to ongoing discussions about how to promote social justice in our society in the best way.

## 2. DEFINING SOCIAL JUSTICE

The concept of social justice has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary discourse, yet there remains a lack of clarity regarding its underlying principles, goals, and methods for

achieving such goals (Novak, 2000). In this section, we will endeavor to provide a comprehensive understanding of social justice by clarifying its premises, objectives, and tools for achieving them.

John Rawls, a prominent philosopher, has significantly contributed to the discourse on social justice through his seminal work, "A Theory of Justice" (2004). In this work, Rawls proposes the concept of "justice as fairness," which serves as the foundation for his account of social justice. He asserts that social institutions should be organized in such a way that they adhere to two key principles: first, that each person has an inalienable right to basic rights and liberties; and second, that social and economic inequalities should only be permitted if they serve to benefit the least-advantaged members of society and if they are necessary to provide equal opportunities for all individuals.

Our modern day understanding of the concept of social justice, underlies basic premises that are quite similar to the ones above. First and foremost, social justice posits that all individuals possess certain inalienable rights that must be protected and promoted by society. These rights include, but are not limited to, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as well as access to essential necessities such as healthcare, education, and housing. Additionally, social justice asserts that all individuals are of equal moral worth, and that no person should be disadvantaged on the basis of their background, characteristics, or circumstances. In terms of economic premises, social justice acknowledges that inequalities often arise from an unequal distribution of resources among individuals and groups due to the existence of hierarchical relationships within the market. These relationships result in some individuals or groups being deemed more deserving of resources and opportunities than others, thus exacerbating existing inequalities (Langan, 1977).

From the premises, a few important conclusions could be drawn out. To start with, social justice stands against hierarchical relationships in the market process. Hierarchical relations is seen as a structural problem of the market that is the prominent cause of unequal distribution of resources. It is important to define what is meant here by hierarchical structures in the market. Hayek explains the market structure as a 'game of catallexy', in which there are two factors to determine who wins or loses; luck and skill (competence) (Hayek, 2022). Therefore, ones who are luckier and more competent have acces to more resources, which stands as an accurate description of the free-market structure. Social justice argues these determinants are intrinsically wrong, as it goes against their basic premises, foremost that no one should be disadvantaged because of their background, characteristics or circumstances. Social justice

operates by the justice principle and puts little to no emphasis on efficiency. Thus, distributive welfare system/policies goes hand to hand with social welfare as a tool to eliminate the alleged discrimination in the market process.

## 3. ISSUES THAT ARISE WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE USE OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AS A TOOL

In the following section, principles of distributive welfare as a tool for social justice will be discussed, following an investigation of the number of issues that arise out of social justice and using distributive welfare as a prominent tool to achieve it.

Distributive welfare is a simple tool as it sounds, however only in principle. Landes and Néron define distributive welfare as "transferring resources from the 'lucky' to the unlucky" (2015). As social justice aims to achieve relational egalitarianism and eliminate hierarchical ones, equal distribution is argued to help create more equal social relationships, prioritizing justice over efficiency. While distributive welfare policies, such as progressive taxation, targeted assistance, and social insurance, vary in their implementation and scope across different nations and societies, they all share the fundamental objective of redistributing resources and opportunities (Lamont & Favor, 2004). However, it should be noted that while distributive welfare policies may align with the goals of social justice, there is not a clear consensus within the literature on the most effective or appropriate means of implementing such policies. This highlights once again the lack of a shared understanding and clarity on social justice.

The concept of distributive welfare, as defined by Landes and Néron as the transfer of resources from the "lucky" to the "unlucky," is problematic that it implies that success and hierarchical status in the free-market are solely determined by luck. While it is acknowledged that certain factors such as access to education, job opportunities, and social networks, which could fall under the umbrella of "luck," do play a role in determining an individual's success, it is important to note that other crucial determinants such as hard work, talent, and determination must also be considered. Using expressions such as 'lucky' and 'unlucky' to describe the parties at the opposite end of distributive policies, reduces the process to a matter of chance and disregards the complexity of the factors that contribute to an individual's success and hierarchical status in the free-market.

Secondly, in its foundation, distributive policies (together with social justice) contain the premise that it is morally correct or acceptable to have an individual's possession of resources

by force for the good of the least advantaged (Varian, 1975). This premise will not be argued against; however it is an interesting point of further discussion. Even if this premise is blindly accepted, is it economically obvious that taking away resources from the 'lucky' and giving it to the 'unlucky' benefits society as a whole more than incentivizing growth and progress? Equality and progress are not mutually exclusive, however disincentivizing work/production and progress are. In a system where individuals are not able to reap the rewards of their own labor and productivity, the incentives to work and create are diminished. This is not to argue that free markets never fail to provide benefits or do not foster any inequality, but rather to challenge the assumption that inequality in the allocation of resources is inherently detrimental to society. While redistributive policies may provide immediate relief to those in need, incentivizing production and progress may ultimately benefit all members of society in the long run. This can be observed by comparing the level of progress and well-being in societies before and after the implementation of capitalist free-market structures. Even the poorest members of society today exist in a more privileged position when compared to the historical context, which highlights the potential benefits of promoting growth and progress (Litchfield et al., 2016). It is important to consider these perspectives when evaluating the effectiveness of distributive policies as a tool for achieving social justice.

So far, we have discussed issues surrounding distributive welfare and the use of such policies. In making a link to social justice, issues immediately arise. An important question within the discourse of social justice pertains to the concept of equality, specifically, whether the goal of social justice should be equality of outcome or equality of opportunity. Equality of outcome refers to the idea that individuals should have equal access to resources and opportunities, regardless of their background or current circumstances. Conversely, equality of opportunity posits that individuals should have equal chances to succeed, regardless of their background or current circumstances. Distributive policies, such as progressive taxation and targeted assistance, are often seen as tools to achieve equality of outcome. However, it is important to consider whether these policies are sufficient in addressing the underlying structural issues that contribute to poverty and inequality. These structural issues include, but are not limited to, lack of access to education and job training, discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and other factors, inadequate affordable housing and healthcare, low wages, insufficient labor laws, and inadequate social safety nets. While distributive policies can help redistribute resources and opportunities to those in need, they do not necessarily address the underlying structural issues that contribute to poverty and inequality (Arneson, 2008). For

example, progressive taxation can redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, but it does not address issues such as lack of access to education or discrimination in the workplace. Similarly, targeted assistance can provide financial support for those in need, but it does not address the underlying factors that led to their poverty in the first place. Therefore, it is important to consider the limitations of distributive policies in addressing the broader issues of poverty and inequality in society, and to explore other approaches to achieving social justice.

One final critique of the concept of social justice is the argument put forth by Hayek, which posits that the pursuit of social justice ultimately leads to the creation of a totalitarian state (Hayek, 2022). Hayek argues that in order to achieve an equal distribution of resources and rewards among all members of society, a powerful authority must have control over the market and the ability to redistribute resources as deemed necessary. However, this also eliminates incentives for individuals to work and produce, leading to a dependence on the state to allocate tasks and enforce compliance in order to maintain the efficiency of the market. This system bears resemblance to a totalitarian state, in which the state exerts extensive control over the lives and livelihoods of its citizens.

## 4. COMPROMISING BETWEEN JUSTICE AND EFFICIENCY

What then would be the ideal welfare system, an alternative to what social justice aims to achieve through distributive welfare? Despite the continuous emphasis on the importance of free-market throughout the paper, we believe neoliberal welfare not to be the answer on its own. In the same way, by criticizing distributive welfare, we do not argue in any way that distributive welfare is of no use or intrinsically wrong. Developing a just welfare system requires a compromise between distributive and neoliberal approaches and incorporation of elements from both approaches (Evers, 2005).

A crucial component of an ideal welfare system would be the emphasis on competence in the allocation of resources. This entails holding individuals and organizations accountable for the efficient utilization of resources, with a focus on achieving measurable outcomes. This diverges from the traditional distributive welfare system, which often distributes resources based solely on need, without regard for the effectiveness of the programs and services provided. Additionally, this new welfare system would prioritize providing services and support to those in greatest need, while also fostering opportunities for self-sufficiency. This can be achieved through a combination of cash transfers, job training and education programs, and other forms of support. Universal access to healthcare, education, housing and other possible essential services is also a fundamental aspect of this new welfare system. This entails

maintaining publicly-funded healthcare and education system, and ensuring that all individuals have access to necessary medical care and support and education of quality, regardless of their income or socioeconomic status. Emphasizing community-based support systems is also crucial in this new welfare system, as it helps provide individuals with the necessary resources and support to achieve self-sufficiency. This can include the development of community organizations and networks, which provide a range of services and support to individuals and families in need.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has sought to provide a comprehensive examination of the concept of social justice and the use of distributive welfare policies to achieve it. Through an examination of the premises, goals, and principles of social justice, as well an analysis of the issues that arise from using distributive welfare as a tool for social justice, it has been established that there are significant limitations to this approach. Specifically, the focus on redistribution of resources tends to overlook the importance of individual competence, and the potential for such policies to eliminate underlying structural inequalities is low. Furthermore, there are concerns that social justice as a principle may lead to a totalitarian form of governance, as articulated by Hayek.

Given these limitations, it is crucial to consider alternative approaches that may better balance the goals of justice and efficiency in welfare provision. One potential solution is to incorporate elements of both distributive and neoliberal policies, prioritizing individual competence and ensuring universal access to basic goods and services such as education, housing, and healthcare. Ultimately, it is essential to approach the question of welfare provision with a nuanced and multi-faceted perspective, taking into account the complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors that shape the distribution of resources and opportunities in society.

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# Memory of Stone: Thailand and Cambodia's Pursuit of Ontological Security in the Preah Vihear Temple Dispute

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Symbolic spaces not only carry cultural heritage or touristic value in international relations; they also play a central role in how nations define themselves, assert historical continuity, and construct collective memories. Temples, monuments, sacred sites, or historical structures can become "objects of ontological security," reinforcing the integrity of states' identities and providing a sense of existential stability. Disputes arising over such spaces are often interpreted not only as matters of sovereignty or territorial control, but also as struggles to preserve national identity and maintain historical legitimacy. One striking example of this is the long-standing Preah Vihear Temple dispute between Thailand and Cambodia. Built during the Khmer Empire in the 11th century, the temple holds strong symbolic value in the historical narratives and national identity construction of both countries. While the 1962 and 2013 International Court of Justice rulings were legally in Cambodia's favor, the dispute remains vivid in the foreign policy discourses and public opinion of both countries. In this context, the study seeks to answer the following fundamental question: "How does the search for ontological security shape states' foreign policy behavior towards symbolic spaces?" Within the framework of this question, Thailand and Cambodia's policies towards Preah Vihear will be examined through a comparative analysis based on ontological security theory, and theoretical implications regarding the role of symbolic spaces in international relations will be presented. Therefore, this case offers a unique opportunity to observe how states' efforts to preserve their perceptions of national identity and claims of historical continuity, which transcend their material interest calculations, are reflected in their concrete foreign policy choices.

## Historical Background

Relations between Thailand and Cambodia are woven with deep historical ties and recurring political tensions. The history of the two countries has a rich background in terms of both cultural interaction and military competition. The origins of this relationship date back to the Khmer Empire, which ruled from the 9th to the 15th century. This Angkor-based empire had a vast sphere of influence that included not only present-day Cambodia but also eastern regions of Thailand (Higham, 2001). The Preah Vihear Temple, built during this period, is not only a religious site but also considered one of the pinnacle examples of Khmer engineering and architecture.

With the weakening of Angkor in the 15th century, the Ayutthaya Kingdom, established by the Thai people, gained regional power. This shift in power led to Cambodia being caught between Thailand and Vietnam politically and militarily (Kasetsiri, 2003). During the 18th and 19th centuries, the borders between the two countries changed repeatedly; wars and diplomatic pressures constantly reshaped the political map of the region. During this process, strategic and symbolic areas such as Preah Vihear changed hands, but in the cultural memory of the local people, the temple remained a part of their Khmer past.

The balance of power in the region was re-established under the influence of European colonialism. In 1863, Cambodia became a French protectorate. France attempted to define the borders through treaties signed with the Kingdom of Siam (present-day Thailand) in 1904 and 1907. One of the maps used in this demarcation process showed the Preah Vihear Temple on the Cambodian side (Strateescu, 2010). While Thailand did not officially approve this map, it did not raise any serious objections for a long time. However, in the post-independence period, the legitimacy of the map and the precise location of the border became a major point of contention between the two countries.

During the Cold War, the regional security environment further complicated Cambodia-Thailand relations. While Thailand developed close ties with the Western bloc, Cambodia grappled with the devastating effects of the civil war and the Khmer Rouge regime. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the two countries experienced refugee movements, guerrilla activities, and occasionally heated conflict in the border regions (Williams, 2011). While Preah Vihear's prominence on the international agenda diminished during this period, the temple remained a symbol of national identity and sovereignty for both Cambodian and Thai public opinion. In 1962, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Preah Vihear Temple was under Cambodian sovereignty. The decision was based on a 1907 French map, citing Thailand's de facto acceptance of this map (Strateescu, 2013). Thailand was forced to implement the decision, but this was perceived by the public as a "territorial loss." This perception, particularly in nationalist circles, was interpreted as a blow to Thailand's image as a "country that maintains its territorial integrity."

In 2008, Cambodia inscribed the Preah Vihear Temple on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This development provoked strong reactions in Thailand, increasing nationalist pressure on the government and triggering military activity on the border (Williams, 2011). Between 2008 and 2011, tensions erupted between the two countries, sometimes escalating into armed conflict. These events once again demonstrated that the temple is not only a cultural asset but

also a strategic element that consistently figures in the security and foreign policy agendas of both countries.

Although the Preah Vihear dispute between Thailand and Cambodia was resolved in Cambodia's favor by the International Court of Justice's 1962 and 2013 rulings, the issue has not been fully resolved at either the political or social level. Legal rulings have not eliminated the deep identity-based and symbolic tensions between the two countries; on the contrary, these tensions have flared up from time to time. Indeed, violent border clashes around Preah Vihear in July 2025 resulted in the loss of dozens of lives and the displacement of thousands of people. Following these events, the parties declared a ceasefire under ASEAN supervision and signed a 13-point agreement aimed at defusing tensions. Although the details of the agreement have not been disclosed, it is known to include commitments to reduce military tensions, deploy observers to border areas, and keep dialogue channels open. These developments have once again highlighted that the Preah Vihear issue is not merely a legal dispute over a historical heritage site, but also a vibrant symbolic conflict that continues to shape national identities, notions of sovereignty, and regional security dynamics in the present day.

Recent developments reveal that Preah Vihear is not only a historical heritage site, but also a dynamic symbolic space where national identities are reproduced, sovereignty discourses are reinforced, and the mutual security concerns of Thailand and Cambodia are shaped today.

**Ontological Security Framework**

The Preah Vihear dispute demonstrates the historical, cultural, and political ties between Thailand and Cambodia, as well as how these ties are intertwined with perceptions of national identity and sovereignty. These symbolic conflicts, which do not end even with legal solutions, are directly linked to the ways states define themselves and their search for identity continuity, beyond material interests. In this regard, the concept of ontological security, which is gaining increasing attention in international relations literature, offers a powerful analytical framework for understanding these dynamics.

The concept of ontological security originates from the discipline of sociology. Anthony Giddens (1991) defines the concept by referring to individuals' need for "existential continuity" and "identity stability." According to him, ontological security is not merely physical security; it is about individuals feeling consistent and predictable about who they are. This is achieved through the continuity of routines, the familiarity of the environment, and the stability of the self-narrative. One of the first studies to adapt this concept to states in the field of international

relations is Jennifer Mitzen's (2006) article. Mitzen argues that states, like individuals, seek ontological security and therefore shape their foreign policies not only in response to material threats but also to preserve their identity consistency. This approach goes beyond traditional realism's emphasis on "survival" and "physical security," drawing attention to the central role of identity in states' foreign policy behavior. Brent J. Steele (2008) notes that states' ontological security needs often outweigh rational calculations of interest and may even lead them to make decisions that put their material security at risk. According to Steele, when a state's identity narrative is threatened, the measures taken to address this threat may conflict with the logic of physical security.

In the ontological security literature, one of the tools employed to maintain identity stability is the maintenance of routines (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006). By repeating certain behavioral patterns in foreign policy, states reaffirm who they are to both their domestic publics and the international community. In this context, symbolic spaces and historical heritage sites hold particular significance as arenas where national identity is embodied and routines are reproduced. Kinnvall (2004) emphasizes that national identity is reinforced in times of crisis through "ontological security pillars," and these pillars are often historical and cultural symbols. Ontological security theory offers two fundamental concepts for understanding symbolic space disputes: identity continuity and existential anxiety. Identity continuity is the state's ability to maintain consistency over time in its response to the question "who are we?" Existential anxiety emerges when this continuity is threatened. Disputes over spaces of high symbolic value, such as Preah Vihear, activate both dimensions. For Cambodia, the temple is a central fulcrum in postcolonial identity construction. For Thailand, the temple is part of the narrative of "indivisible territorial integrity" and "a country that has never been colonized." Therefore, the need for ontological security plays a decisive role in both countries' continued claims to this site.

Furthermore, the ontological security perspective explains why legal decisions struggle to provide lasting solutions. Mitzen (2006) and Steele (2008) note that states' pursuit of ontological security may lead them to view the material solutions offered by international law as insufficient. This is because the perception of an identity threat does not provide "complete satisfaction" despite legal decisions; in order to satisfy the identity narrative, control of the symbolic sphere or at least political discourse related to this sphere must be achieved.

Finally, an important contribution of ontological security theory is that it can provide a rational explanation for steps in foreign policy that appear irrational. For example, military

tensions around Preah Vihear may be costly and risky for both countries in material terms. However, these steps can provide legitimacy in domestic politics in terms of protecting national identity and reinforcing the sense of existential security. In this context, ontological security provides an indispensable analytical framework for understanding foreign policy struggles over symbolic spaces.

**Case Study: Thailand and Cambodia Perspectives**

The Preah Vihear Temple dispute is not merely a technical matter of demarcating the border between two countries. Rather, it involves a claim to a symbolic space deeply rooted in both countries' historical memories and national identity narratives. Ontological security theory allows us to understand why this situation remains unresolved and, at times, escalates into conflict despite international legal decisions.

For Cambodia, the Preah Vihear Temple is a central element in the reconstruction of national identity and collective memory. The country came under French colonial rule in the 19th century and then faced the devastating effects of the Khmer Rouge regime in the second half of the 20th century. These historical ruptures deepened a sense of "lost glory" within Cambodian society. Temples like Angkor Wat and Preah Vihear are tangible reminders of this lost glory. From an ontological security perspective, Cambodia's claim to Preah Vihear is not only a desire for sovereignty but also an answer to the question "Who are we?" Its inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008 reflects its efforts to gain international recognition and legitimacy. This step also served as an identity affirmation in domestic politics: in the public eye, the temple symbolizes Cambodia's reclaiming of its historical heritage and presenting it to the world. Moreover, Cambodia's discourse in this area is largely centered on the preservation of cultural heritage and the achievement of historical justice. This discourse transcends legal decisions: the state frames its control over the shrine not merely as a "territorial gain" but as the restoration of collective memory. As Kinnvall (2004) has noted in the ontological security literature, such symbolic supports play a critical role in reproducing national identity in times of crisis. In Cambodia, Preah Vihear serves precisely this function.

For Thailand, the Preah Vihear issue is directly related to the preservation of its territorial integrity and the continuity of the "never colonized nation" narrative. Thailand is one of the few Asian states to have retained its formal independence thanks to diplomatic maneuvers with Western colonial powers in the late 19th century. This historical legacy has become a cornerstone of Thai national identity. Therefore, the ICJ's 1962 decision was perceived by the

Thai public not only as a legal loss but also as a blow to this narrative of pride. The emphasis on Preah Vihear as "Thai territory" in nationalist discourses creates a rhetorical space where concepts of sovereignty and national honor converge. This rhetoric has occasionally become a tool used by governments to bolster their support during domestic political crises. As Steele (2008) points out, states can sometimes pursue policies that prioritize identity security over physical security; Thailand's insistence on Preah Vihear is a concrete example of this. From the Thai perspective, the temple is not merely a historical artifact but a concrete extension of the narrative that the state's borders are "natural" and "indivisible." This narrative serves to maintain the routines that ensure continuity in national identity. The maintenance of a military presence in the border region, the opposition to Cambodia's UNESCO bid on diplomatic platforms, and the public portrayal of Preah Vihear as part of Thai cultural heritage are all part of these routines.

Both countries view Preah Vihear as an object of ontological security. However, the meanings they ascribe to this object differ. For Cambodia, the temple is a symbol of postcolonial rebirth and historical legitimacy. For Thailand, the temple is a symbol of indivisible national integrity and sovereignty. This difference makes resolving the dispute difficult because the elements of "identity continuity" that the parties seek to protect overlap on the same site. As Mitzen (2006) notes, states often react harshly to situations that pose threats to their identity narratives to protect their ontological security. This is clearly evident in the case of Preah Vihear: each side can only accept legal or diplomatic solutions to the extent that they do not undermine its own identity narrative. Therefore, even after the 2013 ICJ ruling, the dispute has occasionally escalated into military conflict.

The border clashes that took place in July 2025 and the 13-point agreement signed afterwards demonstrate how strong the parties' ontological security concerns still are. The conflicts were interpreted not only as a practical security issue but also as a perceived threat to the parties' identity integrity. Steps such as a ceasefire and the deployment of ASEAN observers may provide short-term stability; however, from an ontological security perspective, it can be said that a long-term solution will be difficult to achieve unless identity concerns are addressed. For Cambodia, this process presents an opportunity to be recognized and respected as a custodian of cultural heritage on the international stage, while for Thailand, it may be perceived as a show of strength demonstrating that it will not compromise on its sovereignty claims. This difference in perception will continue to shape the parties' positions in future negotiations.

The most important point evident in the Preah Vihear dispute is that legal and diplomatic processes do not completely eliminate ontological security concerns. States can strive to

maintain their identity coherence when it comes to symbolic spaces, to the point of subordinating their material interests. This is clearly observed in Cambodia and Thailand's persistent stance on Preah Vihear. In this context, the Preah Vihear case provides a striking example of the importance of symbolic spaces in international relations and how the need for ontological security shapes foreign policy behavior. This example provides a valuable reference point that can be used not only to understand border disputes in Southeast Asia but also to analyze other international conflicts similarly shaped by cultural heritage.

**Conclusion and Evaluation**

This article sought to answer the fundamental question: "How does the search for ontological security shape states' foreign policy behavior towards symbolic spaces?" Through the Preah Vihear Temple dispute between Thailand and Cambodia, the study revealed how the pursuit of ontological security shapes foreign policy behavior. The findings demonstrate that symbolic spaces are perceived not only as historical and cultural heritage but also as concrete foundations of national identity and historical legitimacy.

For Cambodia, Preah Vihear is a symbol of post-colonial identity construction and the reclaiming of "lost glory." Its inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List is a testament not only to the preservation of cultural heritage but also to the pursuit of international recognition and respect. For Thailand, the temple is a concrete extension of the narrative of "indivisible national unity" and "a nation never colonized." The continued assertion of sovereignty despite ICJ rulings demonstrates that the need for ontological security can shape foreign policy attitudes regardless of legal solutions. For both countries, Preah Vihear is an issue related to the preservation of national identity continuity, beyond material interests. Therefore, the dispute cannot be fully resolved through legal decisions; unless identity concerns are addressed, it resurfaces in various forms. The clashes that occurred in July 2025 and the subsequent 13-article agreement demonstrate that ontological security concerns remain strong and continue to guide the parties' foreign policy behavior.

An ontological security perspective offers two important implications in this case. First, symbolic space disputes are more about preserving identity narratives than about material gains or losses. Second, such disputes require the development of approaches that take identity needs into account, not only for resolution but also for diplomatic and legal tools. Therefore, the Preah Vihear case provides a powerful and illustrative example of how the pursuit of ontological security shapes foreign policy behavior regarding symbolic spaces. This finding can be

considered a comparative reference point in examining international conflicts similarly shaped by cultural heritage.

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**Green Law, Gray Reality: Türkiye's Climate Policy and a New Era in EU Harmonization**

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**Introduction**

As the impacts of climate change accelerate globally, Turkey faces acute environmental, economic, and social challenges, particularly given its geographic vulnerability. This critical juncture demands robust legal and policy frameworks harmonized with international and European Union standards. This analysis examines Turkey's recent Climate Law adoption, its position within international climate regimes, and the unfolding dynamics of green transition across key domestic sectors. The complexities of balancing sustainability, economic competitiveness, and social justice form the core of Turkey's evolving climate governance landscape.

**1. The Adoption and Importance of the Climate Law in Türkiye**

**1.1 The Harmonization Process with the European Union: The Green Deal and Türkiye**

Turkey is one of the countries in the Mediterranean Basin that feels the effects of climate change intensely. The 2024 Climate Report of the General Directorate of Meteorology reveals that average temperatures are rising in the country and extreme weather events are increasing. This situation necessitates urgent and comprehensive steps to be taken in the fight against climate change (Bektaş, 2025:70). Türkiye became a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2004, the Kyoto Protocol in 2009, and the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015 and ratified it in 2021 (Sezik & Dokur, 2023). In order to achieve the 2053 net zero emission target, the first Climate Law proposal was submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and this legal step was an important milestone in the institutionalization of Turkey's climate policies (Bektaş, 2025:70-71). Within the scope of the European Union's Green Deal, Turkey has to comply with the carbon regulations (CBAM) to be applied at the land border. This alignment necessitates sectors such as cement, iron and steel, and aluminum, which have a significant share in Turkey's exports, to reduce their carbon footprints (Edenhofer et al., 2021; World Bank, 2024). Institutional adoption and effective operation of market-based mechanisms such as the ETS (Emissions Trading System) is the key

to cost-effective achievement of environmental goals. The European Union's Green Deal, which aims for climate neutrality by 2050, has been the main reference for the transformation of Turkey's economic, agricultural, energy and industrial policies (Ministry of Commerce, 2025). Turkey's Customs Union relationship with the EU and its high export volume indicate that it has to comply with the CBAM. While carbon pricing to be applied to carbon-intensive products at the border directly affects the competitiveness of the Turkish economy, it creates the necessity of switching to low-carbon technologies targeted in this context (Lexpera, 2025). Compliance obligations under the negotiation heading of Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change) ensure that Turkey's legislation is harmonized with the standards of the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement (Lexpera, 2025).

On July 2, 2025, Turkey adopted the first Climate Law as a serious step in the fight against climate change. This law enables Turkey to establish a strong political and institutional framework based on legally based policies against the climate crisis. The Climate Law essentially includes the goals of increasing environmental sustainability and economic competitiveness in line with Turkey's international climate goals. In the law, regulations were made primarily in the field of carbon markets and emission trading system (ETS), thus aiming to comply with carbon border tax practices (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism - CBAM), which play a critical role in Turkey's integration with the EU. However, the lack of comprehensive regulations in the areas of fires, drought, water resources management and local production draws attention to the shortcomings of the law in terms of inclusiveness (Lexpera, 2025). For Turkey, which has obvious openings in disaster management and precautions, this situation is one of the main indicators of the inadequacy and inadequacy of climate policies, especially in practice, in giving meaning to the environmental benefit factor.

## 2. International Climate Regimes and Türkiye's Position

### 2.1 Green Transformation and Capitalism: A Systemic Critique

Turkey's integration into international climate regimes is shaped on the basis of the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities", and as a developing economy, Turkey demands more flexible targets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared to developed

countries (Özkaya, 2023). Turkey, which ratified the Paris Climate Agreement in 2021 (STM, 2022), is in a complex position as it has to balance development priorities and climate targets. Turkey's goal of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 21% by 2030 below the "everything is fine" scenario, which means preventing the emission increases, not absolute reductions, and lagging behind the more ambitious commitments of the European Union leads to serious criticism (Sezik and Dokur, 2023; STM, 2022; WWF, 2025). In addition, Turkey's official policies in its current form are projected to increase its emissions by 2030, which is incompatible with global climate targets (WWF, 2025; Ecosphere, 2025). The discourse of green transformation is criticized as a new version of the capitalist production system and it is emphasized that it can further deepen socioeconomic dependencies and inequalities, especially in developing countries (Reinaud, 2008). For Turkey, the green transformation is a complex process intertwined with the slow exit from fossil fuels, climate policies that contradict economic growth targets, and cost pressure on vulnerable social segments (Özkaya, 2023; Arnot et al., 2023). Considering that the climate crisis has not only environmental but also intergenerational and social justice dimensions, it is clearly seen that Turkey's climate policies are deficient and insufficient in areas that do not aim to ensure structural justice (Arnot et al., 2023:197; Özkaya, 2023). As a result, Turkey's adaptation process to international climate goals; Current economic structural vulnerabilities are shaped by complex tensions between adaptive capacity and development priorities, and in this context, the risk that green transformation policies will exacerbate social and economic inequalities should be seriously considered. Therefore, Turkey needs to re-evaluate its climate laws and targets not only within the framework of environmental sustainability, but also with an inclusive and equitable socioeconomic transformation perspective (Sezik and Dokur, 2023).

## 2.2 National Politics and the Climate Crisis: Sustainability or Visibility?

While the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility" is generally emphasized within the framework of international climate regimes, the tension between Turkey's development goals and its environmental obligations continues. As part of the capitalist economic paradigm, the green transformation brings with it the intensification of big capital and technological innovations, while inflaming the debates on economic inequalities and global justice (STM, 2022). In Turkey, it is criticized that climate policies remain symbolic rather than concrete actions focused on visual and diplomatic prestige; this situation is considered as an indication that policies that claim sustainability serve different dynamics in

the background. In this context, national climate policy is shaped between economic interests, political expectations and international pressures, and institutional and governance reforms are necessary to develop realistic and effective sustainability policies (STM, 2022). Since the climate crisis also includes socioeconomic and intergenerational justice issues, it is imperative for Turkey to center on structured justice concepts in its climate policies (Özkaya, 2023; Arnot et al., 2023).

## 3. Green Activity and Corporate Sustainability: Greening Sectors in Türkiye

### 3.1 Turkey's Climate Future – Is It Possible to Move from Words to Action?

In Turkey, the Emissions Trading System (ETS) operates as a critical market-based tool designed to guide economic agents toward adopting clean technologies by enforcing a cap on aggregate greenhouse gas emissions and enabling the trade of emission allowances (World Bank, 2024; Edenhofer et al., 2021). Analysis of sectoral competitiveness reveals pronounced heterogeneity: the cement sector displays a robust competitive advantage domestically and internationally, the iron and steel sector maintains a moderate competitive position, whereas the aluminum industry suffers from a notably weak competitive stance; additionally, the electricity and fertilizer sectors are marked by overt competitive disadvantages (Sezik & Dokur, 2023). These sectoral disparities impose significant challenges on climate policy formulation, necessitating differentiated and prioritized approaches that account for the uneven economic impacts and capabilities of each sector. It is increasingly recognized that the pivot toward renewable energy cannot be isolated from the broader energy transition required within material production processes. Hence, integrated strategies encompassing efficiency improvements, technological innovation, and shifts in energy sourcing are fundamental to achieving meaningful decarbonization outcomes. Despite the centrality of the ETS to Turkey's climate governance framework, public comprehension and acceptance of this mechanism remain limited. Empirical evidence from a 2025 nationwide survey indicates that merely 57.7% of respondents appraise current climate policies as "incomplete but progressing positively," a perception held among a predominantly university-educated sample (91.5%)—a datum that underscores the urgency for intensified environmental education and public awareness initiatives (Bektaş, 2025:78–81). This gap in knowledge and engagement presents a critical barrier to the effective societal embedding of ETS and other climate instruments, highlighting

the indispensable role of inclusive communication strategies and stakeholder participation in fostering legitimacy and compliance. The successful implementation of the ETS is contingent upon transparent data management practices, coherent sectoral alignment, and genuine social inclusivity that transcends mere regulatory compliance. Moreover, Turkey's climate trajectory is inextricably linked to its harmonization efforts with the European Union, which require profound legislative and institutional adjustments.

The European Green Deal's ambitious objectives necessitate a transition from symbolic policy visibility toward substantive and verifiable sustainability outcomes, thereby compelling governance models that simultaneously address environmental imperatives, social justice, and economic competitiveness. In this context, Turkey's ability to reconcile intersectoral competitive imbalances, enhance societal environmental literacy, and align its policy architecture with international commitments will be pivotal in shaping its climate governance landscape. The current competitive vigor in the cement industry contrasts sharply with structural deficiencies in aluminum manufacturing, delineating a landscape where long-term climate policy must negotiate these contradictions within the framework of energy availability and consumption patterns (Sezik & Dokur, 2023). Importantly, the climate crisis extends far beyond ecological degradation, embodying a complex multidimensional justice challenge that demands analysis through intersecting social, national, regional, and international socio-economic and socio-cultural perspectives (Arnot et al., 2023:197; Özkaya, 2023). Recognizing this, Turkey's recent climate legislation has accelerated green transformation initiatives across key economic sectors—industrial production, energy generation, agriculture, and transportation—with government policies increasingly anchored in renewable energy investments and greenhouse gas abatement programs (Ministry of Climate, 2025). Concomitantly, burgeoning sustainability awareness within the private and financial sectors has stimulated enhanced funding avenues for projects compliant with the Green Deal framework, signaling a growing integration of environmental criteria within economic decision-making processes (Ministry of Commerce, 2025).

Nevertheless, the efficacy of these policies remains contingent on sensitive management of sectoral heterogeneities, exemplified by differential competitive advantages and resource endowments, which must inform policy calibrations to mitigate unintended economic

dislocations and social inequities (Sezik & Dokur, 2023). Persistent deficits in public understanding of climate mechanisms such as ETS further accentuate the critical need for comprehensive education, capacity-building, and participatory governance methods designed to cultivate broad-based stakeholder engagement and shared ownership of climate objectives (Bektaş, 2025). Looking forward, the imminent enactment of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the operationalization of climate law-integrated markets anticipated in 2026 will institutionalize rigorous economic accounting of carbon emissions and incentivize deeper sustainable development commitments across sectors (Lexpera, 2025; Ministry of Climate, 2025). Achieving the transformative potential of these developments presupposes the translation of legal frameworks into detailed, actionable implementation plans that proactively dismantle sector-specific barriers and reinforce inclusive climate governance. Only through such a multifaceted and nuanced approach can Turkey hope to navigate the intricate socio-economic complexities that characterize its national context, while effectively honoring its international climate responsibilities and advancing toward a sustainable, equitable low-carbon future.

**Conclusion**

Turkey's adoption of its first Climate Law and its ongoing alignment with European Union climate policies represent significant milestones in addressing the escalating challenges posed by climate change. However, the true test lies in the effective translation of these legal frameworks into concrete actions that reconcile environmental sustainability with economic competitiveness and social justice. Addressing sectoral disparities, enhancing public engagement, and ensuring full compliance with international obligations will be critical determinants of Turkey's ability to foster a climate-resilient and equitable green transition. The effectiveness of this transition depends on moving beyond symbolic measures toward justice-centered, inclusive, and multidimensional strategies. Turkey's climate policies must be shaped by a holistic approach that not only prioritizes environmental sustainability but also accounts for the structural economic vulnerabilities and social inequalities within the country. While transforming carbon-intensive sectors and implementing market-based mechanisms are essential components, lasting success is unattainable without widespread social awareness and participatory governance. Furthermore, given the intergenerational and social justice dimensions of the climate crisis, structural justice must be at the core of policy formulation. The adoption of a governance model that balances national interests with international climate

commitments, recognizes sectoral competitive heterogeneities, and mitigates social vulnerabilities is imperative for sustainable development. In conclusion, Turkey's legal and institutional advancements will only lead to a climate-resilient, economically competitive, and socially inclusive green transformation if they are underpinned by transparent, participatory, and justice-oriented implementation processes. Such a comprehensive and integrated approach will enable Turkey to overcome domestic structural barriers, contribute meaningfully to global climate goals, and facilitate the sustained convergence of political will and societal support.

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# Analysis of Türkiye's Economic Diplomacy in Africa from a Realist Approach

*Ata Ergün*

## Introduction

In the changing world order, global actors are using many tools to enhance their reach in different regions and theatres. Economic diplomacy, especially in recent years, emerges as one of the most prominent ways to achieve this goal since it helps to build peaceful and sustainable relations while attaining realist ambitions. Rather than competing through hard power, which might cause confrontation between rivals and entail more risks, economic diplomacy offers a safer alternative to expand power through trade, investments, and the involvement of non-governmental actors. From Latin America to Southeastern Asia and Africa, global powers plan and execute various and multidimensional programs, along with creating regional trade blocs in the context of damaged globalisation. China's Belt and Road Initiative, the EU's Global Gateway Project, or regional trade agreements like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) are major examples. Among these examples, Africa is an important theatre due to its colonial past, the interest of emerging powers, and its economic potential. Türkiye is one of these powers that is working to strengthen or build its ties with Africa through economic diplomacy. Even though its engagement with the region started relatively late compared to others, Türkiye executes its policy through different means and institutions. Apart from the economic gains of the engagement, Türkiye aims to expand its political ties to become a more independent political power in the changing global context, fill the power vacuum in specific parts to expand its sphere of influence, and ensure its access to energy resources along with critical raw materials, which are essential for the future of its economic security.

## What is Economic Diplomacy?

In the literature, there are different views about the scope of economic diplomacy. As Bergeijk and Moons (2018) underline in their paper, some scholars put the trade and investment aspect of economic diplomacy into commercial or business diplomacy while narrowing the scope only to decisions in the WTO (World Trade Organisation). Moreover, the topic is mostly examined from the economic perspective in the literature, especially by the prominent scholars of the field (Bayne and Woolcock, 2003). In this essay, the field is analysed from the realist perspective, which can be understood through the explanation of Okano-Heijmans (2011): Economic diplomacy is the diplomacy that employs economic resources in pursuit of a foreign policy agenda. In other words, states use economic resources, either as a carrot or a stick, in the

international arena for foreign policy goals. It might be a short-term strategy like sanctions, import duties, or credits, or it can be long-term FDIs (Foreign Direct Investment), trade agreements, etc.

There is a broad range of tools within economic diplomacy, and different actors can be involved in the process. When diplomacy is executed through the state, diplomatic missions, high-level visits between the countries, and various state agencies can participate and play a role. Along with the state, the private sector plays a role as well through trade councils between the companies of partner countries. As seen in Türkiye's example, there are many trade councils between Türkiye and African countries, as well as Türkiye's trade council with the African Union, coordinated by DEİK (Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey), a business diplomacy agency of Türkiye. Besides actors, infrastructural investments, development projects, and direct flights are important tools apart from trade since they enhance the connection of partner countries to the global value chain. As a result, economic diplomacy aims to create a comprehensive partnership that includes not only trade but also interstate cooperation in development and infrastructure, and even sometimes in security.

As observed, economic diplomacy is not merely a tool for increasing trade but a strategic instrument for building comprehensive economic partnerships between states. This comprehensive, and in some cases, institutional relationship also has a political character. Regional or global powers invest in the infrastructure of the partner countries, increase the bilateral trade volume, allocate funds and credits to create economic dependencies, or at least to access economic resources. In line with this, Goldthau (2010) emphasises that countries use investments and trade to access the strategic resources of other countries. So, the lender/investor country can access strategic resources with more concessions, access strategic infrastructure, and expand its sphere of influence with its political power over that country. However, depending on the context and actors, it might turn into a symbiotic relationship between countries where both parties can benefit and not seek to exploit the weaker one. Still, these two possible cases converge at one point: the use of economic resources for geopolitical goals — in other words, "Geoeconomics."

Geoeconomics is the intersection of economics and geopolitics. In other words, it is the use of economic resources for geopolitical goals (Bergeijk and Moons, 2018; Okano-Heijmans, 2011), or the intersection of economics and security considerations (Herranz-Surrallés, 2024). There is a rich literature on the use of geoeconomics in power rivalries. Rather than using hard power means to achieve geopolitical ends, great powers use geoeconomics as a soft-power tool,

as seen in China's Belt and Road Initiative and its Africa policy in general (Ahrens and Kalkschmied, 2021) or the EU's Global Gateway Project (Bilal & Teevan, 2024; Furness & Keijzer, 2022). Hard power means military interventions or planned coups in the sphere of influence which might irritate the public, be costly, and not be sustainable in the long term. However, geoeconomic soft-power tools would create economic win–win situations, positively affect the image of the great power among the partner countries' public, and would be beneficial for the political elites of the partner country, depending on the partner. These fortify the political influence of the great power on its partners and bring about a more sustainable relationship or a solidified sphere of influence.

**Global Context and Theatres**

Okano-Heijmans (2011) emphasises that the economic diplomacy of a country is highly shaped by the global context, theatres, and the actors. The world order is changing to multipolarity after the US hegemony since the Cold War. While Zakaria (1998), explaining the emergence of the US as a world power, argues that rising economic power brings more political ambitions. Today, China and other emerging economies aim to expand their political influence. In these circumstances, states are repositioning themselves to adapt to this changing order. Unlike in the past, the main means of power is economic diplomacy. As mentioned before, either to expand or to protect their sphere of influence, powers use economic resources. Unlike in the past, economic resources are the main tool. As a rising regional power, Türkiye works to become a more independent player in the changing world order and looks for more political partnerships in its near geographies, especially in Africa (Abrami and Gasco, 2024; Aksoy, Çevik, Yaşar, 2022).

The policies might vary across theatres (Okano-Heijmans, 2011). Its richness in critical raw materials, economic potential, growing market, and the strategic location of specific countries make Africa a theatre for geopolitical rivalries. Powers like the EU and China compete with their economic diplomacy tools in the region; this rivalry is seen as the New Scramble for Africa in the literature (Carmody, 2020; Bature, 2025). Among these powers, Türkiye is an important actor in the region, increasing its diplomatic and economic ties since the beginning of the 21st century. While European countries have the shadow of a colonial past in Africa, China is highly criticised for its exploitative debt-trap diplomacy. Unlike these powers, Türkiye built its relations with the region in a symbiotic way as an equal partner. With its broad diplomatic missions, trade councils, high-level visits, and increasing trade and investments in the region, Türkiye emerges as a more powerful actor in world politics, might fill the gap of the

former colonial powers, and secure access to strategic energy sources and CRM (Critical Raw Materials) in the region.

**Türkiye and Africa**

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Türkiye has drastically increased the number of its diplomatic missions in Africa. While in 2002 Türkiye had 12 embassies, now the number has reached 44. Türkiye's engagement with the region is very multi-dimensional and multi-levelled. There are bilateral and regional trade councils between Türkiye and 48 African countries, frequent presidential and ministerial high-level visits, investments of Turkish companies in infrastructure, FDIs, and partnerships in strategic fields like energy and CRM (Aksoy, Çevik, Yaşar, 2022; DEİK, n.d.; TABEF, n.d.). Along with economic diplomacy, Türkiye also aims to increase its footprint in the region through military bases, security agreements, arms trade, and training camps in African countries. So, the engagement does not only have an economic nature but serves a more comprehensive political agenda with geopolitical ambitions. To become a more independent actor in the changing world, using opportunities in strategic parts of the continent and having access to strategic resources for future economic security can be regarded as one of the realist explanations of Türkiye's presence in the region.

To better understand economic diplomacy, examining the global context is important since it shows the geopolitical rivalries and helps to explain the policies of states. Nowadays, there is a shift from unipolarity to multipolarity, and countries aim to expand their political and economic power in the international arena. Türkiye, as a regional power, also aims to adapt and re-position itself in the changing world order to be a more independent player in world politics. While sustaining relations with classic partners and allies, it is expanding its political and economic network by building sustainable and institutional relations with African countries. The investments, increasing trade volumes, and high-level visits help Türkiye build trust between countries, giving birth to a culture of collaboration. The culture of collaboration and cooperation, achieved through economic partnership, can lead to more comprehensive partnerships and might turn into close political relations. Economy and development are seen as two of the main pillars of Türkiye's engagement in Africa (Parlar Dal and Dipama, 2023). Even if economic diplomacy comes after security partnerships in some politically unstable countries, there is no doubt that development aid, grants, and investments positively affect relations.

After the global context, theatre is the second factor to examine. It is not easy to tell if there is a power vacuum in Africa, but many sources emphasise the decline of the West's influence in the region. Western countries are gradually losing their influence on their former colonies, and other powers work to take their place either through economic means, as China does, or by backing coups and giving security assistance, as Russia does (Brown, 2024; Merritt, 2024). It shows that the space being left by the former colonial powers is going to be filled. Even though it is not the main one, Türkiye is one of the prominent actors to fill that gap (Lebovich and van Heukelingen, 2023). Türkiye does not have a colonial past and approaches African countries as an equal partner, as claimed by being an "equal, transparent, and mutually beneficial" partner (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2024). In the classical realist approach, trade between countries is a zero-sum game. Realism emphasises the relative gains, and one party is destined to gain less compared to the other, which makes it the loser in that game. However, in Türkiye's economic diplomacy, not the African partners but the former "partners" of these countries will be the losers of this zero-sum game. Even though there is no balance in trade between Türkiye and African countries, as shown in the numbers of TABEF (Turkey-Africa Business and Economic Forum) (n.d.), with its humanitarian aid, grants, infrastructure investments, and other security and military assistance, African countries benefit from the partnership with Türkiye. In this scenario, both parties gain, like in a positive-sum game. However, while Türkiye and emerging powers increase their activity in the region, former colonial powers lose their influence. So, it becomes a zero-sum game between new and former partners of Africa. In the last years, France's influence on Sub-Saharan and Western Africa has declined, especially with the recent coups. The leaders of these countries choose to cooperate with new partners, and Türkiye also takes its place among these new players in the region through economic and military assistance.

Another thing that inflames interstate rivalry is the race to access critical raw materials. CRM is vital for future green technologies and electrification. From renewable energy to batteries and the automotive industry, resources like lithium, cobalt, and nickel are essential. CRM is even critical for the defence industry (NATO, 2024). The essentiality of these resources makes them very strategic and important for the economic security of states, and economic security is directly related to national security (Buzan et al., 1998). So, access to these resources is a matter of national security for states. This rivalry is another part of the competition over Africa. There are CRM-rich countries in Africa, and many powers, like China and EU states, are competing for these resources. Türkiye is also an active player in this matter. There are 17

bilateral agreements (only 8 of them are publicly available) between Türkiye and African states for the exploration of mineral reserves (Reich, 2025). Furthermore, in the APRI (Africa Policy Research Institute) paper, it is mentioned that these agreements also include joint projects, investment promotions, and capacity-building cooperation (Ibid, 2025). Not only government-affiliated companies but also private initiatives, like the Türkiye–Africa Business Forum, work for the value chain integration between Türkiye and the continent (Ibid, 2025). In this case, agreements that facilitate exploration, joint projects, and finally value chain integration of Türkiye and Africa directly serve the economic security of Türkiye by providing strategic and essential raw materials.

**Broader Picture**

In Türkiye's Africa policy, economic diplomacy is not the only tool. With the opening of military bases, providing military training, defence agreements, and arms sales, Türkiye helps African countries strengthen their military capabilities and fight against insurgencies (Yıldırım Çınar, 2025; Aksoy, Çevik, Yaşar, 2022). Furthermore, Türkiye takes part in mediation efforts in several issues from the Horn of Africa to Central Africa. Along with security issues, Türkiye is providing help in many other aspects. TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) carries out projects in agriculture, health, and protecting Turkish heritage in the region, while the Maarif Foundation is providing and improving education in African countries. As seen, economic diplomacy is only a part of the broader picture. Türkiye is using different means, several institutions, and works in diverse areas in Africa. Being an equal partner working for mutual benefit, these efforts aim to make Türkiye a more influential player in the region. So, when these policies are evaluated together, it is evident that they serve geopolitical targets. It means that economic diplomacy is a geoeconomic tool used for the geopolitical targets of Türkiye.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, Türkiye's economic diplomacy in Africa shows how economic tools can be used for wider political aims, which is in line with the realist view. In today's world, where power is shifting towards multipolarity, Türkiye tries to build new political and economic partnerships, lower its dependence on old allies, and secure important resources like energy and critical raw materials for the future. Unlike former colonial powers or countries that are criticised for exploitative policies, Türkiye presents itself as an equal partner. This approach helps it gain trust and forge stronger ties with African states. Through investments, trade deals,

and cooperation in infrastructure, as well as defence and development projects, Türkiye creates both economic and political connections. The race for critical raw materials and key infrastructure also shows the competitive side of Africa's geopolitics. For Türkiye, gains in these areas often mean a loss for former colonial actors. However, for African countries, the cooperation can bring benefits in trade, development, and security, making it closer to a win–win relationship. Combining economic diplomacy with aid projects, cultural exchanges, and military cooperation gives Türkiye a strong and multi-dimensional presence in the region. Overall, Türkiye's Africa policy is an example of how economic diplomacy works together with other tools to reach geopolitical goals. As competition between global and regional powers grows, Africa will continue to be an important area where Türkiye can strengthen its role as an active, independent, and influential actor in world politics.

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**The Need for a Paradigm Shift in Cyprus: The Two-State Solution as the Only Untried Solution in the Graveyard of Diplomats**

*Buket Er Akyol*

## Introduction

Cyprus is an island in the Eastern Mediterranean, with Türkiye to the north, Greece to the northwest, Syria and Lebanon to the east, Israel and Palestine to the southeast and Egypt to the south. The Island has hosted many civilizations over thousands of years due to its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia, and has been ruled by the Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, the Eastern Roman Empire, the Arab Caliphates, the French Lusignans and Venetians, and for over three centuries by the Ottoman Empire. After the Ottoman Empire leased the Island to the British in 1878, and the British annexed the Island in 1914, conflicts began between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots that continue to this day. This article discusses peace initiatives regarding the Cyprus issue, the reasons for their failures, and the role of international actors, by addressing the differences in narratives and conflicts between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. Considering the results of these peace initiatives and the current situation on the Island, it seems impossible to achieve a permanent peace in the Cyprus issue by conducting peace negotiations with a biased stance from the outset, without developing an impartial and inclusive approach to the narratives and problems of both sides. For this reason, for the sake of the peaceful co-existence of the two peoples of Cyprus, the biased stance of international actors should be abandoned and the two-state solution based on the right to self-determination should be considered as a paradigm shift towards a solution.

## Competing Narratives and Root Causes of Conflict in Cyprus

Following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, Cyprus was leased to the British at the 1878 Berlin Congress and annexed by the British in 1914. Türkiye recognized the Island's annexation by the British in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. While the early years of British colonial rule were relatively free of conflict, over time, both communities, ruled by the colonial rule of a foreign nation, developed stronger ties to their homelands and developed ethnopolitical aspirations. So much so that, the Greek Cypriots defended *enosis*, which envisaged unification with Greece and the Turkish Cypriots defended *taksim*, which envisaged the north of the Island becoming a part of Türkiye. Following the end of British colonial rule, the Republic of Cyprus was established in 1959 through the London and Zurich Agreements signed between the United Kingdom, Türkiye, and Greece, and the

Turkish and Greek communities of Cyprus. These Agreements established the status of Cyprus as an independent state and ratified the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus. In addition, the Treaty of Guarantee was signed between the United Kingdom, Türkiye and Greece in 1959, thus placing the responsibility on the United Kingdom, Türkiye and Greece as guarantor powers to prevent the unification or partition of Cyprus with any other state. Just three years later, in 1963, Greek Cypriot President Makarios attempted to amend the Constitution and took steps to reduce the representation of Turkish Cypriots in the administration. Subsequently, the Greek Cypriot administration, in violation of the Constitution, excluded Turkish Cypriots from the legislative, executive, and judicial organs in 1963 (Işıksal, 2019). During this period, Turkish Cypriots were also denied access to public services such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare, and subjected to violence such as the massacre of the Turkish Cypriots in 1963 Bloody Christmas (Işıksal, 2024).

This spiral of deadlock, fueled by conflicts, massacres, and displacement between these two communities, continued. The extreme nationalist EOKA, which defended for *enosis* and the cleansing of the Island from the Turkish Cypriots, was supported and armed by the military junta in Greece, and Greece even secretly sent troops to the Island (U.S. Department of State, 1975). On 15 July 1974, EOKA made a coup d'état against the Makarios government and proclaimed the establishment of the Hellenic Republic of Cyprus. Makarios fled the Island and called on Türkiye and the United Kingdom, acting as guarantors, to intervene. So much so that on July 19, he even made a speech at the United Nations Security Council, calling for Greece to end its invasion and withdraw its troops. Since EOKA aimed for unification with Greece and posed an imminent threat to the life of Turkish Cypriots, Türkiye, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Treaty of Guarantee, launched an operation in Cyprus on July 20. While this operation did not bring permanent peace to between the two communities on the Island, it at least stopped the bloodshed for decades. On 2 August 1975, in the negotiations held in Vienna, under the auspices of the United Nations, a population exchange agreement was signed between community leaders Rauf Denktaş and Glafcos Clerides. Thus, Turkish Cypriots in the south and Greek Cypriots in the north were displaced through this population exchange. Ultimately, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus declared its independence in 1983 with a unanimous decision taken by the Assembly, exercising its right to self-determination. The United Nations Security Council, in resolution 541 and 550, defined the declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as a separatist act and called on other states not to

recognize. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is currently a de facto independent republic, whose independence is recognized only by Türkiye.

Following all these events, Greek Cypriots hold Türkiye's military intervention on July 20 responsible for the Island's current division and the stalemate in peace initiatives. Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, attribute the Island's division to Makarios' attempt to amend the Constitution in 1963 to reduce the representation of the Turkish Cypriots, and blame the subsequent removal of Turkish Cypriots from power, the violent incidents, and ultimately the EOKA coup d'état on July 15. Indeed, according to the Athens Court of Appeal's decision numbered 2658/79, dated 21 March 1979, "... The Turkish military intervention in Cyprus which was carried out in accordance with the London and Zurich Agreements was legal. Turkey, as one of the Guarantor powers, had the right to fulfil her obligations. The real culprits... are the Greek Officers who engineered and staged a coup and prepared the conditions for this intervention." (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2012). Another difference in the Cyprus issue is the disagreement regarding minority and representation. So much so that the Greek Cypriots want to define the Turkish Cypriots as a minority and do not even accept the formula such as a two-thirds Greek Cypriots and one-third Turkish Cypriots presidency in each term and representation in the parliament with this ratio (McGarry & Loizides, 2021). Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, define themselves not as a minority but as a constituent nation in the Island. Indeed, the fact that the Turkish Cypriots constitute a population too large to be defined as a minority, around one-third, and that their demands for power-sharing commensurate with their population have been rejected for decades, perpetuates the dispute in Cyprus. Although the term minority is generally understood as being numerically small or lack of political, economic and social dominance, it actually has no universal definition. It can be understood from the examples of Apartheid South Africa, Fiji, or Northern Ireland before the 2000s that being numerically small does not mean anything in the definition of minority. Further, after liberation from the British colony, it is also difficult to say that either side has really gained dominance over the other on the Island. In this regard, one of the main reasons for the failures of the 57-year negotiation process is the unwillingness of the Greek Cypriots to share power and prosperity with the Turkish Cypriots (Işıksal, 2024). So much so that, on 3 February 2008, in the Sunday Mail, former Greek Cypriot Foreign Minister Nicos A. Rolandis proudly admitted that the Greek Cypriot side had rejected at least 15 United Nations documents for a solution, including the London and Zurich Agreements through amending the Constitution (Işıksal, 2024). Indeed, regarding the 1959 London and Zurich Agreements, the "Greek

Cypriots saw the Agreements as the first step towards *enosis*", rather than becoming a federal and consociational state (Loizides, 2018, p.162).

**Peace Negotiations and the Causes of Repeated Failure**

Cyprus is composed of two deeply divided societies. In such a plural society, it is inevitable to resort to the consociational principles when developing a democratic governance formula to unite these sub-societies. Indeed, it is widely accepted that democracy is difficult to implement in multinational and multiethnic states and that special strategies are required in such states for real democracy (McCrudden & O'Leary, 2013). For this reason, "applying the consociational principles is the choice between self-determination and predetermination of the constituent groups in the power-sharing system" (Lijphart, 1995, p.275). Otherwise, that is, if a formula for living in unity cannot be found, there will be no other way than for the peoples to establish independent states based on their right to self-determination. Therefore, power-sharing and group autonomy in a deeply divided society, in other words consociational democracy, is an indispensable requirement of democracy, especially in ethnically divided countries (Lijphart, 2004). In terms of achieving consociational democracy in Cyprus, the peace initiative that comes closest to peace was the Annan Plan in 2004. The Annan Plan referendum was held on 24 April 2004 with a high turnout. The Plan was approved by 65% of Turkish Cypriots and rejected by 76% of Greek Cypriots. The result of the referandum clearly showed that "while the Turkish Cypriot side has the necessary good will", however, the Greek Cypriot side is unwilling "to share power and accept the political equality of the Turkish Cypriots" (Sözen & Özersay, 2007, p.139).

One of the main reasons for this result was the European Union's failure to use "the carrot of accession to the Union" effectively regarding the Cyprus issue and its hasty acceptance of Cyprus as a member (McEvoy, 2014, p.63). The incentive of European Union membership significantly increased the appeal of the Annan Plan for Turkish Cypriots, as it offered better economic opportunities and ended their isolation in the midst of a major economic crisis (Bahcheli, 2004). However, once it became clear that Cyprus was going to join the European Union regardless of whether it remained divided, a strong incentive for Greek Cypriots to accept the Annan Plan removed (Curtis & Fella, 2022). As the referendum results on unification prove, this situation provided the opposite incentive for the Greek Cypriots. Indeed, the European Union could have used this carrot as a great leverage in exchange for resolving the Cyprus issue, but it went in vain (McGarry & Loizides, 2021). Therefore, the European Union should have adopted a more balanced approach to the Cyprus issue and established explicit standards

for the Greek Cypriot side to resolve its disputes as a necessary step towards full membership (Öniş, 2008). However, the European Union has not exerted any pressure on the Greek Cypriot side to find a solution to the Cyprus issue, and now this membership makes it even more difficult to find a fair and lasting solution in Cyprus (Işıksal, 2019). There is still no pressure or incentive for the Greek Cypriot side to reach a compromise on a solution to the Cyprus issue. On the contrary, the Greek Cypriot side is using European Union membership as a stick against the already economically, politically and even culturally isolated Turkish Cypriots. For example, the Greek Cypriot side blocked "the Commission's two draft regulations on direct trade and financial assistance to the Turkish Cypriots which aimed at reducing the economic disparities between the north and the south of the Island" (Sözen & Özersay, 2007, p.139). This hasty acceptance has also led to tensions in relations between the European Union and Türkiye because this acceptance made European Union membership much more difficult for Türkiye and therefore no longer an incentive in negotiations (Tocci, 2004). For example, the Greek Cypriot side demands Türkiye to extend the customs union to the Greek Cypriot side, but Türkiye rejects to open its ports because Türkiye does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots still live under heavy embargoes. Another example is that Türkiye's membership in NATO and the Greek Cypriot side's participation in the EU Political and Security Committee sometimes affect cooperation opportunities between them.

This hasty acceptance by the European Union has also raised considerable controversy. Indeed, the Greek Cypriot side joined without having full control over all areas it claimed to be under its jurisdiction, and this contradicts the fundamental principles of the European Union and also the principles of international law. In accordance with international law, the membership of the Republic of Cyprus violates both Article 8 of the London and Zurich Agreements and Article 50 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus adopted by these Agreements. According to these, the Greek Cypriot president and the Turkish Cypriot vice-president, "separately or jointly, shall have the right of final veto an any law or decision concerning foreign affairs, except the participation of the Republic of Cyprus in international organizations and pacts of alliance in which Greece and Turkey both participate, or concerning defence and security." Similarly, according to Article 1 of the Treaty of Guarantee, "It undertakes not to participate, in whole or in part, in any political or economic union with any State whatsoever." Furthermore, this acceptance, which clearly contradicts international law, also contradicts the European Union's own practice and principles, and criteria applied to candidate countries. Indeed, the European Union has asked that Central and Eastern European

countries resolve "their border and minority disputes before their accession through the Balladur Stability pact" (Işıksal, 2019, p.124). Another controversy is that, with this acceptance, the European Union has deemed the Greek Cypriot administration the successor to the Republic of Cyprus, thereby approving all its previous policies, including the dismissal of Turkish Cypriots from the legislative, executive, and judicial organs of the Republic of Cyprus (Işıksal, 2019). In this regard, this hasty and biased acceptance not only damages the credibility and reputation of the European Union but also weakens its future role in resolving the Cyprus issue by reinforcing the deadlock.

Another reason for the failure of the Annan Plan was the change of the Greek Cypriot administration from Glafcos Clerides, who supported the Annan Plan, to Tassos Papadopoulos during the Annan process, and Papadopoulos's statements against the Annan Plan, saying, the Annan Plan means "accepting the occupation and the invasion" (Direkli, 2022, p.43). So much so that such statements have become widespread in the media and in the discourses of politicians, even in extreme forms such as "the Annan Plan was only fit for Africans not for an EU-member-state-elect that deserved a 'European solution'" (Adamides & Constantinou, 2012, p.13). On the other hand, it is frequently emphasized that Russia had an influence behind this change of stance. So much so that the Greek Cypriot Foreign Minister, Yorgos Yakovou, visited Moscow shortly before the referendum. Following this meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that "the EU accession to the Republic of Cyprus would harm Russian entrepreneurs, and large transfers of funds could be made through the off shore system in Cyprus, and that money could return to Moscow through fake companies, which could cause major problems" (Direkli, 2022, p.45). In fact, a few years after its accession to the European Union, the claim of Russian influence in the rejection of the Annan Plan were strengthened by the fact that Southern Cyprus controversially granted EU citizenship to wealthy foreigners, mostly Russians, and even allowed the Russian mafia to launder money in Southern Cyprus, which was then transferred to Greek banks by purchasing treasury bonds, leading to the 2012-2013 crisis that destabilized almost the entire Eurozone (Dettmer & Reiermann, 2012). Moreover, according to a research by Der Spiegel in 2023, sanctioned Russian oligarchs use Southern Cyprus as a kind of back door to the European Union, and the FBI reported its first findings in March 2025, and the investigation is still ongoing (Baumann & Christoph, 2023; Associated Press, 2024).

After the 2004 Annan Plan and over 50 years of bi-communal federation negotiations, the 2017 Crans-Montana Talks have also yielded no results and shown that Greek Cypriots are not open to any formula that includes power-sharing with Turkish Cypriots. In this respect, it is seen that Greek Cypriots do not want to lose their status quo in Cyprus and do not want to share their right to exist, which has been strengthened with European Union membership (Direkli, 2022). Thus, by arguing that the Greek Cypriot side does not accept the political equality and effective participation of Turkish Cypriots in the governance of Cyprus, then there is no alternative excluding that of the two-sovereign states; the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Ersin Tatar, presented his official proposal for a two-state solution to the Cyprus issue, along with the 6-Point Roadmap, at the informal 5+1 talks held in Geneva in April 2021. Thereupon, on 3 January 2024, UN Secretary-General António Guterres presented his report without any reference to the solution model and appointed María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar as his Personal Envoy on Cyprus by stating her role on determining the 'common ground' for resuming peace talks (Kaymak, 2024). On 12 July 2024, Personal Envoy María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar completed her duty by submitting her report to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres. This report was not shared with the public or the parties. However, a subsequent statement from the UN Spokesperson's Office, referring María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar's findings, officially stated for the first time that there is no common ground among the leaders for progress on the Cyprus issue (United Nations Secretary-General, 2024). On 2 May 2025, María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar was reappointed as the Personal Envoy on Cyprus. The Geneva Talks are currently ongoing with the informal 5+1 talks organized by UN Secretary-General António Guterres with Turkish Cypriot President Ersin Tatar, Greek Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides, and the guarantor states, Türkiye, Greece, and the United Kingdom. Within the framework of the 6-Point Roadmap, these talks focus on trust-building rather than a solution, reaching agreements on issues such as the opening of crossing points, demining operations, a solar energy project, environmental and climate initiatives, the establishment of a youth committee, and cemetery restoration.

**Insisting on a Biased Approach to the Reality of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus: A Paradigm Shift for the Future of Peace in Cyprus**

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus represents a strong example of a well-functioning democracy. Despite being subjected to international isolation and heavy embargoes and therefore dependent on Türkiye, Turkish Cypriots have developed their own forms of democratic practice that differ from the Türkiye, even though their linguistic and cultural ties

remain strong at the popular level (Bahcheli, 2010). The first factor in their establishment of a developed democracy is the 1974 division, which "Turkish Cypriots became physically concentrated in one area and hence better able to preserve their identity and culture and govern themselves" (Bahcheli, 2010, p.145). Thus, as institutions of self-governance expanded and developed, so too did their self-confidence, faith in their leaders, and their sense of difference from mainland Türkiye (Bahcheli, 2010). The second factor is the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which declared its separate statehood, providing them "with both a powerful incentive and new state instruments for democratic development, identity formation and the articulation of their national interests" (Bahcheli, 2010, p.145).

Considering the fact that it is necessary to overcome the non-negotiability in peace processes by finding "a compromise formula in which each side compromises only over what it can", Turkish Cypriots approved the Annan Plan, which proposed consociational democracy under a federal state, at the expense of their independence and security (Zalzberg, 2024, p.317). In this regard, Turkish Cypriots made the maximum compromise they could during both the 2004 Annan Process and the 2017 Crans-Montana Talks. Indeed, as polls show, Turkish Cypriots "oppose reunion under a unitary framework" and have "strong loyalty to the rights and recognition of the TRNC" (Moralıoğlu, 2024, p.48; Sonan et al., 2020). On the other hand, the Greek Cypriots's rejection of any power-sharing formula not only leads to the failure of peace initiatives and turns Cyprus into a 'graveyard of diplomats', but also undermines the essence of democracy (Lindahl, 2019). As Mill argues, democracies are incompatible with multinational states (Mill, 2015). Therefore, implementing democracy in multinational and multiethnic states requires specific strategies, which are consociational principles in terms of power-sharing and group autonomy (Lijphart, 2004; McCrudden & O'Leary, 2013; McEvoy & O'Leary, 2013). For this, one path is the "liberal integartionist approach", which emphasizes "majority rule and minority rights", and is based on "a sense of common citizenship" (McCrudden & O'Leary, 2013, p.1). For this path, apart from the difficulty of defining a minority, there has never been a case of either side ruling over the other in over half a century. Indeed, regarding the common sense of citizenship, while there are some cultural similarities between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, this path seems impossible due to their linguistic and religious differences, and, more importantly, the fact that they have established their own governance for over half a century. The second path is federalism (McCrudden & O'Leary, 2013). Considering the failed peace initiatives in Cyprus and the divisions that these have deepened, it can also no longer be said that this path is possible for both communities. In this

regard, "the opposite of power sharing is power's monopolization by a person, faction, group, organization, or party", meaning the transformation of democracy into "tyrannies, despotisms, military autocracies, monarchies, lordships, papacies, theocracies, and one-party dictatorships" (McEvoy & O'Leary, 2013, p.2). This is why critics of consociational democracy fail to offer a viable alternative. Because alternatives cannot avoid devolving into the tyranny of the majority.

Turkish Cypriots still continue to live under international isolation and heavy embargoes. Indeed, in 2022, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus became an observer of the Organization of Turkic States under the threats of the European Union against both Turkish Cypriots and Türkiye (Kaymak, 2024). Similarly, the opening of representative offices in Southern Cyprus by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which the first two are members and the last one is an observer of the Organization of Turkic States, following the 2025 EU-Central Asia Summit, where the European Union's $12 billion investments in Central Asia were discussed, raises questions about how much longer the European Union will violate its own values on the Cyprus issue. It is concerning that a nation, despite having established a democratic state based on self-determination, participated in all peace talks for over half a century, and even approved the Annan Plan, are forced into such inhumane isolation. Indeed, similar objections are emerging, albeit to a lesser extent, in Europe. Since 2021, former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has stated that the embargo imposed on Turkish Cypriots is too harsh and that if next peace talks fail to yield results, a two-state solution should be considered (Kaymak, 2024; Straw, 2023).

The rejection of proposals for consociational democracy and the ultimate failure of peace initiatives have left the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus with no other option but a two-state solution. The 1933 Montevideo Convention, as "the most widely accepted formulation of the criteria of Statehood in international law", stipulates that the country should possess a permanent population, a defined territory, government and capacity to enter into relations with other States (Shaw, 2008, p.198). While the first three criteria are the constitutive elements for statehood, the last one is declaratory and generally not considered a prerequisite for being a state (Hobach et al., 2007). In this regard, it can be said that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus embodies all the constitutive elements of statehood and that its non-recognition by states other than Türkiye does not prejudice its statehood. Moreover, the principle of self-determination, guaranteed by Article 1 of the 1945 United Nations Charter, was also clearly stated in General Assembly Resolution No. 1514 of 1960 as 'self-determination is a legal right'. Furthermore, the Articles 1 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic,

Social and Cultural Rights, and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political both emphasize the right of peoples to self-determination, the right of peoples to freely determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social, and cultural development, and General Assembly Resolution No. 2625 of 1970 also stated that all peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social, and cultural development without external interference. In this respect, the Turkish Cypriots have gone beyond demonstrating their will to become an independent state and have established a state with a well-functioning democracy. This being the case, it is thought-provoking that the most fundamental values regarding human rights, which the international community is obliged to comply with, are being ignored. Therefore, considering the repeated failures over more than half a century, a paradigm shift has become necessary in future peace negotiations to achieve permanent peace in Cyprus.

**Conclusion**

Cyprus seems to be a place where the same things are done over and over again and different results are expected. After more than fifty peace initiatives, in which every model was tried and failed except for the two-state solution, the Island has gained a place in the literature as a diplomatic graveyard. At this point international actors need to face the non-negotiability in Cyprus and be open to other options which the Cypriots can co-exist. In this regard, the two-state solution, which was also the only solution that was interestingly never asked to the Cypriots by referendum, should not be ignored anymore. Therefore, keeping the two-state solution based on the right to self-determination at least as an option on the table in further peace initiatives is not only an obligation of international law but could also be incentives for Cypriots towards a solution.

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# Suppressing Opposition and the Rule of Law: Case of Venezuela

*Tugay Deniz Unutmaz*

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, populist-authoritarian regimes have exhibited processes of democratic backsliding, characterised by efforts to consolidate power through suppressing opposition and destabilising the rule of law. While there can be many reasons for their rise, such as charismatic leadership or economic instability, it seems necessary to analyze certain behavior in order to get a better grasp of the current ruling systems and problems of governance as a whole. These tendencies are observable in the case of Venezuela. Under Nicolás Maduro, who inherited power following Hugo Chávez's death in 2013, the Venezuelan government has employed a range of institutional, legal, and coercive strategies to undermine democratic institutions and maintain firm control over power. These strategies reflect a broader pattern observed in many post-modern authoritarian regimes.

The rule of law, defined as the principle that all individuals and institutions, including the government, are accountable under the law, equally enforced, and independently judged, is one of the essentials of democratic regimes. Yet in Venezuela, the functioning of this principle is highly open to question. Key judicial actors have been co-opted, legislative powers have been neutralised, and the political opposition has been systematically criminalised and marginalised, effectively eliminating any real opposition to the government (Castaldi, 2006). The combination of legal manipulation and political repression has allowed Maduro's regime to circumvent democratic accountability and create dissent while maintaining a facade of constitutional legitimacy.

This article aims to explore how contemporary authoritative regimes leverage the democratic legitimacy that is entrusted to them to pursue policies that consolidate their authority through systematically undermining the rule of law and suppress political opposition, thereby ensuring the process of de-democratisation. It focuses particularly on judicial capture, the neutralisation of the opposition-led legislature, political persecution, and the manipulation of electoral and institutional frameworks, foreseen in the case of Venezuela. By analysing these dynamics, the article will revolve around the question of: How did legal manipulation, opposition disqualification, and institutional redesign shape Maduro's political survival? Through the Venezuelan case, the article aims to contribute to the broader debates on democratic backsliding and policies of de-democratisation in the twenty-first century.

**2. Political Background**

Venezuela's democratic past is filled with coups and attempts at circumventing crises. During the era of Hugo Chávez, Maduro's predecessor, the political landscape was made up of seemingly attempts at reforming the country through socialist rhetoric, while at the same time expanding presidential powers and ensuring both the National Assembly and the army were filled with loyalists (Latouche, Muno, & Gericke, 2023). Thus, it can be said that these early erosions of institutional independence set the foundation for an authoritarian trajectory masquerading as democratic governance, which would become ever more evident later on.

Following Chávez's death in 2013, Nicolás Maduro assumed the presidency, inheriting not only the political mantle but also an increasingly centralised and authoritarian institutional framework. Maduro's tenure has been marked by an intensifying economic crisis, hyperinflation, shortages of basic goods, and widespread social unrest. The 2015 parliamentary elections constituted a turning point, as the opposition coalition won a surprising majority in the National Assembly, challenging the ruling party's dominance and signalling popular dissatisfaction (Corrales & Kronick, 2025). In response, Maduro's government swiftly initiated a series of authoritarian countermeasures designed to ensure the survival of the regime, which, as of now, was open to question. After the 2015 election, Maduro acted to illegally pack the courts before the chosen lawmakers could sit and used these courts to back him up in the eyes of the "law" (Corrales, 2020). Later during the 2019 presidential elections, his government actively manipulated the voting process and banned certain candidates and parties, ensuring his re-election (Corrales, 2020). Maduro has also been wary of the power of the army and the people; thus, he installed his loyalists in the higher positions of the army and cracked down hard on any protestors (Corrales, 2020). These acts strengthened Maduro's authority and the political system, which was beginning to resemble a modern dictatorship. Consequently, these authoritarian measures worsened Venezuela's economic decline. In response, the Maduro government sought to quell unrest by offering economic concessions and privileges to influential business elites (Corrales, 2020), attempting to secure their support and stabilise the regime amid growing instability.

These developments produced an institutional and political environment where democratic opposition was marginalised, accountability mechanisms were hollowed out, and authoritarian consolidation was achieved through a blend of legalistic manoeuvring, coercion, and public manipulation. Venezuela's trajectory thus exemplifies the modern authoritarian regime; a gradual erosion of democratic safeguards enabled by constitutional manipulation, the

neutralisation of government institutions, and the strategic empowerment of loyalist actors across the political and security landscape.

## 3. Judicial Capture and Legislative Weakening

A defining feature of Venezuela's authoritarian slide under Nicolás Maduro has been the comprehensive capture of the judiciary and the systematic weakening of legislative power; an interplay that dramatically eroded the country's separation of powers. This process initially began during Hugo Chávez's presidency (Corrales, 2020), but reached unprecedented levels under Maduro, especially as the opposition gained traction and social unrest mounted. Central to this transformation was the method of court-packing, which led to the capture of the judiciary by the Maduro government. Court-packing is defined as changes made to the existing court, with the aim of creating a new majority with a political purpose (Garcia Holgado & Sánchez Urribarri, 2023). The goal of political authority is to establish a supportive environment within the judiciary by cultivating a network of affiliated individuals inside the courts (Garcia Holgado & Sánchez Urribarri, 2023). This act was seen time and time again in Venezuela, through the court-packing of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ), Venezuela's highest judicial body. Begun during the presidency of Chávez, the purpose was to stack the judiciary with loyalists who would support the regime (Garcia Holgado & Sánchez Urribarri, 2023). With this, the system in which the judiciary serves as a safeguard for the regime began to take shape, which would be employed repeatedly later on.

The harmonisation of the judiciary to executive interests became evident during the institutional standoff between the opposition-controlled National Assembly and the Maduro government. In the wake of the opposition's landslide victory in the 2015 National Assembly elections, the outgoing government-aligned parliament accelerated the appointment of pro-regime judges, ensuring that the TSJ would be staffed with unwavering loyalists (Garcia Holgado & Sánchez Urribarri, 2023). From this point on, the TSJ systematically invalidated many major legislative initiatives undertaken by the new assembly and stripped opposition lawmakers of parliamentary immunity (Brewer-Carias, 2020), thereby aiming to de-legitimise the assembly. These decisions effectively weakened the opposition's ability to check executive power, rendering the legislature powerless within the constitutional order. Rule-of-law institutions, originally designed to uphold constitutional checks and balances, became tools for neutralising democratic opposition and reinforcing a facade of legality and legitimacy around government actions.

The most audacious move in this campaign of institutional control came in 2017 with the creation of a parallel Constituent Assembly. Thoroughly established to rewrite the constitution, the Constituent Assembly quickly assumed legislative and constitutional powers, further undermining and sidelining the opposition-led National Assembly through unconstitutional means (Brewer-Carias, 2020). This act was legally challenged before the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ) on the grounds that the creation of such a body required the holding of a referendum. However, the TSJ provided legal cover for the manoeuvre by ruling that while a referendum is necessary for constitutional amendments, it is not required for the changing of the constitution in its entirety (Brewer-Carias, 2020). This dual-track legislative system concentrated unprecedented power in the executive branch, enabling the regime to bypass the last remaining crumb of opposition within the state. With this, the coordinated capture of the judiciary and neutralisation of legislative power not only consolidated Maduro's control but also provided a legal structure for undemocratic actions, underlining the case of Venezuela as a cautionary example of how modern authoritarian regimes can de-democratise from within the system.

## 4. Repression of Political Opposition and Everyday People

In the past few years, repression of political opposition and the general population in Venezuela has intensified dramatically, constituting a central pillar of the autocratic transformation in the country. The 2024 presidential election represented the lowest of lows for the Maduro government, as the National Electoral Council announced Maduro's win before the completion of the ballot counting (Hetland, 2025). Following this announcement, large protests began, which were met with brutal repression and arrests of protesters (Hetland, 2025). With Maduro's new term, an extensive campaign of political persecution began aimed at dismantling organised dissent and intimidating citizens.

The regime has systematically arrested thousands of opposition activists, protesters, journalists, and lawyers, often under vague and politically motivated charges such as "incitement to hatred," "terrorism," or "resistance to authority" (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Human rights organisations report over 1,500 political prisoners detained since the controversial election, including minors, many of whom have faced prolonged detentions and denial of legal representation (Human Rights Watch, 2024). These detentions were part of a broader strategy aimed at instilling fear among ordinary citizens, with the intent of deterring any future forms of opposition.

Mass protests erupted in low-income neighbourhoods immediately after the election announcement, reflecting both popular dissatisfaction and demands for transparency from the government. The government's response was brutal and unrelenting. Security forces, including the National Guard and police, alongside armed pro-government paramilitary groups known as *colectivos*, employed excessive force, resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and thousands of arrests during crackdowns on public demonstrations (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Furthermore, sources have documented at least 23 protester deaths attributable to these security operations in the weeks following the election (Al Jazeera, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2025).

During this phase, the security forces have certainly become the regime's instrument of control on the streets, transformed into armed enforcers operating with impunity. These various security groups, such as the *colectivos,* have been reported to intimidate opponents, suppress protests, and have been implicated in violent attacks on opposition figures and media outlets (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Beyond physical repression, the government has also pursued legal and administrative tactics to restrict civic space. Laws granting broad powers to shut down NGOs, stripping passports from critics to limit travel, and threatening union leaders (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Hetland, 2025) are just some of the additional tools the Maduro government has employed to suppress dissent within Venezuela.

It appears that the prospect (or reality) of losing power awakened Maduro to realise a future in which he could face prosecution or be forced into exile. Whether due to his detachment from the political reality or optimism for another electoral victory, the 2024 election marked a turning point, after which his new term began with intensified repression against all forms of opposition, political, civic, or otherwise. This case exemplifies how authoritarian leaders may fully embrace autocratic rule when the alarm bells signalling their impending doom grow ever more undeniable.

## 5. Electoral Manipulation and Institutional Control

With the opening presented through legal capture, the restructure of government institutions was underway. Central to this process was the systematic domination of the National Electoral Council (CNE), which became an instrument firmly loyal to the ruling party. The CNE exercised strict control over key electoral functions—candidate registration, ballot access, and vote counting—ensuring outcomes heavily favoured Nicolás Maduro and his United Socialist Party (Corrales & Kronick, 2025). This manipulation not only sidelined opposition voices but also severely undermined confidence in the electoral process, as was apparent in the 2024 and

2025 elections, which were marred by allegations of widespread fraud and irregularities. Furthermore, changes to electoral laws were enacted without meaningful input from opposition parties, predominantly favouring legislative and regional representation for the ruling party. The existence of vague and politically motivated criteria to disqualify opposition candidates, often citing charges like "inciting hatred" (Human Rights Watch, 2024), further narrowed the political sphere and undermined any meaningful competition. These manoeuvres reinforced an uneven electoral environment that favoured regime loyalists and further marginalised dissent.

These tactics are closely in line with the regime's campaign against civil society. The newly adopted "anti-NGO law" severely limits the activities and funding of non-governmental organisations, especially with the law's ambiguous articles and strict sanctions, including deregistration and dissolution (Amnesty International, 2024). It seems evident that such ambiguous laws are expressly designed to stifle criticism and remove support structures for the opposition, further narrowing the public sphere and civil rights. Consequently, as a way of showing formal rejection of this system, electoral boycotts have emerged as a response to these manipulations. In recent legislative and regional elections, major opposition parties, citing unfree conditions and lack of transparency, called for widespread abstention (Latouche, Muno, & Gericke, 2023). Such drastic actions are not new in the realm of politics. Boycotts have been used to serve as powerful protests against the system while also rallying and uniting supporters, visibly demonstrating their strength and collective presence to the wider public. However, they also risk solidifying ruling party dominance by reducing turnout and opposition oversight at polling stations. Analysts remain divided on their effectiveness: while they delegitimise government claims of democratic legitimacy, they can also intensify opposition fragmentation and cede official institutions to regime loyalists (Huseynov, 2024; Schmidmayr, 2013). Thus, the institutional crackdown on opposition thus far has been successful for the ruling party, as seen in the 2024 presidential election, solidifying Maduro's rule in Venezuela.

This multi-level strategy of electoral and institutional manipulation illustrates how legal, administrative, and electoral mechanisms intertwine to solidify autocratic regimes and eliminate any genuine democratic competition in Venezuela. Moreover, this approach has been crucial to Maduro's political survival, highlighting how autocratic leaders must maintain tight control over all branches of government to avert challenges and potential collapse. This analysis supports the hypothesis that authoritarian survival depends fundamentally on the thorough capture and control of institutional mechanisms, which, in Venezuela's case, has enabled the

regime to neutralise opposition and maintain power despite significant domestic and international pressures.

## 6. Conclusion

Venezuela's political trajectory under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro exemplifies how democratic institutions can be systematically dismantled and restructured to empower authoritarian rule. Although the process began under Chávez, who employed populism to bypass institutional restraints and consolidate his long-term rule, it was under Maduro that these trends intensified dramatically. With the strategic use of state instruments combined with constitutional reconstruction, the regime set in motion a gradual erosion of democracy by undermining judicial independence and weakening legislative oversight. Maduro's failures and gradual decline further fuelled these actions amid severe economic crisis and mounting social unrest, triggering a cycle of institutional capture, electoral manipulation, and violent repression designed to neutralise any meaningful opposition.

The capture of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice and the later establishment of a parallel Constituent Assembly effectively eliminated legislative checks and further consolidated executive power. At the same time, the militarisation of governance and the reconstruction of the security groups created a coercive environment that severely restricted political freedoms and intimidated dissenters across society. Electoral manipulation via the control of the National Electoral Council and restrictive electoral laws, combined with the strategic use of opposition boycotts, further diminished the prospects for electoral competition and reinforced Maduro's grip on power. Importantly, these high-level tactics were complemented by the local governance and justice mechanisms, establishing regime influence at every level of state and society.

This case highlights a broader pattern observed in many contemporary authoritarian regimes, where democratic institutions and processes are maintained in form but systematically hollowed out in substance. By manipulating electoral systems, capturing judicial and legislative bodies, and repressing opposition through both legal and extralegal means, autocratic leaders create a facade of democracy that conceals an increasingly centralised and unaccountable exercise of power. Crucially, this dynamic is not unique to any single country; it reflects a global trend in which authoritarian leaders adapt democratic norms to legitimise themselves internationally while consolidating autocratic dominance domestically. Understanding these shared mechanisms of authoritarian consolidation provides key insights into how modern autocracies evolve and endure despite growing domestic discontent and external pressures.

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**Mao Zedong Thought in Practice: A Comparative Analysis of China and Global South Maoist Movements**

*Ahmet Çağrı Soylu*

## Introduction

With the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the world's most populous nation came under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This monumental achievement not only marked the consolidation of Communist power in China but also positioned Chairman Mao as a central figure in global revolutionary circles. Thus, in the aftermath of the Chinese revolution, Mao's experiences, strategies and ideological formulations which developed for over decades of struggle began to attract attentions from all over the world. That is why, his ideas, strategies and theories started to be read and studied.

While the revolution has been of interest to the entire world since its inception, the period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s was when Chairman Mao and Chinese communism became globally trending. During this period, China was undergoing the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and leftist movements worldwide were studying the events there, thus discussing Mao's ideas on the Chinese Revolution and Marxist Theory. This current of thought, which spread throughout the world during this period, including the United States, France, Italy, Peru, Turkey, Tanzania, and India, was given the name Maoism (Cook, 2014). While Maoism reached a significant audience worldwide, it emerged in a much more radical and effective way, particularly in the countries of the Global South. This is because, when applying Marxism to the Chinese reality, Mao Zedong demonstrated that China was a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country embracing the struggles of many imperialist powers, and shaped his entire revolutionary strategy accordingly. This position was embraced by certain left-wing groups in countries of the Global South, where prosperity had not been as widespread as in Western countries due to colonial histories or the influence of imperialism, and the idea that Mao Zedong's strategies could also be applied in those countries gained strength (Bhattacharya, 2012).

Although the Cultural Revolution resonated strongly in the Global South and sparked numerous political movements, it was met with intense criticism within the People's Republic of China. The country was destabilized both politically and economically, education was disrupted, and this created a profound social trauma for Chinese society. The party faction that was sidelined for criticizing the Cultural Revolution and advocating economic reforms came to

power under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping after Chairman Mao's death, and the direction of the People's Republic of China underwent a significant change (吴超, 2008). These shifting dynamics have significantly shaped the way the People's Republic of China interprets Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought, setting it apart from the perspectives held by Maoist movements in the Global South. These distinctions have also played an important role in shaping the future trajectory of China's relations with other states.

**Mao Zedong Thought in China**

Maoism is fundamentally a theory that adapts Marxism and Leninism to Chinese reality. This adaptation is based on the fact that, as a unique feature, China is a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country, and therefore, a suitable formula must be developed for the application of Marxism in China. By semi-feudalism, it is meant that feudalism in China was not completely overthrown by the Xinhai revolution, and that feudal remnants still largely prevail in the countryside, while capitalist production flourishes in the cities (Mao, 1926). In other words, because China was a country experiencing both feudalism and capitalism simultaneously, Mao characterised it as a "semi-feudal" country. The concept of semi-colonialism, on the other hand, describes the fact that foreign powers do not directly exploit China through their own colonies, but rather exert economic, military, and regional influence on China and exploit its resources for their own prosperity (Mao, 1926). The People's Republic of China adopted Mao's ideas and this conceptualization and interpreted the world from this perspective, especially during the Cultural Revolution. However, with the death of Mao and the transfer of power to Deng, there were serious changes in this regard. While the Deng-led government acknowledged the invaluable value of Mao's ideas and the status of Mao Zedong as a hero, it argued that his style of governance, particularly in his later years, warranted criticism. This led to a significant divergence between the Mao Zedong Thought adopted by the Chinese Communist Party and the thought of the Cultural Revolution (Vogel, 2021).

In the Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party (1981), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officially reassessed Mao Zedong's legacy. The resolution recognized Mao's central historical role, emphasizing his leadership and contributions to the success of the Chinese Revolution. At the same time, it offered a critical evaluation of the Cultural Revolution, arguing that the development of a personality cult around Mao had seriously undermined the principle of democratic centralism within the Party. The resolution noted that Mao's increasingly arbitrary and personal decision-making in his later years had caused significant

damage to the Party's governance mechanisms. In this light, while Mao's contributions were acknowledged with reverence, his political errors -especially during the final phase of his leadership- were openly addressed. The resolution concluded that Mao Zedong Thought should be preserved as a vital historical component of the CCP's ideological foundation, but that China's future should not be bound to past revolutionary doctrines, and instead must be guided by decisions grounded in the realities and demands of the contemporary period. Therefore, with this decree, the People's Republic of China viewed Mao Zedong's thought as part of the party and country's development process and as an ideological doctrine that could be referenced when necessary, while deeming it wrong to establish economic and political governance based solely on it. As a sign of respect for the founding leader, his image was not removed from currency, nor was his portrait removed from Tiananmen Square -where it would remain forever. He remained enshrined in the Chinese people's memories as a historical figure and a nation's hero. However, this was not the case for the Maoist Global South movements of the 1968 generation, influenced by the Cultural Revolution.

**Mao Zedong Thought in Global South Countries**

From the mid-1960s onward, the Maoist movement's radical stance against semi-feudal and semi-colonial social structures, its proposed tactics and techniques against more powerful armies, and its progressive stance, rooted in its integration with socialist ideology, attracted the attention of the masses in the Global South (Dirlik, 2013, p. 235-237). Consequently, the movement gained significant strength, particularly in countries defined as peripheral/semi-peripheral within the capitalist production model, such as Turkey, India, the Philippines, and Nepal.

**Turkey: Proleterian Revolutionary Luminous and TKP/ML**

The left-wing movement in Türkiye enjoyed a certain strength in the 1960s. Left-wing publications, particularly in magazines, were making serious attempts. Consequently, in this environment where a wide range of ideas were shared, different factions emerged over time (Turku, 2024). The new theory of democracy and the idea of gradual revolution, which occupied a significant place in Mao Zedong's thought, inspired the idea of a National Democratic Revolution .In this context, the Proleterian Revolutionary Luminous Movement, which embraced Maoism, emerged from the NDR and later followed a separate path. Later, a separate group within Proletarian Revolutionary Luminous, which split from this movement due to disagreements, founded the TKP/ML under the leadership of İbrahim Kaypakkaya and

launched an armed guerrilla movement advocating village revolution within a Maoist framework (Zileli, 2016). This movement, led by Kaypakkaya, advocated for the swift implementation of a socialist revolution led by peasants, without focusing too much on the nuances of Mao Zedong's intellectual foundation. It adopts the concepts of "Protracted People's War" and "Encircling the cities from the countryside" adopted by the Chinese Revolution during the Chinese Civil War (Kaypakkaya, 1970) .

**India: Naxalite Movement and Armed Insurgency**

The turning point for the Maoist movement in India was the Naxalbari Peasants' Revolt, which they launched in 1967. The Maoist cadres, led by Charu Mazumdar, who supported this revolt were expelled from the Communist Party of India (M). Consequently, they founded the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (D'Mello, 2019). After this uprising, the Naxal movement began to grow in India and engaged in active armed struggle in the region extending from the east to the south of India.

The Naxalite movement's ideological foundations and tactical methods exhibit a significant convergence with Mao Zedong's revolutionary doctrine, particularly in terms of agrarian reform and guerrilla warfare. Like Mao's emphasis on mobilizing the rural peasantry as the primary force of revolution, the Naxalite insurgency emerged in a predominantly rural India, where approximately 77% of the population resided in villages at the time of the movement's inception. The socio-economic structure of rural India, marked by the enduring caste system, placed Dalits and other lower-caste groups in a position of systemic marginalization. These communities, often excluded from state services and political representation, became a key support base for the Naxalites (Chandra, 2013). By positioning themselves as a vanguard of the oppressed and economically disenfranchised classes, and employing guerrilla warfare against state forces, the Naxalites mirror the Chinese Communist Party's pre-1949 revolutionary model both in strategy and in the social composition of their movement (Laikwan, 2020).

**Philippines: Communist Party of Philippines and New People's Army**

The Maoist movement in the Philippines began in 1968 with the re-establishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines under the leadership of Sison (Mediansky, 1986). Following this re-establishment, the party, following the Maoist path, adopted the methods of "encircling the cities from the countryside" and "protracted people's war," as in Turkey and India. Believing that Chinese society was socioeconomically similar to Philippine society, they

sought to implement the methods of the Chinese revolution. In this context, they secured the support of indigenous populations and peasants in regions with weak state capacity. The New People's Army, the party's armed section, implemented land reform in the regions it controlled, redistributing land to the peasants (张雁博, 2018). In this respect, it can be said that they sought to implement similar strategies to the Communist Party of China's civil war-era policies and those implemented during the early years of Mao's rule in the People's Republic of China.

**Nepal: From class struggle to parliament**

Even today, Nepal is a country where 78% of its population lives in rural areas. This rate was around 90% in the 1990s, when the Maoist movement began to develop (Thuy, 2025). Because the peasant population constituted the majority and the caste system discriminated against women and lower-caste people in social life (Kafle, 2023), the Maoist movement's anti-traditional, radical ideas aimed at reforming social norms were embraced by the backward peasant class (Bownas, 2015). Considering the Maoist movement's massive impact and subsequent integration into central politics through peace talks, the Nepalese example of Maoism is cited as the most successful example in the world (Dirlik, 2013, p. 231). The Maoist movement spearheaded Nepal's transition from monarchy to democracy and the movement against discrimination against low-caste people and women in society.

The armed struggle in Nepal prior to the 2006 peace talks reflected many of the classic strategic features of Maoist revolutionary warfare. As a predominantly feudal society ruled by a monarchy and structured around a rigid caste system, Nepal presented conditions that mirrored those of pre-revolutionary China. In this context, the anti-feudal orientation of the Chinese Revolution was seen as particularly relevant to Nepal's socio-political reality. Moreover, Nepal's vast population of landless peasants provided fertile ground for the mobilization of a peasant-led revolution, in line with Mao Zedong's theory of revolutionary change. Given these similarities, it appeared feasible for Nepal's Maoists to emulate the Chinese revolutionary model, particularly in terms of military strategy. Just as the relatively weak Red Army and its guerrilla units in China adopted fluid, mobile warfare to outmaneuver and ultimately overcome a superior conventional army, the Maoists in Nepal pursued a similar path-seeking to wear down the state through asymmetric tactics rooted in local support and rural encirclement.

An examination of Maoist movements in four countries reveals that the struggle took various forms depending on the specific realities of each country, yet they all share core

principles. These countries contain regions dominated by rural populations, characterized by political and economic instability, marginalization, dispossession, and weak state capacity. In such regions, Maoist movements emerged with similar features -most notably a focus on guerrilla warfare, the abolition of landlordism, and efforts to improve the welfare of underdeveloped and oppressed groups.

Although these movements adopted many of Mao Zedong's policies as guiding principles, they often engaged with them only superficially, failing to fully embrace the ideological foundations behind them. This gap is largely attributable to the cult of personality surrounding Mao Zedong, especially during the Cultural Revolution, when his pronouncements on economics and politics were treated as absolute truths. As a result, the Maoist groups examined in this study differ significantly from the official ideological line of the People's Republic of China. While the Chinese state does not support these groups, the groups in question frequently denounce the contemporary PRC as a revisionist and "social imperialist" power (Central Committee Communist Party of India (Maoist), 2021).

**Comparison: China and Global South Maoism**

In his work "New Democracy," Mao Zedong stated that China was still in the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal phase, the first stage leading to a socialist state, and advocated for cooperation between the petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie, workers and peasants (1940). This stance ended in 1956, on the grounds that socialist transformation had been completed (Communist Party of China, 1981). After this stage, various disagreements arose within the party. Mao Zedong emphasised that class struggle had not ended, even with the completion of socialist transformation, bourgeois elements within the party might still exist, and these elements needed to be continuously eliminated (Mao, 1956). However, the reformist wing argued that after the completion of socialist transformation, the focus should be on the development of economic and productive forces (Communist Party of China, 1981). This distinction underpins the divergence between Maoism, as developed in countries such as Turkey, India, the Philippines, and Nepal; and Mao Zedong Thought, as institutionalized in the People's Republic of China.

Maoist movements in the Global South, prioritizing class struggle above all else and often rejecting the stage theory of revolution, envision a revolutionary process driven entirely by the armed mobilization of the peasantry. In contrast, the official Chinese state narrative maintains that revolution must proceed in stages: prior to the socialist phase, alliances should

be forged among workers, peasants, the national bourgeoisie, and the petty bourgeoisie (including students, small tradespeople, and merchants) to advance their shared interests (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2019). This approach entails the gradual implementation of reforms leading to the establishment of a socialist state, after which, with the end of class struggle, the continued development of the productive forces becomes the central task.

A second key distinction lies in how the Chinese Revolution adapted socialism to its unique historical, cultural, and social conditions, whereas Maoist movements in the Global South generally do not undertake such contextualization. Mao Zedong himself frequently emphasized that his military strategies during the Chinese Civil War were inspired by earlier wars in China's history (Mao, 1936). Moreover, his interpretation of Marxism was explicitly grounded in China's semi-feudal and semi-colonial realities, incorporating the peasantry into Marxist-Leninist theory as a revolutionary class. Following the setbacks of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formulated a renewed socialist vision tailored to China's evolving conditions. In contrast, Maoist groups in the Global South largely replicated the revolutionary programs propagated during China's Cultural Revolution without adapting them to their own cultural and historical contexts. This lack of contextualization has resulted in significant challenges to mass mobilization and popular support. For instance, Turkey had an urbanization rate of approximately 60% in the 1960s, rising to around 80% today (World Bank Group, 2024). In such a highly urbanized society, the Maoist strategy of "encircling the cities from the countryside" is strategically impractical. Additionally, the failure of these movements to align with local histories is evident in cases such as the anti-Kemalist stance of the Turkish Maoist movement and the Naxalites' rejection of Gandhi's legacy. This contrasts sharply with Mao's own recognition of the progressive nature of the Xinhai Revolution and Sun Yat-sen's contributions, which the official tradition of the People's Republic of China continues to acknowledge (Mao, 1956).

A third important difference is that Mao Zedong Thought in China is flexible and practical, while Maoism in the Global South is not. Maoist groups in the Global South mostly stick to the ideas and methods from the Cultural Revolution and resist any changes. On the other hand, Mao Zedong Thought in China focuses on practical solutions based on the real situation. This approach allowed China to include market elements to the system with concepts such as Market Socialism, while still keeping a socialist state. However, many Maoist groups

outside China see this flexibility and change as a sign of revisionism and accuse the Chinese cadres of following a capitalist path.

For all these reasons, there is no current relationship between the People's Republic of China and Maoist groups in the Global South. While one side views these groups as terrorists, the other side views the PRC as a social imperialist state (Central Committee Communist Party of India (Maoist), 2021).

**Conclusion**

Chairman Mao's ideas spread worldwide in the late 1960s, carried by the political and cultural currents unleashed by the Cultural Revolution, and inspired a wave of Maoist organizations. The most influential and enduring of these arose in the Global South, particularly in Turkey, India, the Philippines, and Nepal. While they share many similarities with one another, their interpretations of Mao Zedong Thought diverge sharply from that of the People's Republic of China. First, Global South Maoist groups have consistently placed uncompromising class struggle at the center of their politics, whereas the PRC has shifted toward a more conciliatory approach emphasizing the development of productive forces. Second, the Chinese experience has fused Maoist principles with its own historical and cultural realities, achieving a distinctive social integration, while movements abroad have struggled to root their ideology as deeply in local contexts. Third, the adaptability and pragmatism of Chinese political thought contrasts with the doctrinal rigidity of many Global South Maoists, who adhere closely to the Cultural Revolution's original narrative. These enduring differences have prevented any organic connection between the PRC and other Maoist movements; in many cases, they have stood in open opposition. This divergence not only marks a fracture in the global history of Maoism, but also underscores how ideas, once set in motion, evolve along sharply different trajectories when refracted through distinct social and political realities.

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# TAIWAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SMALL STATE THEORY: LIMITED RECOGNITION, UNLIMITED SPHERE OF IMPACT

*Zeynep Gökçe Bulgen*

In the international system, the concept of power has shaped societies and history in every era. Dynamics shaped by the axis of power have assigned states certain responsibilities within the system or positioned them as the system's dominant actors. In this context, the more visible states were those with classical military and economic power. Accordingly, over time, the focus has been on superpower competition and its impact on the system among states categorized as great, middle, and small powers. While the great and dominant powers played a leading role in the global world, smaller states remained outside the game or were considered ineffective actors. However, today's New World is reshaping all classical perceptions, and the multifactorial system is transforming again with various actors. Especially after World War II, not only middle and small states participated in the bipolar world order, but also non-state actors were needed. In the multipolar world order; states, non-state institutions, and individuals can actively participate within the system. Therefore, with developing technology, every state and individual, using the internet, has the opportunity to reach beyond the nation. Despite grappling with much greater uncertainty in this multifactorial order, every state, and especially small powers, gains regional and global leeway.

Small states have become more visible within the system. However, a definitive framework has yet to be established by experts, and there are subjective approaches that influence the smallness of a state. However, the most common principle is that small states are relatively small in terms of size, population, and economic resources. Accordingly, small states have limited resources and global influence. (Abdykadyrova,2024) Despite this, every state has the right to define and implement its foreign policy objectives to protect its interests and ensure its security. In line with this right, states with a weaker sphere of influence need alliances, regional organizations, and global institutions to develop their own strategies. (Abdykadyrova,2024) And even according to Keohane and Handel, Small States are obliged to these alliances in order to survive both economically and politically. (Thorhallsson,2018) In this context, small states require various forms of power to achieve self-determination, such as soft power, smart power, and digital power. The most common type of power preferred is the smart power component because it provides the effective power transformation strategy and resource management methods that small states require. (Nye, 2011) The current global order is filled with small states that cleverly employ their own cultural diplomacy, and many nations

are more visible than in the old order. This means that the age has changed, and as interdependence between states has increased, each state has become more likely to transform the system and become involved in its power dynamics. Taiwan is one of the best examples of a small state striving to exist within the system and maintain and expand its sphere of influence. To what extent does this theoretically small state utilize its maneuvering skills in response to the obstacles it faces? How does it manage diplomatic ties with allies and rival powers?

First, to understand Taiwan's current status in the global arena, it's helpful to examine its historical context. Understanding Taiwan's existence also brings into focus the two superpowers: China and the United States. Today's Taiwan was forced to retreat to its current territory when the Kuomintang (KMT) fought against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). (Maizland&Fong,2025) It had to defend itself against the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Although the Civil War ended, a new era began for both sides. At that time, the U.S., under the presidency of Harry S. Truman, was struggling against communism and established the Truman Doctrine to aid all democratic nations feeling under the influence of authoritarian powers.(Berglund,2013) One of the small states to which this doctrine reached was Taiwan, which received military, economic, and political assistance from the U.S. Thus, while Taiwan was taking steps toward close and deep relations with the U.S., a dominant international power, tensions with its neighbor, China, persisted. Accordingly, the U.S.-China-Taiwan trilateral relationship began to take shape. (Sung & Teng, 2022) China and Taiwan have been unable to establish close, cooperative relations because Taiwan strives to maintain its autonomy. Nevertheless, given its historical roots and the importance of preserving its territorial integrity, China considers Taiwan a part of itself. This issue is a core interest for China and a red line in its foreign policy. However, Taiwan's ideology is more aligned with the U.S., and they have a mutually supportive alliance. This is because the U.S. maintains control over the region through democratic Taiwan and continues to support Taiwan, while Taiwan develops its own strategy by forming an alliance with the then-superpower. (Sung & Teng, 2022) Thus, the U.S. enacted the "Taiwan Relations Act" to implement its foreign policy. (American Institute in Taiwan) Because this small state is a key player for both China and the U.S., it also laid the groundwork for partnerships between China and the U.S., such as the Shanghai Communique, the Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations, and the August 17th Communique. (Sung&Teng,2022) With these developments, bilateral relations (U.S.-Taiwan and China-U.S.) have evolved into a trilateral relationship pattern through more diplomatic means. In the global system, these three actors influence and balance each other. For over 50 years, a tacit

understanding has persisted among these three actors. (Sung&Teng,2022) The relationship, which continues covertly and sometimes with flexible moves from the U.S., is not clearly defined due to China's "One China Policy" in foreign policy. (Goldstein,2023) The world, especially the U.S., accepts the One China Policy, and this has led to Taiwan's exclusion from the global arena. The U.S. Taiwan Relations Act was a significant starting point for Taiwan, a small state struggling to find its own position. (Lawrence,2025) However, facing China, which has grown and developed over the years and become a superpower, Taiwan needed to find a more sustainable path to advance its own interests. Taiwan's own existence aside, the power struggle between the U.S. and China has escalated, and the Trump administration has launched a trade war against China. (Sung& Teng,2022) The economic war, which began in 2018, continued for two years, with consequences affecting the entire world. Yet, Taiwan emerged from this war with minimal damage because China considers Taiwan part of itself, while the US considers it an ally. Although this period proved advantageous for Taiwan, it was determined to develop definitive policies for the future and refused to maintain the same distance from both China and the US. Internationally, Taiwan had lost the opportunity to join organizations like the WHO and the OECD Steel Committee, and even lost its previous membership in the United Nations. (Sung&Teng,2022) Its international recognition was limited, and Taiwan sought to break its de jure state status. (Lee,2012) Diplomatic consistency is at the forefront of these steps. China and Taiwan have signed numerous Cross-Straits agreements over the years, facilitating the establishment of more moderate cultural, economic, touristic, and social ties between the two coasts. Especially during Taiwan's Ma Ying-Jeou era, the slogan "No unification, no independence, and no use of force" was emphasized. (MAC Republic of China (Taiwan)) This principle aimed to prevent disputes, establish a win-win relationship, and pioneer a new future. (Office of Republic of China,2008) With these established China-Taiwan relations, diplomatic steps shifted away from risk-taking and instead focused on maximizing interests. Unlike developing coastal relations, are not enough to completely end the tension between the two sides, as China is determined to protect its territorial integrity. (Maizland&Fong,2025) Faced with a rapidly growing superpower, how long can a state like Taiwan maintain its interests through leverage? Or how can it maximize its own power to expand Taiwan's international reach?

Taiwan's efforts to increase its global visibility were framed by rather moderate policies. Prior to these policies, many experts attempted to explain Taiwan's use of force with the "Hedging Theory."(Sung&Teng,2022) However, historical processes and dynamics

demonstrate that Taiwan is in a different position than other small states. In other words, this small state is grappling with its own identity amidst both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, in shaping its foreign policy, it has formulated laws based on "equality" and "reciprocity" to strengthen international cooperation and maintain regional stability. (Sung&Teng,2022) In fact, this seems wise because these principles are compatible with United Nations agreements. In addition to all these diplomatic moves, Taiwan opted for the use of soft power against the system dynamics it competed with. In other words, to participate in this game scene, Taiwan first read its own codes and, according to these characteristics, opted for a more moderate use of power constructed with cultural, geographical, and social values. Taiwanese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) stand out as the first concrete example of this diplomacy. While Taiwan's participation in Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) is fraught with obstacles due to the One China Policy's significant global influence, various participation rights are being gained through local NGOs. Taiwanese NGOs are seen as key actors complementing the state's regional and global role and function. (Lin&Lin, 2017) Their missions include "promoting human rights, environmental sustainability, building local infrastructure, improving public health, and providing agricultural and humanitarian assistance."(Lee,2012) Moreover, NGOs act in the public interest and pursue specific missions. Additionally, their political neutrality allows them to actively participate in many global issues, expanding Taiwan's political reach. For instance, the themes of humanitarian aid, disaster management, and sustainability align perfectly with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs). It's possible to see Taiwan's involvement in similar humanitarian aid platforms through its NGOs. It doesn't oversee NGOs, which act as the government's outstretched hand, but instead supports them by providing all necessary resources. The post-1980 democratization process, in particular, influenced NGO formation, and today, thousands of NGOs operate in Taiwan. (Lee,2012) In 2000, the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) established the NGO Affairs Committee. This established an institutionalized profile, effectively promoting Taiwan's status in the international arena without facing political obstacles. The general characteristics of Taiwanese NGOs are as follows: These institutions are instruments that carry Taiwanese diplomacy to the global order, reflect Taiwanese values because they are shaped around a specific concept, and are the secret makers of cross-Strait agreements. (Lee,2012) In fact, NGOs are the structures through which Taiwan can enact its vital diplomacy, which it calls "huolu waijiao," and gain visibility through "flexible diplomacy" amidst power struggles. (Lee,2012)

Another dynamics of Taiwan's influence, as a small state, is its businesspeople, known as "Taishangs." Democratization in Asia in the 1990s brought about various changes. The new system, which encouraged businesspeople and entrepreneurs as non-state actors, saw a surge in the number of Taiwanese businesspeople. (Kabinowa,2024) In particular, the Taishangs, who reside within the People's Republic of China with their families, exerted significant influence on cross-Strait relations, fostering diplomatic relations in the areas of mutual economy and tourism. Furthermore, economic factors were the driving force behind the Taishangs' expansion abroad, particularly their migration to Mainland China. This was due to structural changes in Taiwan's economy and its aim to access opportunities in the growing Chinese market. (Schubert,2010) This allowed Taiwanese entrepreneurs to expand their business operations on the mainland. As the Taishang gained momentum as a key tool in public diplomacy, a new policy was defined for the government. The Taiwanese government's Overseas and Extra-Territorial Policy, known as "Qiawu," was transformed into the new Qiawu, along with the role of the Taishang in public diplomacy. (Kabinowa,2024) Following these developments, the World Taiwan Chambers of Commerce (WTCC) was established, and as part of the new Qiawu, the Taishangs' mandate was expanded, for example, by being appointed as special envoys for regional economic dialogues and promoting Taiwan's philanthropic image in the global arena. As a more concrete example, the Taiwan Institute for Economic Research (TIER) sent delegates to APEC, representing Taiwan on an international platform. (TIER) Moreover, the Taishangs support government humanitarian aid programs and NGO-compatible activities. The recent earthquake of February 6, 2023, is a prime example. In response to the earthquake's severe consequences, the Taishangs donated $20 million to support both Türkiye and Syria, with various NGOs acting as intermediaries in this effort. (Kabinowa,2024) An earlier example is the COVID-19 outbreak. By successfully addressing this pandemic crisis, Taiwan also increased its international influence by donating 100,000 face masks and medical equipment to local communities and governments. (Kabinowa,2024) These donations were then distributed by chambers of commerce. This aid bolstered Taiwan's soft power through public diplomacy. With its COVID-19 initiative, Taiwan emphasized the following message to the global order: "Taiwan can help, and Taiwan is helping."(Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of China(Taiwan)) Cultural diplomacy also continues to be shaped by a multitude of actors. Today, Taiwan successfully utilizes exchange programs and is a preferred destination for many international students. The ecosystem where foreign cultures meet continues to foster democracy. In fact, despite being a young democracy, Taiwan ranks tenth according to The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. This democratic development is followed by

various developments, such as technological advancements, innovation, and global industries. For this reason, Taiwan has seen significant growth in chip production.

As a result, small states seeking to maintain their statusquo and achieve new growth among the superpowers can play an active role in today's multipolar world order and become directional changers in global affairs. Thus, we face a complex multi-player structure, and amidst uncertainty, each state is taking steps to make its own move. Every step is shaped by the states' preferences. The Taiwanese example exemplifies the struggle to exist within an ecosystem fraught with challenges. While the opportunities exist, the obstacles are considerable. While the success and global presence of Taiwanese NGOs offer a way for Taiwan to become institutionalized and visible, it is unrealistic for Taiwan to achieve significant growth in the long term solely through NGOs. Nevertheless, many dynamics, such as businesspeople, exchange students, implemented global policies, and growing technological resources, make Taiwan more noteworthy.

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# Japonya-NATO İlişkileri ve Hint-Pasifik'te Yeni İttifaklar

*Acar Boray Bıldırcın*

## Giriş

Hint-Pasifik'in Uluslararası İlişkiler'de gittikçe önem kazanan bir bölge olduğunu sıklıkla vurgulamaktayız. Bu bölge dünya nüfusunun yarısından fazlasına ve GSYH bakımından dünya ekonomisinin %60'ına ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu bölgede meydana gelebilecek çatışmaların tüm dünyada barış ve istikrarı kuvvetle sarsacağı söylenebilir. Son yıllarda hem batı dünyasının hem de bölge ülkelerinin güvenlik tehditlerinde ise Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti ilk sırada gelmektedir. Çin'in demografik gücü ve yükselen ekonomik potansiyeli ile, bölgede agresif ve revizyonist politikaları olduğuna dair bir söylem birliğine rastlamaktayız. Söylem birliği olmasına karşın, dünyadaki tüm ülkelerin Çin'e karşı algıladığı tehdit düzeyi de farklılık göstermektedir. Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı sürerken özellikle Avrupalı ülkeler Çin'in ekonomik ve siyasi yükselmesine karşı ABD'nin verdiği tepkileri vermemekte, yaptırımlarda isteksiz kalabilmektedirler. Küreselleşme ve ekonomik karşılıklı bağımlılık bölgesel krizleri küresel sorunlara çeviriyor ama, ulus devletler dış politikalarını hâlâ geleneksel jeopolitik güvenlik algılamalarıyla şekillendiriyorlar. Bu bağlamda ABD'nin Çin ile mücadelesinde bölgedeki müttefiklerin giderek önem kazanacağını da ifade edebiliriz. Hint-Pasifik'te Japonya, Güney Kore, Hindistan gibi ülkeler de Çin'in artan askeri gücü ve ekonomik hâkimiyeti karşısında ABD ile ikili ilişkilerini güçlendirmeye ve yeni çok taraflı kolektif güvenlik mekanizmaları kurmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Bu hususta **QUAD** tekrar canlandırılmış, **AUKUS** imzalanmış ve **ASEAN** ile bağlar güçlendirilmiştir.

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**QUAD: Quad**rilateral Security Dialogue/Dörtlü Güvenlik Diyaloğu ABD, Avustralya, Japonya ve Hindistan.

**AUKUS**: **A**ustralia, **U**nited **K**ingdom, **U**nited **S**tates (Trilateral Security Partnership) / ABD, Avustralya, Birleşik Krallık (Üçlü Güvenlik Ortaklığı)

**ASEAN**: **A**ssociation of **S**outhe**a**st **A**sian **N**ations/Güneydoğu Asya Uluslar Birliği

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Hint-Pasifik'te barış ve istikrardan bahsederken bölgede ABD'nin en önemli müttefikinin Japonya olduğunu da ifade etmekteyiz. Ekonomik gücü, askeri altyapısı ve coğrafi konumu gereği Japonya, Tayvan ya da Senkaku Adaları gibi ihtilaflı bölgelerde ortaya çıkabilecek bir krizin önündeki ilk engel niteliğindedir. Lakin son yıllarda yaşadığı ekonomik sorunlar ve askeri yapılanmasının doğası gereği bu krizlere tek başına yanıt vermesi pek

mümkün görünmemektedir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında savunmasını ABD'ye emanet eden ve ekonomik kalkınmasına odaklanan Japonya, 2000'li yıllardan sonra uluslararası krizlerde aktif rol almaya başlamış ve güvenlik politikalarında önemli değişikliklere gitmiştir. Abe Şinzou'nun İkinci Başkanlık Dönemi'nde (2014) anayasadaki pasifist 9. Madde'nin tekrar yorumlanması ve Kişida Dönemi'nde 2022'de kabul edilen "Ulusal Güvenlik Stratejileri" bu değişikliklere örnektir. Bunun yanında, Japonya hem bölgede hem de uluslararası alanda yeni müttefikler, yeni ittifaklar arayışında olmuş ve özellikle Soğuk Savaş sonrasında NATO ile sıkı ilişkiler kurmuştur. Japonya birçok NATO operasyonunda görev almış ve NATO ile ortaklık anlaşmaları imzalamıştır. ABD ile olan ortaklığına alternatif oluşturması açısından NATO üyesi Avrupa ülkeleri ile yakın ilişkiler kurmaya çalışmış, diğer Hint-Pasifik ülkeleri ile NATO zirvelerine katılmıştır. Japonya hem Hint-Pasifik'te hem de uluslararası alanda güvenliğini ve etkinliğini korumak, hatta artırmak için hâlâ NATO'ya ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Lakin NATO'nun ABD eksenli olması sebebiyle Japonya'ya istediği alternatifleri sağlamaması, Hint-Pasifik'te aktif rol almaktan kaçınması ve üye ülkeler arasında ihtilaflar olması sebebiyle Japonya diğer ittifak kapılarını da kapatmamıştır. Bu doğrultuda QUAD yapılanmasının tekrar canlandırılmasına öncülük etmiş, ASEAN ile önemli ilişkiler kurmuştur. Tüm bunlar doğrultusunda, bu yazı ise öncelikle Japonya'nın NATO ile olan ilişkilerini, daha sonra kısaca Hint-Pasifik'teki yeni ittifakları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla öncelikle Japonya-NATO ilişkilerinin; tarihi, üzerinde durduğu ilkeler ve mevcut engeller incelenecektir. Daha sonrasında bölgede kurulan QUAD gibi diğer ittifaklardan bahsedilecektir.

**Japonya-NATO İlişkileri Tarihi**

**1. Soğuk Savaş Dönemi**

Bugün Japonya NATO'nun en uzun süreli dış ortağıdır. Buna rağmen Soğuk Savaş döneminde Japonya ve NATO arasında kayda bir resmi ilişkiye rastlanmamaktadır. Bunun sebepleri arasında bir tarafta Japonya'nın bu dönemde tüm odağını ekonomik kalkınmaya vermesi ve düşük yoğunluklu bir dış politika yürütmesi, diğer tarafta ise NATO'nun kendisini Atlantik çerçevesinde bölgesel bir ittifak olarak tanımlaması yatmaktadır (Galic, 2019). Bu dönemde yalnızca 1979, 1981 ve 1984'te Japon bakanlar ve parlamenterler NATO'ya gayri resmi ziyaretlerde bulunmuşlardır. 1983'te ise Abe Şintarou (Abe Şinzou'nun babası) Japonya ve NATO arasında bir danışma mekanizması kurulması için Avrupa başkentlerini ziyaret etmiştir (Galic, 2019).

Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılma sinyalleri vermesi NATO'nun bizzat kurulma sebebi olan yegâne tehdidi ortadan kaldıracak gibi görünüyordu, böylece örgütün bir misyonu ve vizyonu kalmayacaktı. Lakin Soğuk Savaş'ın bitimiyle birlikte dondurulmuş bazı sorunlar gün yüzüne çıktı. Bölünmüş bir Kore, statüsü belirsiz bir Tayvan ve kanlı bir iç savaşın eşiğinde olan Balkanlar, NATO'nun kendini yenileyerek uluslararası alanda barış ve istikrar için inisiyatif alan bir organizasyona evrilmesine yol açtı. Buna paralel olarak 1990'lardan itibaren Japonya-NATO İlişkileri'nin de filizlendiğini görmekteyiz (西川, 2024). Örneğin, 1990 yılının haziran ayında Belçika'nın Knokke kentinde 'NATO-Japonya Güvenlik Sorunları' (NATO-Japan Security Issues) isimli bir konferans düzenlenmiştir. Sonrasında Kasım 1992'de Tokyo'da ve Ekim 1994'te NATO Karargâhı'nda olmak üzere iki konferans daha bunu izlemiştir. Bu süreçte Sovyetler Birliği dağılmadan önce 1991 yılının Eylül ayında NATO Genel Sekreteri Manfred Wörner Japonya'ya resmi bir ziyaret gerçekleştirmiştir. Bu ziyaret NATO ile Japonya arasındaki resmi ilişkilerin tesisi anlamına gelmektedir.

## 2. Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönem

Soğuk Savaş'ın bitmesi NATO-Japonya ilişkilerinde yeni bir sayfa açtı. NATO'nun uluslararası alanda etkin olma isteği ve Japonya'nın Soğuk Savaş sonrası yeni düzende yer alma arzusu birleşerek; demokrasi, insan hakları ve liberalizm gibi ortak değerler üzerinde yükselmeye başladı. Özellikle 11 Eylül 2001 terör saldırılarından sonra ilişkiler ivme kazandı. NATO, bu saldırıları gerekçe göstererek Afganistan'a müdahale kararı almıştı. Japonya da NATO'ya siyasi ve insani destek vermiştir. Dönemin Koizumi Hükümeti, operasyonlara destek verebilme amacıyla 2001 yılının Ekim ayında 'Terörle Mücadele Özel Tedbirler Yasası'nı' çıkarmıştır. Bunun üzerine 2002 yılında Tokyo'da Afganistan'a 'Yeniden Yapılanma Yardımı Uluslararası Konferansı' düzenlenmiştir. Japon Deniz Kuvvetleri 2001'den 2010'a kadar Hint Denizi'nde görev almış, terörle mücadele faaliyetlerinde bulunan yabancı donanma gemilerine yakıt ve su tedarik ederek yardım sağlamıştır (西川, 2024). Aynı zamanda Japon Öz Savunma Kuvvetleri hem Afganistan'da hem de Irak'ta İl İmar Ekipleri'nde (Provincial Reconstruction Team) yer alarak bölgenin yeniden kalkınmasında görev üstlenmiştir (Tsuruoka, 2023). Bu bölgelerde Japon ekipleri diğer NATO ülkeleriyle ortaklaşa hareket ederek 'Birlikte Çalışabilirlik' anlamında önemli yol kat etmiştir.

Japonya Soğuk Savaş sonrasında sadece NATO operasyonlarına değil, birçok BM operasyonuna da katılım göstermiştir. 1991-2021 yılları arasında Japon Öz Savunma Kuvvetleri'nin katıldığı operasyonlar listesi aşağıda verilmiştir:

- Basra Körfezi, Kamboçya, Mozambik, Ruanda, Suriye – Golan Tepeleri, Honduras, Türkiye, Doğu-Timor (x3), Hindistan, Afganistan (x2), Hint Okyanusu (x2), Haiti (x3), Irak (x3), Iran, Tayland, Endonezya (x3), Kamçatka, Pakistan (x2), Nepal, Somali, Yeni Zelanda, Güney Sudan.

Bunların yanı sıra Japonya NATO ile Bosna-Hersek için çok taraflı Barış Uygulama Konseyi'ne katılmış; Tacikistan, Moldova, Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan'da da yardım çalışmaları yürütmüştür (Bacon & Burton, 2017).

Operasyonlarda alınan roller ve görev tanımlamaları ise aşağıdaki gibidir.

- Mayın temizleme, imar (x7), diğer barış güçlerinin ikmali (x3), insani yardım (x7), kar temizleme, afet yardımı (x11), tıbbi destek (x3), barış koruma (x3), kurtarma, korsanlıkla mücadele, bilgi toplama, tahliye.

Not: Japon Öz Savunma Kuvvetleri 1999 Marmara Depremi'nde afet bölgesine 500 geçici konut ulaştırmıştır.

Japonya tüm bu operasyonlara katılım sağlayarak insan haklarına saygılı, özgür ve liberal bir dünya düzeni için beraber çalışma isteği ve kapasitesi olduğunu zamanla NATO ülkelerine kabul ettirebilmiştir. 2000'li yıllardan sonra da NATO-Japonya siyasi ilişkileri önemli olaylara sahne olmuştur. İlk olarak 2006 yılının mayıs ayında Japonya Dışişleri Bakanı Aso Tarou NATO Karargahı'nı ziyaret eden ilk Japon Dışişleri Bakanı olmuştur. Bakan Aso Kuzey Atlantik Konseyi'nde yaptığı konuşmada 'küresel değerlerden' bahsetmiş; demokrasi, özgürlük, insan hakları, hukukun üstünlüğü ve market ekonomisinin önemini vurgulamıştır (Bacon & Burton, 2017). Bir yıl sonra 2007 yılının ocak ayında bu kez Japonya Başbakanı Abe Şinzou NATO Karargahı'nı ziyaret eden ilk Japon başbakanı oldu. Kuzey Atlantik Konseyi'nde konuşan Abe, Japonya'nın Kuzey Kore ve Çin ile alakalı güvenlik tehditlerini Avrupalı ülkelerle paylaştı (Tsuruoka, 2023). Siyasi diyaloglar yoğunlaştıkça sahadaki iş birliği de artış gösterdi. 2008'den itibaren Japonya Afganistan'la ilgili NATO Zirvesi toplantılarına davet edildi. Operasyonlarda askeri anlamda görev almamasına ve birliğe üye olmamasına rağmen toplantılara katılan tek ülke oldu. Bir yıl sonra 2009'un ağustos ayında Okyanus Kalkanı Harekâtı devreye alındı ve Japonya NATO ile Aden Körfezi'nde korsanlığa karşı mücadeleye başladı. Aynı yılın Nisan ayında Japonya Dışişleri Bakanı Nakasone ve Çibuti Dışişleri Bakanı Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, bölgede faaliyet gösteren Japon Öz Savunma Kuvvetleri birliklerinin yasal ve resmi statüsüne ilişkin bir mektup imzaladılar (外務省, 2009). Mart 2011'de ise Japon

Deniz Öz Savunma Kuvvetleri Çibuti'de komuta merkezi, biniş tesisleri ve park alanını içeren kendi üssünü kurdu (Vertin, 2019).

NATO ve Japonya arasındaki iş birliği 2010'lardan sonra da devam etti. Öncelikle 2010 yılında NATO ve Japonya arasında Bilgi Güvenliği Antlaşması imzalandı. Sonrasında 2013 yılında Japonya NATO'ya özel temsilci atadı. Aynı yıl NATO Genel Sekreteri Rasmussen Tokyo'yu ziyaret etti. Bu ziyaret sonucunda taraflar arasında 'Ortak Siyasi Bildirge' imzalandı ve bu ziyarette Rasmussen NATO ve Japonya'nın 'Doğal Ortak' olduğunu ifade etti (Yuichi, 2024). 2014'ün şubat ayında Rusya Ukrayna'ya saldırdı ve NATO tüm dünyada ortak değerleri taşıyan müttefik ülkelerle iş birliğini artırma yoluna gitti. Aynı yılın mayıs ayında Başbakan Abe Şinzou Kuzey Atlantik Konseyi'nde Japonya'nın 'Barışa Proaktif Katkı' politikası çerçevesinde uluslararası barışa katkı sunmak istediğini söyledi. Abe'nin bu temennisine paralel olarak 2014'ün haziran ayında Japonya, Anayasası'ndaki 9. Madde'nin yeniden yorumlanması teklif edildi. Karar Ağustos 2015'te mecliste onaylandı ve 2016'nın mart ayında kabul edildi. Japonya'nın güvenlik politikalarındaki değişim NATO tarafından olumlu karşılandı ve müteakiben 24 Mayıs 2018'te Japonya Brüksel Büyükelçiliği'nde ilk NATO misyonunu kurdu. Bir hafta sonra 31 Mayıs'ta (2014'te imzalanan) Bireysel Ortaklık ve İş Birliği Programı yenilendi. Nihayet 2019'da Japonya NATO'ya ilk büyükelçisini atadı. 2021'den itibaren ise Japonya NATO'nun Siber Güvenlik Operasyonları'na katılmaya başladı.

Tüm bunlar yaşanırken 2022'de Rusya tekrar Ukrayna'ya saldırdı. Çin'in de Hint-Pasifik'te artan nüfuzu, askeri ve ekonomik gücü göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, NATO müttefikleriyle olan ilişkilerini bir adım daha öteye taşıma kararı aldı. Bunun sonucunda 29 Haziran 2022'de bir ilk olarak Başbakan Kişida diğer IP4 (Indo-Pacific 4) ülkeleri ile Madrid'teki NATO Zirvesi'ne katıldı (Euronews, 2024). Japonya NATO'nun Ukrayna'ya Yönelik Kapsamlı Yardım Paketi'ne de iştirak etti. Akabinde 31 Ocak 2023'te Genel Sekreter Stoltenberg Tokyo'yu ziyaret etti. Aynı yıl temmuz ayında düzenlenen Vilnius Zirvesi'ne Japonya ve diğer IP4 ülkeleri de katılım gösterdi. Zirve sonrasında NATO ve Japonya arasında 2026'ya kadar geçerli kalacak olan Bireysel Olarak Tasarlanmış Ortaklık Programı kabul edildi. IP4 ülkelerinin NATO zirvelerine katılma trendi NATO'nun 75. yılında düzenlenen Washington Zirvesi'nde de devam etti. Donald Trump'ın ikinci kez Amerikan Başkanı olduğu 2025 yılında ise IP4 ülkelerinin başkanları NATO Zirvesi'ne katılamayacaklarını dile getirdiler. Japonya Başbakanı İşiba Şigeru, Güney Kore Devlet Başkanı Lee Jae-Myung ve Avustralya Başbakanı Anthony Albanese çeşitli sebeplerden dolayı Hollanda'daki zirveye bizzat gelemeyeceklerini bildirdiler (AA,2025).

**Japonya-NATO İlişkilerinde Ortak Değerler**

Japonya-NATO ilişkilerinin bugüne gelmesine şüphesiz ki 'Ortak Değerlerin' ve güvenlik algılamalarının paralel olması büyük rol oynamıştır. Demokrasi ve insan haklarına bağlılık, liberalizm ve denizlerde seyir serbestisi gibi iki tarafın paylaştığı değerler, iş birliği için çok önemli bir altyapı sunmuştur (長廣, 2014). NATO, dış politikasında denizlerin serbestliğini, saldırmazlığı ve liberal ekonomik düzeni önceleyen Japonya'yı mevcut uluslararası düzenin devamlılığı için önemli bir ortak olarak görmüştür. Japonya ise NATO'nun uluslararası hukuka bağlılık, demokrasi ve insan hakları için garantör konumda olduğunu düşünmektedir (Bacon & Burton, 2017). Japon Dışişleri Bakanı Aso, Başbakan Abe Şinzou ve Genel Sekreter Stoltenberg de birçok kez 'ortak değerler' ya da 'küresel değerler' olgusundan bahsetmişlerdir.

İki tarafın da mevcut küresel düzeni değiştirmeye yönelik agresif hareket eden Rusya, Çin ve Kuzey Kore gibi ülkeleri güvenlik tehdidi olarak tanımlaması sebebiyle de dış politikada beraber hareket etmek mümkün olmuştur. Bu bağlamda ilk kez 2019'da NATO'nun Londra Zirvesi'nde bir güvenlik tehdidi olarak Çin'den bahsedilmiştir. Çin ile ilgili olan söylem değişikliği Japonya tarafından olumlu karşılanmıştır. Akabinde 2022'de ABD'nin yayınladığı Ulusal Güvenlik Stratejisi'nde ÇHC "uluslararası düzeni yeniden şekillendirmek isteyen ve bunu başaracak ekonomik, diplomatik, askeri ve teknolojik güce sahip olan tek ülke" olarak tanımlanmıştır. Yine aynı yıl Japonya'da kabul edilen Ulusal Güvenlik Stratejisi'nde, Çin'in Japonya için "eşi benzeri görülmemiş ve en büyük stratejik zorluk" olduğu belirtilmektedir. Başbakan Abe, Başbakan Kişida ve Genel Sekreter Stoltenberg gibi isimler 'Avrupa'nın güvenliğinin Asya'nın güvenliği ile doğrudan bağlantılı olduğunu' birçok kez ifade etmişlerdir. Kuzey Kore askerlerinin Ukrayna'ya konuşlandırılması da bunun somut kanıtı niteliğindedir. Aynı zamanda Japonya NATO'dan ABD ile olan ilişkileri pekiştirmek amacıyla da yararlanmıştır. Dış politikada aktif rol alan ve NATO operasyonlarını destekleyen bir Japonya bölgede ABD'nin yükünü hafifletecektir. Diğer yandan Japonya NATO operasyonları vesilesiyle normal şartlarda ulaşamadığı Afganistan, Irak gibi bölgelere ulaşmış, küresel alanda nüfuzunu artırma şansı yakalamıştır (Tsuruoka, 2023).

Lakin Japonya-NATO ilişkilerinde olumsuzluklar da elbette ki mevcuttur. Japonya'da NATO'nun Soğuk Savaş sonrası süreci kötü yönettiği ve Rusya'da istenen değişikliği yaratamadığına dair fikirler bulunmaktadır. Örneğin 2022'de patlak veren Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı sonrasında Japonya NATO'yu etkisiz ve pasif kalmakla suçlamıştır. Japonlara göre

NATO'nun Ukrayna'da Rusya'yı durduramaması Çin'e Hint-Pasifik'te nüfuzunu artırması için cesaret verecekti. Yani Japonlar Ukrayna Savaşı'nın Tayvan Savaşı'nı tetikleyebileceğini düşündüler (Van der Veere, 2025). Hatta Japonlar daha da ileri giderek Ukrayna krizinin çıkmasının başlıca sebebinin NATO'nun diplomatik hamleleri olduğunu da ileri sürmüşlerdir. NATO ise Japonya'nın Rusya'ya yönelik yaptırımları uygulamaktaki isteksizliğini eleştirmiştir (Bacon & Burton, 2017). Japonya enerji tedariğinin aksamaması için Rusya'ya yönelik yaptırımları tamamen uygulamaya sokamamış, Rusya'dan doğalgaz almaya devam etmiştir.

**Hint-Pasifik'te Yeni İttifaklar**

Her ne kadar Japonya NATO ile olan iş birliğini sürdürme ve artırma adına birçok girişimde bulunmuşsa da NATO dışında da bireysel anlamda Avrupalı ülkelerle ilişkilerini geliştirmiş ve farklı kolektif güvenlik oluşumlarına öncülük etmiştir. Son yıllarda ABD'nin öngörülemez ve güvenilmez politikaları bu süreci hızlandırmış, üye ülkeler arasındaki anlaşmazlıklar da durumu körüklemiştir. Örneğin Polonya ve Baltık Ülkeleri gibi ülkeler NATO'nun Asya açılımına her zaman şüpheyle yaklaşmışlardır (Paul, 2013). Tüm bunlar NATO açısından olumsuz bir izlenim yaratmıştır. Bütçe sorunları da örgüt içerisinde ABD ve Avrupalı ülkelerin aralarının açılmasına sebep olmuştur. ABD yokluğunda bir NATO, Japonya için olumsuz bir resim çizmiştir. Çünkü Avrupa-Doğu Asya diyalog ve iş birliğinde şimdiye değin ABD hep kolaylaştırıcı rol üstlenmekteydi. Lakin ABD'nin son yıllarda aradan çekilmesi iş birliğini azaltmadı. Hâlihazırda hem Japonya hem de Avrupa savunmada ABD'ye aşırı bağımlılığı azaltmayı, daha fazla stratejik özerklik kazanmayı hedeflemekteydiler (Van der Veere, 2025). Bu amaçla Avrupalı ülkeler Hint-Pasifik'teki nüfuzlarını bireysel olarak artırdılar ve Japonya ile iş birliğini sürdürdüler. Örneğin 2021 yılında, Birleşik Krallık'ın uçak gemisi vurucu grubu CSG21 Hint-Pasifik'e konuşlandırıldı. Aynı yıl Fransa Jeanne D'Arc Görevi'ni başlattı ve Almanya Bayern Fırkateyni'ni bölgeye konuşlandırdı. Japonya Öz Savunma Kuvvetleri, Hint-Pasifik'in çeşitli bölgelerinde Avrupalı kuvvetlerle çok sayıda ortak eğitim ve tatbikat gerçekleştirdi. Aynı zamanda Japonya, İngiltere ve İtalya'nın ortaklığıyla GCAP (Global Combat Air Programme) isimli bir jet savaş uçağı üretme projesi başlatıldı. Şunu ifade edelim ki, NATO kolektif olarak Hint-Pasifik Bölgesi'nde hiçbir zaman askeri varlık bulundurmayabilir. Zaten Japonya'da da Avrupalı müttefiklerin ve NATO'nun Hint-Pasifik bölgesindeki olası çatışmalara askeri anlamda doğrudan müdahil olacağı beklentisi yoktur. Japonya için bölgede NATO, ortak değerlere sahip bir ortak olarak uluslararası hukukun caydırıcılığını temsil etmektedir (Paul, 2023).

NATO bünyesindeki Avrupalı ülkelerle geliştirilen ikili ilişkilerin yanı sıra, Japonya ve Hint-Pasifik'teki diğer demokrasiler farklı birçok bölgesel iş birliği girişimlerinde bulunmuşlardır. Özellikle 2007'de QUAD diyaloğunu başlatan Başbakan Abe, 2012 yılında Asya'nın Demokratik Güvenlik Elması'ndan bahsetmiştir. Güney Çin Denizi'nin bir Pekin Gölü olma tehlikesiyle karşı karşıya olduğunu, bunun karşısında Avustralya, Hindistan, Japonya ve ABD'nin elmas şeklini alarak demokrasiyi savunması gerektiğini söylemiştir. Bu söylem şüphesiz ki QUAD'ı destekleyici ve devam ettirici niteliktedir. QUAD'ın yanı sıra AUKUS, ASEAN ile iş birliği, Japonya-ABD-Kore ve Japonya-ABD-Filipinler iş birlikleri bölgede kolektif güvenlik açısından önemlidir. Bizzat Japonya'nın yeni başbakanı İşiba, Hint Denizi Bölgesi'nde QUAD, AUKUS ve Japon-Kore-ABD iş birliğinin önemini dile getirmektedir (石破, 2024). Bu bağlamda İşiba'nın Abe'den beri süregelen çok taraflı ve proaktif dış güvenlik politikalarını sürdürmekte kararlı olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Lakin diğerlerinden farklı olarak İşiba, ilk kez bir 'Asya NATO'sundan' bahsetmiştir. ABD'den gelen ilk görüşler "Bunun için çok erken olduğunu" ya da "Bunun bir fantezi olduğunu" ifade etmektedir. Fransa'dan da karşı görüşler yükselmiştir. Hindistan ise bu fikri paylaşmadıklarını belirtmiştir. İşiba'nın kabinesinde Dışişleri Bakanı olarak görev alan Iwaya Takeshi ise bunun "Gelecek için bir fikir", "Orta ve uzun vadeli bir plan" olduğunu açıklamıştır. Bu geri dönütlerden sonra İşiba Asya NATO'su hakkındaki konuşmalarına da bir süreliğine ara vermiştir (Yuichi, 2024).

QUAD'ın hikayesi ise Aralık 2004'te Hint Okyanusu'nda meydana gelen deprem ve tsunamiye dayanmaktadır. ABD, Hindistan, Japonya ve Avustralya bir grup oluşturarak tsunamiden etkilenen ülkelere kurtarma birlikleri ve insani yardım göndermiştir. Sonrasında Başbakan Abe Şinzou 2007'de Avustralya, ABD ve Hindistan'ın desteğiyle bir stratejik güvenlik diyalogu olan QUAD'ı başlatmıştır. 2007 yılından 2017 yılına kadar bir durgunluk yaşanmıştır. Çin'in öncelikli hedefi haline gelmekten kaçınan ülkeler; QUAD'ı uzun bir süre pasif bir konumda tutmuştur (Durmaz, 2021). Filipinler'in başkenti Manila'da, Kasım 2017'de gerçekleştirilen ASEAN Zirvesi'nde bu dört ülke, Hint-Pasifik'te Çin'in artan nüfuzunu askeri ve diplomatik açıdan sınırlandırmak amacıyla QUAD'ı yeniden canlandırma kararı almıştır (Alperen, 2022). QUAD iş birliğinde özellikle Hindistan'ın yer alması dikkat çekicidir. 2020'de Hindistan-Çin arasında yaşanan sınır çatışmasından sonra Hindistan, ABD ve müttefikleri ile iş birliğinin kaçınılmaz olduğunu anlamıştır. Çin'i karadan ve denizden çevreleyebilmek adına Hindistan bölgesel iş birliğinin önemli bir ayağı olmuş, bölgenin ismi bile değişmiştir. Kimi zaman Uzak Doğu, Doğu Asya, Asya-Pasifik hatta Batı Pasifik olarak adlandırılan bölge için

uluslararası ilişkiler literatüründe Hint-Pasifik kavramı kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Bu kavram neticesinde Hindistan Çin'e karşı mücadelenin ana aktörlerinden biri olmuş, Hint Denizi ise önemli bir rekabet alanına dönüşmüştür.

**Sonuç**

Soğuk Savaş'ın bitimine kadar Japonya ve NATO arasında kayda değer bir ilişkiye rastlanmamıştır. Soğuk Savaş'ın bitmesiyle birlikte Yugoslavya gibi dondurulmuş sorunlar gün yüzüne çıkmış, terör gibi küresel anlamda iş birliği gerektiren yeni güvenlik tehditleri doğmuştur. Bu bağlamda yegâne güvenlik tehdidi ortadan kalkan NATO dağılmamış, aksine uluslararası barış ve istikrara yönelik tehditlerle mücadele edebilmek adına genişlemiş ve kendini yenilemiştir. Bölgesel bir güvenlik örgütünden uluslararası bir organizasyona dönüşümünde NATO küresel alanda yeni ortaklara ihtiyaç duymuştur. NATO ile ortak değerleri paylaşan, ekonomik ve teknolojik gücü yüksek Japonya da bu sayede NATO ile önemli bir ilişki kurabilmiştir. Japonya sahip olduğu yumuşak gücü dünyaya ulaştırabilmek ve küresel liberal düzenin devamlılığına katkı sunabilmek adına birçok NATO operasyonunda görev almıştır. Özellikle Afganistan görevi Japon Öz Savunma Kuvvetleri ve Japon yönetiminin istek ve kabiliyetlerini ortaya koymuştur. Bu sayede ortak değerleri korumada NATO ile ortak çalışabileceğini kanıtlayan Japonya için NATO ile siyasi iş birliği kurmanın yolu açılmıştır. Zamanla NATO ve Japonya arasında üst düzey ziyaretler gerçekleşmiş, ortak siyasi bildiriler yayınlanmış ve ortaklık anlaşmaları imzalanmıştır. Japonya Hint-Pasifik'te Kuzey Kore ve Çin ile mücadelede arkasında NATO desteği olmasını hâlâ oldukça önemsemektedir.

Lakin Japonya'nın NATO'ya üyelik ihtimalinin olmaması, son yıllardaki ABD'nin öngörülemez ve güvenilemez politikaları, örgütün bütçe sorunları ve üye ülkeler arasındaki anlaşmazlıklar NATO'nun son yıllarda Japonya için olumsuz bir imaj çizmesine sebep olmuştur. Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı'nda Japonya, NATO'nun savaşın çıkmasını engelleyemediğini ve çıkan savaşı durduramadığını, Rusya'nın başarılarının Çin'i cesaretlendireceğini ifade etmiştir. Bu sebeple Japonya, Avrupalı ülkelerle olan ikili ilişkilerine ivme kazandırmış ve bölgede farklı oluşumlarda yer almıştır. Hindistan, Avustralya ve Yeni Zelanda gibi ülkeler nezdinde nüfuzu olması sebebiyle İngiltere, bölgeyle bağları olan eski sömürgeci güç Fransa, Japonya ile ekonomik ve tarihi anlamda ortak hafızası olan Almanya ile ikili ilişkiler geliştirilmiş, bu ülkelerin bölgedeki askeri varlığı olumlu karşılanmıştır. Bunlar dışında bölgede hayata geçirilen QUAD, Japon-Amerikan-Kore iş birliği gibi çok taraflı oluşumlarda yer alınmış, AUKUS ve ASEAN gibi oluşumlar desteklenmiştir. Japonya'nın yeni Başbakanı İşiba ise 'Asya NATO'su' kavramını ortaya atarak eleştirilmiştir.

Japonya'nın NATO ile olan ilişkilerini ortaklık düzeyine taşıyana kadar birçok operasyonda aktif görev alması ve istikrarlı bir şekilde uzun yıllardır aynı söylemleri tekrar etmesi bizlere İşiba'nın 'Asya NATO'su' kavramının tamamen bir hayalden ibaret olmadığını söylüyor. Japonya şu an için kulis yapıyor, tepkileri ölçmeye çalışıyor olabilir. Yakın gelecekte Çin diğer ülkeleri kışkırttığında ya da Hint-Pasifik'te silahlar çekildiğinde Japonlar 'Asya NATO'su' kavramını tekrar ortaya atacaklar mı, ortaya atılan plan bu kez nasıl karşılanacak henüz bilemiyoruz. Lakin her ne kadar ABD son yıllarda öngörülemez politikalar ortaya koysa da Çin konusunda görüşlerinin değiştiğini söylemek zor. Çin ile olan mücadelede ABD'nin Japonya'ya, Japonya'nın da ABD'ye ihtiyacı var. NATO ile Japonya ilişkilerinin geleceği hakkında kesin bir şey söylemek zor, lakin Japonya-ABD karşılıklı bağımlılığının devam edeceğini söyleyebiliriz.

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# 7 Ekim Olaylarından Günümüze İran'ın Vekil Aktörlerinin Durumu

*Dudu Hilal Koç*

2010 yılında başlayan Arap Baharı, Ortadoğu'daki birçok ülkede şiddetli iç savaşların yaşanmasına sebep olmuştur. Bu dönemin bir getirisi olarak da birçok ülkede yönetimler değişmiştir. Ancak ister yeni kurulmuş olsun ister kendini korumuş olsun birçok yönetimin otoritesini koruma noktasında zafiyet göstermeye meyilli olduğu bilinmektedir. Bu süreçle birlikte, özellikle "zayıflayan devlet" veya "başarısız devlet" olarak bilinen yönetimler bölgede giderek yayılmış olup bazı devletler veya devlet dışı aktörler de oluşan bu otorite boşluğundan yararlanmak istemektedir. Bu noktada ise devreye vekil güç kavramı girmektedir. İran, Ortadoğu politikalarını farklı ülkelerde kontrol altında tuttuğu vekil aktörleriyle şekillendirmektedir ancak bu vekil aktörler özellikle son birkaç yıldır çeşitli değişimlere uğramaktadır. Bu yazıda da İran'ın vekil aktörleri ve bunların nasıl değişimlere maruz kaldıkları ele alınacaktır. Böylece İran'ın özellikle Ortadoğu politikalarının temelinin ve diğer devletlerle olan ilişkilerinin nasıl şekillendiği daha iyi anlaşılabilecektir.

İran, Ortadoğu'daki ciddi askeri güçlerden biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ayrıca pek çok ülkedeki yönetimi de vekil aktörleri üzerinden doğrudan etkilemekte ve yönlendirmektedir. İran, bölgedeki gücünü yıllar boyunca kendisinin vekil aktörleri olarak bilinen silahlı gruplar sayesinde pekiştirmiştir. Böylece İran'ın bölgedeki siyasi gücünün bu silahlı grupların varlığına ve etkinliğine dayalı olduğu da savunulabilir (Rakipoğlu, 2024). Dolayısıyla İran'ın askeri gücüne bakarken bölgedeki vekil aktörlerinin yaratabileceği tehlike de dikkate alınmalıdır. Yazının ilerleyen kısımlarında daha detaylı ele alınacağı gibi Yemen'deki Husilerin İsrail'e verdiği zarar bunun önemli örneklerinden birisidir.

Bu noktada İran'ın nerede hangi vekil aktörleri olduğu ve bu aktörlerin bölgedeki siyasi ve askeri olayları nasıl etkilediği sorusu cevaplanmalıdır. Lübnan Hizbullah'ı, Yemen'deki Husiler, Suriye'deki birçok Şii grup ve Irak'taki Haşdi Şabi İran'ın bölgedeki önde gelen vekil aktörleri olarak sayılabilir. Suriye'deki Şii grupları iç savaş sırasında güçlendiği ve Haşdi Şabi'nin de yine yakın 2014 yılında bölgedeki DAEŞ tehdidine karşı kurulduğu bilinmektedir. Hem bu örnekler hem de Lübnan ve Yemen örneği göz önüne alındığında bu ülkelerin hepsinin ortak noktası otorite boşluğunun olmasıdır. Bu ülkelerde devlet şiddet tekelini elinde tutamamakta olup; bu da devlet dışı aktörlerin ortaya çıkmasını kolaylaştırmaktadır. İran da bu ülkelerde bahsedilen gruplar üzerinden belli bir oranda kontrol sağlamaktadır. Bu sayede İran'ın Ortadoğu'da yıllar boyunca önemli bir etki alanı olmuştur. Ayrıca vekil aktörler üzerinden

yürütülen operasyonlardan Kudüs Gücü olarak adlandırılan ekip sorumludur. Bu ekibin İran Devrim Muhafızları içindeki dış operasyonlardan sorumlu birim olduğu da bilinmektedir (Rakipoğlu, 2024). Bu birimin tüm dünyada gündeme gelmesine neden olan çarpıcı bir gelişme de Kudüs Gücü Komutanı Kasım Süleymani'nin 2020 yılında Bağdat'ta öldürülmesi olmuştur. Bu olay İran'da siyasetinde ciddi bir sarsıntı yaratırken İran'ın vekil aktörlerinin gücü açısından da dönüm noktalarından birisi olarak kabul edilebilir. Bu noktada, Kasım Süleymani'nin hedef alınmasına giden süreci ve bu olayın İran'ın bölgedeki otoritesini nasıl etkilediğini detaylıca ele almak gerekmektedir. Süleymani'nin hayatını kaybetmesine neden olan saldırı, ABD tarafından Bağdat'ta gerçekleştirilmiş ve hem Süleymani hem de yanındaki bazı Şii milisler hedef alınmıştır. Süleymani ile birlikte Şii bir silahlı güç olan Kata'ib Hizbullah'ın kurucusu Mehdi el-Mühendis de aynı saldırıda ölmüştür (Çalışkan, 2020). Bu saldırının arka planında ise 2019 yılının eylül ayında yaşanan Aramco saldırısıyla tırmanan gerginlik yatmaktadır (Çalışkan, 2020). Suudi Arabistan'ın önde gelen petrol şirketlerinden olan Saudi Aramco'ya yönelik olarak Yemen'de bulunan Husi güçlerin insansız hava araçlarıyla saldırı düzenlemesi bölgede yeni çatışmaları tetiklemiştir (The Guardian, 2019). Bu saldırıyı izleyen süreçte Kerkük'te yine İran yanlısı gruplar ABD üssünü hedef almıştır. Cevap olarak da ABD'nin bu gruplara operasyonlar düzenleyerek zarar vermesi de Bağdat'ta sokak gösterilerine neden olmuş ve buradaki ABD Büyükelçiliğini tehdit eden durumlar yaşanmıştır (Kasapoğlu & Kaya, 2020). Süleymani'yi hedef alan saldırının arka planındaki askeri gerilim böyle şekillenmiştir. İran'ın kontrol ettiği gruplar üzerinden özellikle ABD'ye yönelik tehdidin artması ise bir anlamda İran'ın bölgedeki güç gösterisi olarak yorumlanabilir (Kasapoğlu & Kaya, 2020).

Özellikle bu dönem ele alınırsa olayın sadece bir dizi askeri çatışmayla açıklanması da yetersiz olacaktır. Zira bu dönem Donald Trump'ın ilk başkanlık dönemine denk gelmektedir. Trump, özellikle İran'a yönelik sert politikalarıyla öne çıkmıştır. Bu dönemde, Obama'nın İran'a yönelik yürüttüğü ve sıkça eleştiri alan diplomasiye ters olarak daha sert bir dış politika benimsenmiştir. Trump, 2017'deki bir konuşmasında İran'ın bölgeye yıkım getiren aşırı grupları desteklediği ve bölgedeki mezhepsel çatışmalara neden olduğunu dile getirmiştir (Lane, 2023). Bunlara ek olarak Trump ilk başkanlık döneminde vekil aktör olarak tanımlanabilecek 7 gruba yaptırım kararı almıştır (Lane, 2023). Kendisinden önceki başkanların ve Biden yönetiminin yaptırım kararlarına bakılacak olursa Trump'ın çok daha net bir şekilde İran'ı hedef aldığı görülmektedir. Bu noktada vurgulanması gereken başka bir nokta da Trump'ın ilk başkanlık döneminin öne çıkan özelliklerinden birisi de yaptırımlarla özellikle ekonomileri yıpratma politikasıdır. İran da özellikle yaptırımlarla yıpratılmaya çalışılmıştır.

Yukarıda da belirtildiği gibi Trump'ın İran'a yönelik politikaları kendisinden önceki Obama yönetiminden oldukça farklı olmuştur. Obama yönetimi sıkça eleştirilere konu olsa da İran ile nükleer anlaşma için uzun süre mesai harcamıştır. 2015 yılında varılan anlaşma, İran'ın nükleer kapasitesine yönelik önemli kısıtlamalarla birlikte Batı'nın İran'a yönelik yaptırımlarının kaldırılmasını içermektedir (Anadolu Ajansı, 2018). Kapsamlı Ortak Eylem Planı (KOEP) olarak bilinen anlaşmanın müzakerelerine İran, Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi'nin 5 daimi üyesi ve Almanya katılmıştır. Ayrıca Avrupa Birliği de görüşmelerde yer almıştır (Robinson, 2023). O dönemde bu anlaşmaya gelen eleştirilerin çoğunluğu İran'a karşı yumuşak politikaların izlendiği ve bunun İran'ın bölgede kendisini daha güçlü konumlandırmasına neden olabileceği temellerine dayanmıştır. Eleştirilere bakıldığında, yaptırımların kaldırılmasının İran'ın ekonomisini güçlendireceği ve böylece İran'ın vekil güçleri yoluyla Ortadoğu'daki etkinliğini arttırabileceğinin altı çizilmiştir (Kheyrian, 2019). Bu nedenle İsrail de bu anlaşmayı eleştirmiş ve İran'a karşı fazla hoşgörülü davranıldığını savunmuştur (Robinson, 2023). Hatta Suudi Arabistan yönetimi de İran'ın bölgedeki etkinliğinin artmasının ve nükleer bir güç haline gelmesinin en çok kendilerini olumsuz etkileyeceğinin belirterek müzakerelere dahil edilmeleri gerektiğini vurgulamıştır (Robinson, 2023). Ortadoğu'dan gelen bu eleştirilere ek olarak, ABD'de cumhuriyetçiler de Obama yönetimini sık sık bu anlaşma üzerinden hedef almıştır. Nitekim Trump yönetimi 2018 yılında anlaşmanın baştan itibaren hatalı olduğunu belirterek anlaşmadan çekilmiş ve aynı yıl İran' a yönelik tüm ABD yaptırımlarını yeniden yürürlüğe koymuştur (BBC News, 2021). Nükleer anlaşmayla varılan uzlaşının da ortadan kalkmasıyla ABD ve İran'ın bölgedeki anlaşmazlıkları zirveye ulaşmış ve sonuçta da İran'ın bölgedeki en önemli isimlerinden sayılan Süleymani hedef alınmıştır. Böylece ABD, yaptırımlar yoluyla İran ekonomisini hedef alırken İran'ın bölgedeki vekil aktörleri de ABD'nin hedef noktaları haline gelmiştir. Bu süreçten sonra ABD-İran gerginliğinin azalmadığı aksine sürekli arttığı göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır. Nitekim bu süreç, 2023'te şiddetlenen Hamas-İsrail çatışması ile başka bir boyuta taşınmış ve geçtiğimiz aylarda ABD'nin doğrudan İran topraklarındaki nükleer tesisleri hedef almasına yol açmıştır.

Yaşanan bu süreç, İran'ın vekil aktörler üzerinden bölgede sağladığı kontrolün ciddi bir erozyona uğradığı yorumlarına da neden olmaktadır. Vekil aktörlerin bölgede kurduğu hakimiyetin kırılma noktalarından biri olarak 7 Ekim 2023 tarihinde yükselen Hamas-İsrail çatışması gösterilebilir. İsrail bu çatışmalarda Gazze'deki yüzbinlerce sivili hedef almış ve Hamas hedeflerinin dışında bölgedeki birçok noktaya ağır bir şekilde saldırmıştır. Bu bağlamda İsrail'in özellikle Lübnan'a yönelik yaptığı saldırılar, çatışmanın boyutunu İsrail – Filistin

çatışması olmaktan çıkarmıştır. Çatışmaların başlangıcında, bu çatışmanın bölgesel bir çatışmaya dönme tehlikesi sık sık dünya basınında gündeme gelmiştir. 7 Ekim 2023 tarihinden günümüze kadar birçok aktörün çatışmalara dahil olması ise bu olayların hala geniş kapsamlı bölgesel bir çatışmaya dönüşme tehlikesi taşıdığını göstermektedir.

Bu çatışmalar bağlamında İsrail, Hizbullah tehdidini gerekçe göstererek Lübnan'a ağır saldırılar düzenlemiştir. Lübnan, hâlihazırda uzun bir süreden beri birçok siyasi ve ekonomik sorunla boğuşan bir zayıflayan devlet örneği oluşturmaktadır. İsrail saldırıları da ülkedeki siyasi endişeleri üst seviyeye çıkarmıştır. Bunun sonucunda, ülkede yıllardır ciddi bir gücü elinde tutan Hizbullah da Filistin'de süren savaşı Lübnan'a getirdikleri için eleştirilerin hedefine yerleşmiştir (Acar, 2023). Buna ek olarak, İsrail'in saldırıları Hizbullah'ın askeri gücünü yıpratırken bir yandan da üst düzey kadrolardaki birçok ismin öldürülmesi örgüt üzerinde önemli bir sarsıntı yaratmıştır. Bu isimlerin başında da Hizbullah lideri Hasan Nasrallah gelmektedir (Acar, 2023). Dolayısıyla İsrail – Hamas çatışmalarıyla başlayan süreçte İran'ın Lübnan'daki vekil aktörlerinden olan Hizbullah önemli bir güç kaybına uğramıştır. Hizbullah siyasi olarak Lübnan'da varlığını korusa da İran'ın en önemli vekil aktörlerinden birinin bölgedeki gücünün azaldığı söylenebilir (Carter, 2025).

Bir diğer önemli gelişme ise 10 yıldan fazla süren iç savaş sonucunda Suriye'deki Esad rejiminin devrilmesi olmuştur. İran, bu iç savaşta binlerce Şii milisle birlikte Beşar Esad'a destek vermiş ve Esad'ın sahadaki en önemli destekçilerinden olmuştur. Ancak Esad yönetimini devrilmesi İran'ın uzun yıllardır kullandığı kaynakların boşa gitmesine neden olmuştur. Coğrafi olarak da İran, Esad rejiminin devrilmesiyle birlikte kendisi ve Hizbullah arasındaki trafiği sağlayan önemli bir bölgede kontrolü kaybetmiştir (Carter, 2025). Böylece Esad rejiminin çökmesi hem Suriye üzerindeki İran etkisini kırarken hem de Lübnan'daki Hizbullah yönetiminin para ve silah akışını keserek Hizbullah'ın zayıflamasına neden olmuştur. Böylece Esad rejiminin çökmesi İran'ın vekil aktörlerine çok boyutlu bir zarar vermiştir.

İran bu süreçte özellikle Yemen'deki Husiler üzerinden Basra Körfezi etrafındaki gücünü korumaya çalışmaktadır. Husiler, Hürmüz Boğazından geçen bazı gemileri hedef alarak dünya ticaretinin güvenliği üzerindeki gücünü göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Bu bölgenin stratejik bir diğer önemi de İsrail'e yönelik bir çok füze saldırısının bu bölgeden gerçekleşmesidir. Boğazdan geçen gemilere yönelik vergileri sürekli arttığı bilinmektedir (Sameai, Canik & Aksoy, 2025). İran'ın bu saldırılarına karşılık İsrail de Yemen'deki Husilerin kontrol ettiği bazı stratejik noktaları hedef almaktadır. Bu noktalardan birisi de Hudeyfe Limanı'dır (Sameai,

Canik & Aksoy, 2025). 2024'ten beri sıklaşan saldırılarla birçok insan ölürken Husilere alt yapı bakımından da ciddi zararlar verilmiştir.

Yıllardır vekil aktörler üzerinden devam eden İran– ABD ve İran – İsrail çatışmaları ise geçtiğimiz aylarda asıl aktörler arasında doğrudan bir çatışmaya dönmüştür. 12 Haziran 2025 tarihinde Uluslararası Atom Enerjisi Ajansı'nın (IAEA) İran'ın yirmi yıllık bir süreçte ilk defa nükleer silahların yayılmasını engellemeye yönelik yükümlülüklerini ihlal ettiğini açıklamasıyla birlikte İsrail, İran'ın nükleer alanda çalışan birçok bilim insanına, nükleer tesisleri ve üst düzey askeri isimlere saldırı düzenlemiştir. İran'ın bunu savaş sebebi kabul etmesi sonucunda ise İsrail' e binlerce füze ve insansız hava aracıyla saldırılar düzenlenmiştir (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). Çatışmaların dönüm noktası ise ABD'nin İran'daki 3 nükleer santrale hava saldırısı düzenlemesi olmuştur (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). Bu durum savaşın şiddetlenmesine yönelik endişeleri arttırmıştır. ABD, İran'ın nükleer kapasitesine kalıcı zararlar verdiğini öne sürse de Birleşmiş Milletler saldırının İran'ın nükleer kapasitesine bu derece yoğun bir zarar verilmediğini dile getirmektedir (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). Bu saldırının sonucunda ise İran misilleme amacıyla Katar'daki ABD üssüne saldırı düzenlemiştir. ABD, bu saldırının daha önce haber verilerek gerçekleştiğini ve herhangi bir can kaybına neden olmadığını iddia etmiştir (Karimi & Price, 2025). Bu saldırıdan sonra ise tarafların 24 Haziran tarihinde birbirlerine saldırıyı bırakmaları üzerine ateşkes sağlanmıştır.

Vekil aktörler üzerinden devam eden küçük çaplı çatışmaların İran ve İsrail arasındaki doğrudan bir çatışmaya dönmesiyle birlikte bölgede askeri gerginliklerin zirveye çıktığı görülmektedir. Bir diğer önemli ayrıntı ise İran'ın bu savaşta vekil aktörlerinden ve Rusya gibi müttefiklerinden yeterli desteği görememesidir (Karimi & Price, 2025). Bu durum İran'ın bölgedeki etkinliğinin tahmin edildiği kadar güçlü olmadığı yorumlarına neden olmuştur. Başka bir bağlamda ise Rusya ve Çin gibi aktörlerin İran'a etkili bir destek sunmaması da bu müttefiklik ilişkilerinin sorgulanmasına yol açmıştır. Diğer devletlerle olan ilişkiler başka bir detaylı konu olmakla birlikte vekil aktörlerin durumu İran ile olan ilişkileri nedeniyle bu yazının önemli bir parçasıdır.

Sonuç olarak; İran -İsrail arasında yükselen savaşta vekil aktörlerin etkisiz kalması, bu aktörlerin son yıllarda yaşanan çatışmalar boyunca ciddi anlamda yıprandığını göstermektedir. Buna bağlı olarak, 7 Ekim 2023 tarihinden beri İsrail'in İran destekli gruplara yönelik saldırıları ve bölgedeki siyasi değişimlerin İran'ın hem doğrudan hem de vekil aktörlerle dolaylı olarak elinde tuttuğu askeri gücünde önemli bir yıpranmanın olduğu söylenebilir. İran'ın dış politikasının doğrudan vekil aktörlerle elinde tuttuğu askeri güce dayalı olduğu göz önünde

bulundurulduğunda, İran'ın dış politikasını önümüzdeki süreçte güçlendirme yönünde adımlar atacağı beklenmektedir. Ancak bunun yeni bölgesel çatışmalara neden olma olasılığı da de önümüzdeki ayların küresel gündemini etkileyecektir.

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# Sword of Justice or Scales of Faith? The ICC's Dilemma with Islamic Narratives

*Gülsena Çevirken*

## Introduction

Most of today's armed conflicts are "non-international" conflicts fuelled by the rise and activities of non-state armed groups. Among these, certain groups not only resort to violence, but also exert significant influence over local populations through security structures, rules of law, and most importantly, religious norms. A critical question arises at this point: How do these armed groups manipulate religious narratives to legitimize themselves? And, more importantly, how does the International Criminal Court (ICC) deal with such claims of religious authority in the pursuit of justice?

The Al Hassan case, focusing on the actions of Ansar Dine in Mali, vividly illustrates these challenges (ICC, 2020). Julie Fraser's blog post, *Islam Itself Is Not on Trial*, directly addresses this dilemma, questioning the ICC's approach to Islamic law and warning that neglecting religious sensitivities could severely damage the Court's legitimacy among local populations (Fraser, 2023). This blog post builds on Julie Fraser's analysis to assess how the ICC addresses the religious narratives of armed groups invoking Islamic legitimacy, and the international legal implications that follow. Finally, the analysis will put forward recommendations on how the court may strike a balance between religious sensitivity and legal neutrality, while considering Fraser's suggestions.

## Armed Groups, Islam, and the ICC: Insights from Fraser

Julie Fraser's blog post, "Islam Itself Is Not on Trial," provides an important analysis of how the ICC can more effectively combat the religious and cultural arguments of armed groups (Fraser, 2023). The unique position of the article in the literature lies in its detailed examination of the problems faced by the ICC, focusing on the concrete realities of the Al Hassan case rather than general theoretical discussions. The practices of armed groups such as Ansar Dine in Timbuktu, the requirement for women to wear the veil, the prohibition of the carrying of amulets, and the prohibition of music and cultural events, clearly demonstrate the practical difficulties faced by the ICC in addressing such crimes (ICC, 2024, paras. 670–760).

The main controversial point that Fraser draws attention to is the contradiction between the ICC prosecutor's statement that "Islam is not on trial" and the real content of the case (ICC, 2023, p. 5). According to the article, while the prosecutor's office claimed that Islam was not on trial, it also had to constantly evaluate arguments regarding Islamic law throughout the case (Evans, 2005). Fraser (2023) emphasizes the importance of the ICC directly but sensitively engaging with Islam and Islamic law, rather than ignoring religious elements as it has done in previous similar cases.

Fraser's (2023) concrete recommendations include, first, that ICC judges should recognise Islamic law as a multifaceted and contested area, rather than treating it as a monolith. She welcomes the appointment of Professor Intisar Rabb as an expert advisor on Islamic law to the Office of the Prosecutor, seeing it as an important step towards more informed and nuanced decision-making (HLS News Staff, 2021). Such an approach would enable the Court to better distinguish between the religious justifications advanced by armed groups and the genuine beliefs of local communities.

Another suggestion by Fraser (2023) is that the ICC should communicate more strongly with Muslim communities that are directly affected by its decisions. By referring to Islamic principles and norms in ICC decisions, the court's decisions can be made more understandable and meaningful to local communities. This approach is also important in terms of encouraging the participation of states that have a distance from the ICC system and have large Muslim populations, such as Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Badar, 2022). This step can bring the ICC closer to its goal of universality (Badar, 2022; Fraser, 2021, pp. 15–16)

Fraser's (2023) analysis makes an important contribution to the literature on how the ICC can develop a more inclusive and effective legal approach to the religious discourse of armed groups. In this context, the fact that it offers practical and concrete suggestions for resolving the legal and cultural problems facing the ICC makes the article a valuable reference in academic discussions.

**Islamic Law on Trial? The ICC's Response to Armed Groups**

ICC is currently faced with a critical dilemma when trying the actions of armed groups operating in various parts of the world within the framework of international law (Bartles-Smith, 2022). The efforts of armed groups, particularly Ansar Dine, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, to legitimize their acts of violence on religious grounds by interpreting

Islamic law in a way that serves their own political interests, conflict with the ICC's principle of neutrality (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022; Gray, 2018, pp. 136–143).

This difficulty is further compounded by the slowness of religious authorities, political leaders and even Muslim scholars to clarify the distinction between extremist interpretations and authentic Islamic traditions (Zoli, Bassiouni, & Khan, Yıl, pp. 40–43). Moreover, although Islamic law itself contains principles that prohibit many forms of violence and provide internal mechanisms for conflict resolution, these aspects are not sufficiently emphasized in the public opinion, thus complicating the ICC's task (al-Zuhili, 2005, pp. 272–276). This situation forces the court to confront a serious question: Should the ICC draw the "sword of justice" to prosecute religious discourse used by armed groups, or should it balance the "scales of cultures" by taking into account the sensitivities of different cultures (Piovesan, 2024)?

It must be acknowledged that it is practically impossible for the ICC to conduct detailed assessments of every culture and religion. As seen in the Al Hassan case, the frequent use of the phrase "Islam is not on trial" by ICC judges demonstrates that the court's direct involvement with religious interpretations may jeopardize its legal impartiality (Fraser 2023). Given the wide variety of interpretations of Islamic law, it seems unrealistic for the ICC to conduct comprehensive analyses of not only Islam but also every culture and religion (Fraser, 2020, p. 248).

At this point, Fraser's (2023) suggestion of an independent expert could be taken further and a sub-commission of independent experts could be established. These commissions could analyze how armed groups use religious discourse as a propaganda tool on the ground, how they manipulate local people and how they shape perceptions in the international community. In this way, the ICC could create a more concrete and impartial information base for its decisions. This method would help the ICC maintain its neutrality and contribute to the real universalization of international law. It would also reduce the possibility of armed groups using false religious interpretations as a defense, allowing for fairer court proceedings.

**Armed Groups and Justice: TWAIL's Call**

One of the biggest dilemmas of the ICC is the distrust of Muslim-majority countries that are not party to the Rome Statute in the court's understanding of justice. From a TWAIL (Third World Approaches to International Law, a critical school of thought highlighting how international law has historically reflected Eurocentric and colonial biases) perspective,

scholars argue that for international law to be truly universal, local legal traditions and norms need to be more effectively integrated into the system (Badar, 2022; Fraser 2021 pp. 11-15).

The Al Hassan case clearly demonstrates how armed groups use religious narratives for propaganda and public mobilization purposes. Similar methods are seen in groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab, which exploit Islamic references to legitimize violence and establish control over local populations.  Mr. Al Hassan's defense team acknowledged that Islamic law is "a complex legal system" and sought advice from experts such as Professor Mohamed Badar to highlight the differences between local religious practices in Timbuktu and the strict interpretations of Ansar Dine (ICC, 2022, p. 37). The defense provided deeper context by addressing topics such as crimes and punishments in Islamic law, marriage rules, and the role of the clergy. Meanwhile, throughout the trial, the prosecution also argued that Ansar Dine did not consider the people of Timbuktu to be "true Muslims" and labelled them as "infidels" (ICC, 2023, pp. 12, 60). This illustrates how the armed group instrumentalized religious rhetoric to serve its own interests.

It is clear that the ICC's claim of internationalization should not mean that it loses its impartiality. The establishment of independent commissions of inquiry could enable the ICC to obtain deeper and more impartial information on the activities of armed groups. Such an approach would allow the ICC to be accepted not only as a "sword of justice" but also as an institution that balances the legal and cultural scales of different societies.

**Unanswered Questions for the ICC**

The ICC's efforts to address armed groups resemble an incomplete puzzle, with critical gaps still visible. Fraser's call for the ICC to consider cultural contexts is important, yet it leaves some fundamental questions unanswered: Can the ICC realistically assess the diverse religious and cultural narratives of armed groups, and if not, who should bear this responsibility? At this point, a more concrete and workable approach is needed concerning the ICC's position on cultural and religious matters.

Beyond Fraser's proposal, the ICC clearly needs independent expert commissions to better understand the activities of armed groups. While such a commission would require political will beyond the Court's current mandate, it is essential for strengthening the ICC's credibility and providing impartial analysis of armed groups' influence on cultural narratives. These mechanisms should not only document facts on the ground but also offer a holistic

perspective by analyzing the psychological, social, and propaganda impacts of armed groups on both local communities and international perceptions. Field data collected by these commissions would enhance the impartiality and legitimacy of the ICC's decisions, while helping to guard against discourse manipulation by armed groups.

As a concrete example, in the Al Hassan case, the ICC's appointment of an expert advisor on Islamic law is an important step, but the impact of this expert on the case process and decision-making mechanisms is not clear. Shouldn't such steps be taken to increase the participation of Muslim-majority countries that are not parties to the Rome Statute in court processes (Fraser, 2020, pp. 11–12)? The ICC's recognition of different legal traditions and local realities through more inclusive policies, drawing on the TWAIL perspective, would be a real step towards the universalization of international law. How can the ICC remain impartial when assessing the complex religious and cultural structures of armed groups, and what new mechanisms can it put in place to ensure this?

**Conclusion**

The ICC is confronted with a delicate balancing act when adjudicating cases involving armed groups that invoke religious and cultural narratives to justify violence. The Al Hassan case highlights that this challenge is not just theoretical, but has direct and significant implications for the Court's practice. Groups like Ansar Dine, ISIS, and Boko Haram have strategically exploited interpretations of Islamic law to legitimize their actions, compelling the ICC to navigate a narrow path between respecting cultural sensitivities and upholding judicial impartiality.

As Higgins (2020, pp. 247–248) points out, it is not possible to completely ignore cultural contexts, but direct involvement also increases the risk of impartiality. Therefore, mechanisms such as independent expert commissions should be used to help the court better understand local realities. This will enable decisions to be free from manipulative religious discourses and strengthen the universality of justice.

Ultimately, the central question facing the ICC is: How can the court impartially distinguish between the religious claims of armed groups and the realities on the ground? The answer will determine not only the legitimacy of the ICC, but also the future of international law. And perhaps all that is needed for the ICC to achieve this balance is to weigh the ideal of universalization of law on a scale of justice that includes cultural realities.

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# Cracks in the Kremlin's Grip: Russia's Waning Influence in the South Caucasus

*Şerif Sav*

## Introduction

"Nothing is so permanent as change," observed Heraclitus, a truth that captures the shifting balance of power in the South Caucasus. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow retained substantial influence over its post-Soviet neighbors, using security alliances, economic leverage, and "frozen conflicts" to assert dominance. For decades, Russia acted as the indispensable arbiter of regional disputes, ensuring that no significant political or security decision could bypass its involvement.

Today, that dominance is visibly eroding. Regional actors are asserting greater autonomy, forging new partnerships, and openly challenging the Kremlin's authority. While this paper does not examine the most recent peace agreements in Washington between Armenia and Azerbaijan, those developments nonetheless stand as further evidence of Moscow's diminishing role. The trajectory of decline, already evident before, accelerated sharply following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which overstretched its military, deepened economic strain, and diverted its attention away from the Caucasus. Against this backdrop, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia have recalibrated their foreign policies in ways that collectively signal the end of Moscow's uncontested primacy in the region.

### a. Azerbaijan: Strategic Autonomy and Assertiveness

Azerbaijan's recent trajectory vividly illustrates Russia's waning influence in the South Caucasus. Long practiced in the art of multi-vector balancing, Baku has historically avoided full alignment with either Russia or the West, preferring to safeguard its sovereignty. In the post-Soviet era, Azerbaijan did not join Moscow-led blocs like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or the Eurasian Economic Union, reflecting a cautious distance from Russian domination (Safiyev, 2024). Instead, President Ilham Aliyev pursued a pragmatic foreign policy aimed at "ensuring [Azerbaijan's] political survival" by maneuvering among larger powers (Safiyev, 2024). While maintaining ties with Moscow, Azerbaijan simultaneously fostered partnerships with Türkiye and engaged with Western economies.

Moscow's declining influence became starkly evident in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In 2020, Azerbaijan launched a successful military campaign to reclaim large swaths

of territory held by Armenian forces since the 1990s. Backed decisively by Türkiye and logistically Israel, Baku prevailed in the 44-day Second Karabakh War, regaining control over seven districts and part of Nagorno-Karabakh itself (Neset et. al, 2023). Russia, ostensibly the region's power broker, stayed neutral during much of the fighting and intervened only to broker the ceasefire, inserting 2,000 "peacekeepers" into Karabakh as monitors (Landgraf & Seferian, 2023). Notably, this outcome, Azerbaijan's major territorial victory, was achieved without Russian military support or mediation. It signaled a dramatic shift: a long-standing conflict that Moscow had used to justify its influence was now being resolved on Azerbaijan's terms. Over the next three years, Azerbaijan's assertiveness in Karabakh further exposed Russia's waning role. In late 2022, Azerbaijani authorities effectively blockaded the Lachin corridor, the only road patrolled by Russian peacekeepers connecting Karabakh to Armenia (Mills & Walker, 2023). When Azerbaijani forces pressed to "reassert control" over parts of Karabakh during this period, Russian troops did not intervene, even as the blockade caused humanitarian distress and the exodus of tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians (Daly, 2025). Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly condemned the Kremlin for failing to uphold security guarantees, underscoring how Russia's pledge to protect its Armenian ally under the CSTO was ringing hollow (Osborn, 2023). By September 2023, emboldened Azerbaijani forces launched a final lightning offensive that completed Baku's takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh, effectively dissolving the separatist entity. Once again, Russia, preoccupied with its war in Ukraine, did nothing to stop Azerbaijan's advance, drawing "fierce backlash" from Armenia but confirming that Moscow was either unable or unwilling to rein in Baku (Daly, 2025). This decisive outcome eliminated a principal source of Russian influence, its role as peacekeeper and mediator in Karabakh, and marked "the end of 30 years of conflict" on Azerbaijani terms (Safiyev, 2024, p.4). President Aliyev touted the victory as fulfilling the nation's long-held dreams without reliance on outside powers (Safiyev, 2024). For Moscow, the loss of the Karabakh file was a strategic blow. The Kremlin's long-standing strategy of managing "frozen conflicts" to exert influence was upended, what was once leverage had become a liability. Now that calculation has changed. Azerbaijan's 2020-2023 offensives showed that such conflicts were "far from frozen" and could escalate beyond Moscow's control (Safiyev, 2024). In fact, some in Baku suspect Russia tacitly acquiesced to Azerbaijan's final push in 2023: a secret understanding to remove the last impediment to closer Azerbaijani-Russian relations (Cenusa, 2025). Whether or not that is true, the outcome undeniably diminished Russia's standing: Russian peacekeepers withdrew ahead of schedule in early 2024, their mission mooted by Azerbaijan's victory (Kitachaev, 2025). As the conflict that once necessitated Moscow's presence faded away, Baku

increasingly kept its distance from Russia, seeking instead new security and economic partners (Daly, 2025).

Russia's overextension in Ukraine greatly contributed to its declining influence over Azerbaijan. With Moscow distracted and military resources tied up, the Kremlin had limited capacity to enforce its will in the Caucasus. Azerbaijani leaders recognized this opportunity. Aliyev's government pursued a more independent course, confident that Russia, mired in sanctions and battlefield losses, would be reluctant to open a new front of confrontation in Azerbaijan. Indeed, Baku began to "impose new rules on Moscow" as early as late 2024, testing how far it could go without provoking serious Russian retaliation (Kitachaev, 2025). A notable example came in December 2024, when an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane en route to Grozny was shot down, allegedly by a Russian air defense unit, killing 38 civilians (Bagirova & Stolyarov, 2024). Initially, Russian authorities tried to downplay the tragedy, but Azerbaijan publicly demanded accountability. In a remarkable turn, President Vladimir Putin personally apologized to Aliyev for the "tragic incident," a rare admission of fault, and even agreed to the construction of a memorial in Moscow for Aliyev's father, Heydar Aliyev (Kitachaev, 2025; Bennett, 2024). This episode demonstrated that Baku could extract concessions from Moscow when pressing firmly. It also taught Aliyev that a controlled confrontation with Russia could yield political dividends at home: he appeared as a strong leader standing up to a great power, without crossing into irreparable breach (Kitachaev, 2025). Crucially, Azerbaijan has found new alliances to counterbalance Russia's influence. Foremost is its deepening bond with Türkiye. The Ankara-Baku partnership is often described in fraternal terms ("one nation, two states") and was formalized in the 2021 Shusha Declaration, a mutual security pact (Sahakyan, 2024). Turkish military support, from training to supplying drones, was pivotal in Azerbaijan's Karabakh victories. In return, Azerbaijan has solidified Türkiye's strategic foothold in the Caucasus. Today, Ankara effectively serves as Baku's security guarantor, allowing Aliyev greater freedom to defy Moscow (Safiyev, 2024). As analyst Rail Safiyev notes, Azerbaijan "owes its recent independent action and sovereign self-assurance" to Türkiye's backing, which bolsters its position against larger powers (Safiyev, 2024, p.4). Russia has been forced to tolerate this reality, at least tacitly. Putin cannot afford a direct clash with Türkiye, a fellow regional heavyweight nor does Baku's pro-Türkiye orientation threaten the survival of Putin's regime in the way a pro-Western democracy might (Yunusov, 2025). Thus, Moscow has grudgingly adapted to Azerbaijan's new alignment, prioritizing compromise over confrontation. Azerbaijan has also capitalized on Europe's energy needs to reduce its

dependence on Russia. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, European states sought alternative oil and gas suppliers, and oil-rich Azerbaijan seized the moment. In July 2022, Baku signed a major agreement with the European Union to double natural gas exports to Europe by 2027, helping replace Russian supplies (Euronews, 2022). By mid-2023, Azerbaijan provided nearly 6% of EU's gas imports, and an EU-Azerbaijan "Strategic Partnership" on energy was in place (von Essen, 2023). Europe's reliance on Azerbaijani gas gives Baku a degree of political protection; Western criticism of Aliyev's authoritarian rule has been relatively muted as Azerbaijan becomes more strategically pivotal (Kitachaev, 2025).

In effect, Azerbaijan has positioned itself as a "reliable energy partner" to the West and a key piece in Europe's effort to diminish Russian influence (Tüfekçi, 2025). Meanwhile, Russia's traditional tools of influence in Azerbaijan have lost potency. Soft power levers like Russian-language media and cultural ties remain present, many Azerbaijani elites are Russian-educated and Russian news still circulates, but they are increasingly offset by Turkish cultural influence and a rise in anti-Kremlin sentiment among the public (Safiyev, 2024; Aliyev, 2018). Economic pressure is also less effective: while hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis work in Russia, Baku knows that any Russian move to expel migrant workers or ban Azerbaijani goods would hurt Moscow as well by driving Baku even closer to the West or Türkiye. Moreover, Moscow itself now depends on Azerbaijan as a transit corridor to circumvent sanctions. Since 2022, Russia has poured investment into the International North–South Transport Corridor, upgrading rail lines through Azerbaijan to connect to Iran and South Asia (Caspian-Alpine Society, 2025; Kaleji, 2025). This logistical reliance further constrains the Kremlin's ability to coerce Baku; Azerbaijan has power as a sanctions lifeline for Russia's economy (Daly, 2025). Ironically, the more Russia leans on Azerbaijan for trade routes and energy swaps, the more Baku can assert its autonomy without fear of reprisal.

By 2025, Azerbaijan shifted from cautious balancing to open confrontation with Moscow:

- <u>December 2024:</u> After Baku accused Russia of downing flight J2-251, Putin issued a rare apology and offered compensation which is a reversal that placed Moscow on the defensive (Mao, 2024).
- <u>May 2025:</u> Aliyev skipped Russia's Victory Day parade, voiced support for Ukraine, and hosted Kyiv officials, signaling greater independence while keeping selective economic ties (TASS, 2025).

- <u>June 2025:</u> Following a brutal Russian raid on ethnic Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg, Baku retaliated by raiding Sputnik's offices, arresting Russian nationals, and cancelling cultural events (Vakulina, 2025; Hajiyeva, 2025).
- <u>July 2025:</u> Aliyev likened Ukraine's fight to Azerbaijan's Karabakh campaign and welcomed Erdogan to Shusha, underscoring Ankara's primacy over Moscow ( Khachidze, 2025).

These moves reflect a decisive erosion of Russian influence, with Baku asserting itself as a regional actor aligned more closely with Türkiye than the Kremlin.

These confrontations highlight how Russia's traditional influence mechanisms have faltered. Moscow's once-formidable "levers of influence" such as the CSTO military alliance, energy dependence, or Russian-language soft power, carry little weight when Azerbaijan feels its sovereignty is at stake (Taghizade, 2025). The CSTO, for instance, proved impotent to either restrain Azerbaijan or reassure Armenia, effectively discrediting Russia's security umbrella in the eyes of the region. Energy leverage cuts both ways: Europe's hunger for non-Russian gas gives Azerbaijan confidence, while Russia's need for transit routes through Azerbaijan gives Baku power. Even Moscow's propaganda offensive backfired; aggressive anti-Azerbaijani rhetoric on Russian state TV (e.g. Vladimir Solovyov's broadcasts) only inflamed Azerbaijani public opinion and stiffened Baku's resolve to assert its independence (Strelnikov & Rescheto, 2025; Muradov, 2022 )

### b. Armenia: Disillusionment with Moscow and Turn to the West

For most of the post-Soviet period, Armenia has been one of Russia's closest allies, heavily reliant on Moscow for security guarantees. This relationship was rooted in Armenia's geopolitical predicament: hostile relations with neighboring Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh) and Türkiye left Armenia isolated, thereby elevating Russia as an indispensable patron (Giragosian, 2019). Russia maintained a military base in Armenia and Armenian borders with Türkiye and Iran were guarded by Russian border troops which is a tangible symbol of a security alliance dating back to the 1990s. In the economic realm, too, Armenia integrated with Russian-led initiatives, joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2015 and depending on Russian investments and energy supplies. Politically, successive Armenian leaders upheld a foreign policy of "complementarism," seeking to balance deep ties with Russia against parallel engagement with the West (Atanesyan et al., 2024). This delicate strategy aimed to extract benefits from both East and West without antagonizing either. For example, Armenia negotiated

an Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013, only to abruptly backtrack under Russian pressure in favor of the EAEU which is a move that highlighted the Kremlin's grip on Yerevan's strategic choices (Atanesyan et al., 2024). The compromise Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that Armenia eventually signed with the EU in 2017, a weakened alternative to full association, underscored how Armenia historically walked a tightrope between its security patron and its desire for Western partnerships. Despite occasional frictions, notably Armenian public outcry after revelations in 2016 that Russia had been selling advanced weapons to Azerbaijan, Armenia's foe (Giragosian, 2019) - the core alliance remained intact. Until recently, Moscow was widely perceived (both among elites and the public) as Armenia's chief strategic ally and protector, a status cemented by decades of close cooperation and shared security interests (Atanesyan et al., 2024). This historical context is crucial to understanding the magnitude of the shifts now underway.

The onset of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 marked the beginning of a dramatic re-evaluation of Russia's role in Armenia. When Azerbaijan, backed openly by Türkiye, launched a full-scale offensive to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020, many in Armenia expected that Russia, bound by a mutual defense treaty and peacekeeping obligations, would intervene decisively or at least use its influence to protect Armenian interests. Instead, Moscow largely stayed on the sidelines until the final days of the 44-day war. It was only after Azerbaijan's forces gained the upper hand that President Putin brokered a ceasefire on November 9, 2020, deploying Russian peacekeeping troops to the remaining Armenian-populated part of Nagorno-Karabakh (Kochashvili, 2022). Superficially, this outcome extended Russia's military footprint through the peacekeepers and seemed to reaffirm its regional dominance. However, Armenian perceptions of the war's outcome tell a different story. The war was a strategic shock: Armenia suffered a humiliating defeat, losing most of the territory it controlled in Karabakh, and many Armenians implicitly blamed Russia for failing to prevent this disaster. It can be said that while Moscow did gain a peacekeeping role, the "basis for Moscow's influence over Yerevan was shaken" by the war, and any illusion of Russia as an omnipotent protector was shattered (Kochashvili, 2022, p.15). Indeed, rather than strengthening Moscow's hand, the 2020 war exposed cracks in the Kremlin's grip. Azerbaijan's victory owed much to Turkish military support via drones, training, and planning, highlighting the emergence of Türkiye as a new regional power in the Caucasus (Kochashvili, 2022; Vardazaryan, 2024). Russia, which had long been the pre-eminent external actor in the South Caucasus, suddenly faced a diminished role, having allowed Ankara to tilt the balance. Scholars have observed that

Moscow's earlier policy of playing arbiter between Armenia and Azerbaijan was neutralized once Türkiye intervened decisively on Baku's side (Vardazaryan, 2024). Throughout the war, Russia appeared to maneuver pragmatically, aiming not to unequivocally back its treaty ally Armenia, but rather to stop the fighting at a moment that preserved some influence for itself. It's argued that Russia intervened "just in time" but not to save Armenian-held Karabakh per se, but to prevent Azerbaijan, and by extension Türkiye, from achieving a total victory that could sideline Moscow (Vardazaryan, 2024). The Kremlin's priority, it seems, was to contain Türkiye's rising influence in Azerbaijan by inserting Russian peacekeepers, effectively freezing the conflict on terms tolerable to Baku and Ankara, even if that meant Armenia's defeat (Vardazaryan, 2024). From the Armenian perspective, this was a bitter pill: their supposed ally had not come wholeheartedly to their aid, apparently prioritizing great-power calculations over the defense of Armenian interests. Such perceptions began eroding the traditional faith in Russia as Armenia's security guarantor. Armenian domestic fallout from the war further underscored a turning point in attitudes toward Russia. In the winter of 2020–21, protests in Yerevan targeted Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for the defeat, but there was also palpable public resentment that Russia, despite a military alliance (the CSTO), had stood by while Azerbaijan reclaimed territory. Public trust in Russia plummeted in the war's aftermath. Survey data confirm a "consistently declined" trust in Moscow among Armenians over the past few years, with particularly sharp drops after 2018 and 2020 (Atanesyan et al., 2024, p. 262). Even as Russia formally remains Armenia's main ally, Armenian society no longer views that alliance with the same confidence as before (Atanesyan et al., 2024). In short, the 2020 war misbalanced Armenia's policy of complementarism: elites in Yerevan began openly doubting Russia's reliability, and ordinary Armenians started questioning whether the alliance was a one-way street (Atanesyan et al., 2024). This represents a sea change from the previous status quo.

If 2020 was the catalyst for doubt, the two years that followed provided ample evidence to reinforce Armenian disillusionment with Russia's security guarantees. In the war's wake, several security crises saw Armenia invoke its alliance with Russia. A glaring example came in May 2021, when Azerbaijani forces encroached across Armenia's internationally recognized border in the Syunik and Gegharkunik regions (TASS, 2021; Avedian, 2021). Pashinyan's government urgently appealed for help under the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) treaty, which considers aggression against one member an attack on all (Krivosheev, 2021). The response was tepid at best: Moscow and the CSTO merely urged "dialogue" and dispatched a fact-finding mission; no military assistance was forthcoming. A similar and more

severe scenario unfolded in September 2022: Azerbaijan launched the largest attack on the Republic of Armenia itself in decades, shelling towns and positions inside Armenia, killing over 200 soldiers and occupying new strips of territory (Tatikyan, 2024). Once again, Armenia turned to Russia and the CSTO for defense, and once again, it was largely met with silence. The CSTO delayed any concrete action; eventually a team was sent to assess the situation, but no collective defense was mounted (Tatikyan, 2024). By the time token CSTO monitors were offered, Azerbaijan had already achieved its aims and a ceasefire was in place, rendering the gesture moot. This pattern of inaction had a devastating effect on the alliance's credibility. As Pashinyan pointedly noted, Armenia's membership in the CSTO "did not stop Azerbaijan from resorting to aggression;" a damning indictment of the alliance's efficacy (Al Jazeera, 2023; Tatikyan, 2024). In November 2022, at a high-profile CSTO summit in Yerevan, Pashinyan refused to sign the closing statement, essentially protesting the organization's failure to support Armenia in its hour of need (Tatikyan, 2024). These incidents signaled that the CSTO and by extension Russia, its leading member, was no longer seen as a reliable security provider in Yerevan. Armenian officials began to speak openly of the CSTO's "dysfunctional" nature (Tatikyan, 2024). In early 2023, Armenia went so far as to cancel planned CSTO military exercises on its soil, an extraordinary rebuke to the alliance (Teslova, 2023). The symbolism was clear: the security pact was broken in Armenian eyes, or at least not worth the paper it was written on. Prime Minister Pashinyan even floated the possibility of quitting the CSTO outright, reflecting the depth of frustration (Gavin, 2023). Perhaps most shocking for Moscow, Pashinyan publicly questioned the benefit of Russia's very military presence in Armenia. By spring 2023 he argued that Russia's military base and troops in Armenia "not only do not guarantee Armenia's security but, on the contrary, create threats" to Armenia (Hedenskog, 2024). It vividly illustrated how far the relationship had deteriorated: what had been a strategic alliance is now openly doubted and debated within Armenia. Several factors help explain Russia's aloof response to Armenia's security pleas, and these factors themselves underscore a shift in regional dynamics. One key reason is Russia's overextension in Ukraine after February 2022. The Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine drastically reduced its bandwidth and resources to project power elsewhere. With Russia's military bogged down and taking heavy losses, Moscow became both less able and less willing to intervene in the Caucasus (Gavin, 2023). Pashinyan acknowledged this, noting that as a result of the war in Ukraine, "the capabilities of Russia have changed," and Armenia can plainly see that Moscow is now "fully committed" elsewhere (Gavin, 2023). Another factor is a subtle but significant realignment of Russia's priorities: Azerbaijan and Türkiye have risen in strategic importance to Moscow since 2022 (Gavin, 2023). Facing

isolation from the West, Putin has leaned on relationships with non-Western partners; in this context, oil-rich Azerbaijan, which maintained cordial ties with Moscow and did not join sanctions, became an attractive partner, and Türkiye's role as a mediator/trading partner with Russia grew. In fact, on February 22, 2022, just two days before invading Ukraine, Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed a "Declaration on Allied Cooperation," essentially elevating Russia-Azerbaijan relations to a new high (Huseynov, 2022). This timing was telling: Moscow was securing Baku's goodwill at a critical moment. The implications for Armenia were stark. As researcher Tatikyan's analysis put it, the lack of Russian support during Azerbaijan's offensives was "conditioned by the growing alliance between Russia and Azerbaijan" (Tatikyan, 2024, p. 80). In other words, Russia made a strategic choice to court Baku at Armenia's expense, assuming Armenia had no alternative but to stay loyal (Vardazaryan, 2024). The Kremlin appeared confident that tiny, landlocked Armenia was too dependent to ever leave Russia's orbit, even if its interests were sidelined (Vardazaryan, 2024). This gamble, treating Armenia as the dispensable side of the triangle, turned out to be a major miscalculation. By 2023, Armenia's disillusionment was so deep that even Russian officials admitted the relationship was in serious crisis (Ohanjanyan, 2025; de Waal, 2024). As Marut Vardazaryan (2024) observes, Armenian-Russian ties had deteriorated to "the worst condition in 30 years", marked by an unprecedented lack of trust. Armenian society no longer believes in Russia as a reliable ally, and future Armenian governments will inevitably have to account for this reality of public opinion (Vardazaryan, 2024).

Facing what it perceived as a security vacuum left by Russia's unreliability, Armenia has gradually but decisively pivoted toward the West for support. This is a notable shift for a country that, unlike Georgia or Ukraine, had never explicitly pursued NATO or EU membership. Over the past two years, however, Yerevan has taken a series of steps that signal a realignment of its geopolitical orientation away from Moscow's orbit. One major development has been Armenia's growing engagement with the European Union on security matters. In early 2023, at Armenia's request, the EU deployed a civilian monitoring mission (EUMA) along Armenia's volatile border with Azerbaijan (Council of the EU, 2023). This mission, unprecedented in Armenia, aims to observe and report on security developments, thereby acting as a soft deterrent against further Azerbaijani incursions (Tatikyan, 2024). The very presence of EU monitors on the ground speaks volumes: it fills, in a modest way, the confidence gap left by the CSTO's absence. Moscow was notably displeased by this EU mission, seeing it as Western encroachment in its backyard, but Armenia welcomed it,

indicating where Yerevan now looks for reassurance. In parallel, the EU, alongside the United States (the recent peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia was not included in this essay) has taken on a larger diplomatic role in mediating Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks. High-level summits facilitated by European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels, and separate talks hosted in Washington, have become regular occurrences since 2022, often to Armenia's preference over Russian-led talks. These Western-led negotiations have gained traction as Russia's credibility as an impartial broker waned. Simply put, Armenia has diversified its diplomatic options, no longer entrusting Moscow alone with the role of mediator. Armenia's outreach to the West is also evident in the military sphere. In September 2023, Armenia conducted joint military exercises with the United States, code-named "Eagle Partner 2023," on Armenian soil which was a small peacekeeping drill, but one with outsize symbolic significance (Trevelyan, 2023). This marked the first such exercise with U.S. troops in Armenia and was designed to help Armenia prepare for international peacekeeping missions. Moscow reacted angrily, but Yerevan defended the drills as a sovereign decision (Stamboltsian & Stepanian, 2023). The subtext was clear: Armenia is signaling that it is no longer willing to coordinate its every security move with Moscow, and that it seeks to build ties with alternative military partners, however modest. Additionally, Armenia has begun seeking arms and training from sources other than Russia. For decades, the Armenian military was equipped overwhelmingly with Russian weaponry and relied on Russia for maintenance and supplies. After 2020, and especially since 2022, when Russia's own war needs disrupted arms deliveries to Armenia, the Armenian government started looking to countries like India, the Middle East, and the West for arms deals. Notably, in 2022 Armenia secured a weapons contract with India (for artillery systems and rockets), and there have been talks with France and the U.S. about possible defense cooperation (Arakelyan & Avedissian, 2025). These moves illustrate an intent to reduce dependence on Russian military supplies, a significant break from past practice. Perhaps the most emblematic move in Armenia's pivot was a diplomatic and legal one: in October 2023, the Armenian parliament voted to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Avetisyan, 2023). This decision had huge implications because the ICC had issued a warrant for President Vladimir Putin over war crimes in Ukraine, meaning if Putin set foot in Armenia, an ICC member, the Armenian authorities would be obligated to arrest him.

Moscow was furious at this "unfriendly" step, seeing it as a betrayal by an ally. Armenian officials insisted the ratification was about holding Azerbaijan accountable for aggression and "not aimed at Russia" (Vincent, 2023; van der Made, 2024) But the timing and

symbolism were impossible to ignore: Yerevan chose international rule-of-law commitments over shielding Putin, a stark departure from the solidarity Moscow expected. Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned Armenia's ambassador in a very public dressing-down over a "series of unfriendly actions," including the ICC move, Armenia's provision of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and Yerevan's decision to recall its representative from the CSTO headquarters (Gavin, 2023). This diplomatic rift confirmed that Armenia was no longer behaving like a deferential junior partner. It is important to note that Armenia's pivot to the West is born more out of desperation than out of long-term strategic planning. Pashinyan's administration still stops short of calling it an outright alliance shift, and Armenia has not applied for NATO membership or other hard security guarantees. Pashinyan himself acknowledges that while partnerships with the EU and U.S. are growing, "I cannot say that the support and help we are receiving is sufficient to serve our objectives" (Ghazanchyan, 2023). In other words, Western backing, while appreciated, has not replaced what Russia used to provide. This highlights a core dilemma for Armenia: even as it loses faith in Russia, it has no immediate alternative for a security patron of equal weight. As a result, Armenian officials have pursued a delicate strategy of hedging: trying to build Western ties to safeguard Armenia's sovereignty and reform agenda, while hoping not to cross any red lines that would provoke overt Russian retaliation against Armenia. That said, the trajectory is unmistakable: Armenia is more politically and militarily aligned with the West today than at any previous point in its post-Soviet history.

### c. Georgia: Euro-Atlantic Aspirations and Strategic Resilience

Georgia's modern trajectory exemplifies the erosion of Moscow's once-dominant influence in the South Caucasus, even as Russia struggles to retain power through hard power and hybrid tactics. After the Soviet Union's collapse, the Kremlin sought to keep Georgia in its orbit by exploiting separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Zachau, 2021). Russian "peacekeepers" became power brokers in these regions, providing Moscow a diplomatic carrot and stick, promising territorial integrity or threatening secession to influence Tbilisi's policies (Sayın & Modebadze, 2015). This strategy culminated in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, when Russia invaded after clashes in South Ossetia. Moscow's primary motive was geo-strategic: halting NATO's eastward expansion into its perceived sphere of influence (Nilsson, 2018). The war ended with Russian troops occupying Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Moscow unilaterally recognizing both as independent states. Ironically, by formalizing the separation of these territories, Russia forfeited a key influence tool, it removed any ambiguity or "potential carrot"

of resolving the conflicts on terms acceptable to Georgia. Tbilisi severed diplomatic relations with Moscow, and public sentiment toward Russia hit a nadir as Georgia viewed the 2008 events as an invasion and occupation of its sovereign land. In the aftermath, Russia's influence in Georgian society and politics waned sharply in a soft-power sense, even as hard security power remained in the form of military presence in the breakaways. Georgia doubled down on its westward orientation, seeking protection and partnership with NATO and the EU to guarantee its security and sovereignty.

Despite Moscow's efforts, Georgia has persistently charted a pro-Western course, underscoring the limits of Russia's grip. The 2003 Rose Revolution brought to power Mikheil Saakashvili's unequivocally pro-NATO, pro-EU government, which pulled Georgia out of the Russian-led CIS and sought integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions (Aydın, 2011). In 2008, NATO's Bucharest Summit controversially promised that Georgia "will become a NATO member" in the future, a stance that provoked Kremlin ire (Paul & Maisuradze, 2021). While NATO membership stalled post-war, Georgia intensified cooperation with the Alliance and contributed to international missions, signaling its continued westward resolve. On the EU track, Georgia joined the EU's Eastern Partnership and later signed an Association Agreement in 2014, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area that bound its economy closer to Europe (Wiegand & Schulz, 2015). This was a remarkable step given Russia's open hostility to EU enlargement in former Soviet republics, indeed, Russia views any Euro-Atlantic integration by its neighbors as "incompatible" with its vision of the neighborhood (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). Yet Tbilisi pressed ahead, illustrating that Moscow's ability to veto Georgia's strategic choices had diminished. Georgian officials drew clear "red lines": no compromise on territorial integrity and the sovereign right to choose alliances (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). In other words, Georgia would not trade its Euro-Atlantic future for reconciliation with Moscow. This resolve limited the scope of any rapprochement with Russia to tactical pragmatism rather than a wholesale realignment.

After a domestic power shift in 2012, however, Georgia experimented with a cautious reset toward Russia which was a policy described by Bidzina Lebanidze and Kornely Kakachia as "bandwagoning by stealth" (2023). The new Georgian Dream (GD) government, led from behind the scenes by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, believed that a less confrontational stance could reduce tensions (Gutbrod, 2025). Under GD, Tbilisi restored trade and people-to-people links severed after 2008, reopened direct dialogue channels, and generally "accommodated Russia's interests and concerns in Georgia's foreign policy decisions" up to a point (Cecire,

2024; Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). For example, Georgian wine and mineral water regained access to the Russian market after being banned during Saakashvili's tenure, and officials toned down public criticism of the Kremlin (Vincent, 2025). These moves "delighted the Kremlin" as they signaled a more pragmatic, Moscow-friendly line in Tbilisi. Crucially, however, GD's accommodation was partial and informal. Georgia did not reverse its formal pro-Western orientation or make concessions on core sovereignty issues (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). The government maintained its NATO and EU integration projects and it signed the EU Association Agreement in 2014 and continued implementing NATO interoperability reforms. In essence, GD attempted a balancing act: improve relations with Russia without abandoning the West. This balancing was inherently unstable, as Moscow's maximalist demand. Tbilisi's stance amounted to "defacto and partial bandwagoning with Russia without formally changing the country's declared pro-Western foreign policy" (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023, p. 677). Such ambiguity was sustainable only as long as domestic consensus allowed it.

A defining constraint on Moscow's influence in Georgia is the Georgian public's overwhelming pro-Western sentiment. European and Euro-Atlantic integration enjoy near-consensus support in Georgian society, often cited at roughly 80% approval in opinion polls (Chkhikvadze, 2024; Civil Georgia, 2025). Even many Georgian elites view European identity as integral to the country's post-Soviet nation-building (Lebanidze & Kakachia 2023). This means any government seen as selling out to Russia risks severe public backlash. Indeed, GD's "stealth" rapprochement with Moscow was tightly constrained by societal opposition (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). Recent events underscore how public mobilization has checked policies perceived as Russian-influenced. For instance, in June 2019, widespread protests erupted after a Russian Duma deputy was allowed to address Georgia's parliament, outrage over this breach of national pride forced the parliamentary speaker's resignation and chilled any overt chumminess with Moscow (Al Jazeera, 2023). More dramatically, in March 2023 the GD-led parliament hastily passed a controversial "foreign agents" law, closely modeled on Russia's 2012 law requiring NGOs and media with foreign funding to register as agents (Górecki, 2024). This sparked days of mass protests in Tbilisi, with tens of thousands of Georgians waving EU flags, chanting pro-Europe slogans, and even resisting riot police to demand the law's repeal. The backlash was so intense that the government withdrew the bill to avoid further unrest. The episode vividly demonstrated Georgia's strategic resilience: the public will rally to defend the country's Western trajectory and democratic institutions against measures seen as Kremlin-inspired. As one analysis notes, Georgian Dream "went a step too

far, even for its own supporters" with the foreign agent law, showing that there is a limit to how much Russian-style governance Georgians will tolerate (Langbein, 2025). Likewise, when the GD government appeared to waver on EU integration in late 2024 announcing a suspension of EU accession efforts until 2028, it provoked immediate outrage (Civil Georgia, 2024). Tens of thousands protested in Tbilisi and other cities, viewing the pause as a betrayal of Georgia's European destiny. The strength of these reactions highlights a fundamental reality: unlike in Belarus or other authoritarian states, in Georgia a sizable, active civil society stands ready to oppose a Kremlin pivot. This inherently limits Russia's soft-power penetration and its ability to steer Georgia's course via proxy.

Although weakened in influence, Russia retains significant influence points in Georgia, chiefly in the security and economic domains. Geography and unresolved conflict play to Moscow's advantage. Georgia shares a border with Russia and sits outside NATO's security umbrella, making it a vulnerable frontline state in what Russia considers its "near abroad". The Kremlin continues to violate the 2008 ceasefire, stationing thousands of troops, FSB security units, and heavy weaponry in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Rulac, Geneva Academy, 2018). These occupied territories compose roughly 20% of Georgia's internationally recognized territory, a constant strategic pressure point. Periodically, Russian security forces engage in "borderization," creeping the occupation line deeper into Georgian-controlled land, or detaining Georgian citizens near the divide (Kakachia et. al, 2018). The mere presence of the Russian army on Georgian soil constitutes a permanent threat that Moscow can utilize to intimidate Tbilisi. Indeed, Russia has not renounced the use of force; in military drills and rhetoric, it periodically reminds Georgia of the fate of 2008. Georgian policymakers are acutely aware that without NATO protection, any direct conflict with Russia would be calamitous. This fear is something the ruling Georgian Dream party has exploited politically. Ahead of elections, GD leaders often play up the "existential threat" of war, implicitly arguing that only their cautious, Russia-accommodating stance keeps the country safe. In 2024, for example, the GD's campaign "was largely based on cultivating fear of a new war with Russia," even using footage of bombed Ukrainian cities in its ads to drive the point home (Kincha, 2024). Since the Ukraine invasion in 2022, GD officials have openly propagated a conspiracy narrative that the West such as the United States, EU, and domestic "agents" wants to drag Georgia into a war with Russia (EUvsDisinfo, 2024; Minesashvili & Gozalishvili, 2025). By casting pro-Western opposition as reckless warmongers, the ruling party both justifies its own rapprochement with Moscow and legitimizes crackdowns on dissent, in effect using the Russian threat as a tool to cement

power. The net effect is a paradox: Russia's military menace, while real, becomes domestically useful to those in Georgia inclined to slow-roll Western integration. This dynamic illustrates that Russia's influence now often operates indirectly, via Georgian actors' manipulation of public fears, rather than direct control over Georgian decisions.

Economically, Georgia has in recent years increased its exposure to Russia which was a reversal of the immediate post-2008 trend when Georgia reduced dependence. GD's policy of "pragmatic" engagement led to steadily growing trade and financial links with Russia over the past decade. Exports from Georgia to Russia have more than doubled in relative terms: Russia's share of Georgian exports rose from just 4.4% in 2012 to about 10.8% by 2023 (Interfax, 2025; Schiffers, 2025). Key Georgian products (wine, mineral water, agricultural goods) now rely on the Russian market again. At the same time, Russia rewards Georgia's friendly posture. Notably, after Georgia pointedly refused to join Western sanctions over the Ukraine war, Moscow lifted long-held punitive measures: in 2022–23 Russia resumed direct flights to Tbilisi and even unilaterally waived visa requirements for Georgian citizens (Civil Georgia, 2023; The Moscow Times, 2024). These gestures, while framed as goodwill, also serve to pull Georgia closer economically. The resumption of air links and easier travel led to a surge of Russian visitors and temporary residents. Following the Ukraine invasion, tens of thousands of Russians such as many young professionals, IT workers, and dissidents escaping Putin's regime relocated to Georgia, bringing an infusion of cash and opening businesses (Cordell, 2022; Demytrie, 2022). In fact, the number of new Russian-owned companies registered in Georgia more than tripled after 2022 (IDFI, 2024). This influx contributed to Georgia's double-digit GDP growth in 2022-23, one of the fastest in Europe. By 2023, Russia had also become Georgia's single largest country-level trading partner and an important source of remittances and tourism revenue (Transparency International Georgia, 2024). Such trends indicate that economic interdependence on Russia has grown, giving the Kremlin renewed potential influence (Kakachia & Kakabadze, 2025). For example, Russia could threaten trade embargoes or exploit Georgian companies' ties to Russia in order to influence Tbilisi's policies. The ideological element is intertwined here: GD's leadership increasingly echoes conservative and pro-Russian talking points such as emphasizing "traditional values" or skepticism of liberal Western agendas, aligning with the worldview promoted by Moscow's soft power (Kakachia & Kakabadze, 2025). The Georgian Orthodox Church, a highly trusted institution, also shares strong links with the Russian Orthodox Church and has opposed some Western-backed reforms, indirectly buttressing Russia's preferred narratives (Keating & Kaczmarska, 2019). In short,

Russia uses a mix of security pressure, economic carrots, and ideological affinities to maintain influence in Georgia (Kakachia & Kakabadze, 2025). This influence, however, operates under significant constraints and is contested at every turn.

Georgia's case demonstrates both the erosion of Russian dominance in the region and the ongoing struggle for influence. On one hand, Moscow has clearly lost its grip on Georgia's strategic direction: after three decades, Russia could not prevent Georgia from seeking NATO and EU membership, nor could it make Tbilisi join the CSTO or BRICS which are institutions through which Russia has influence. Unlike Armenia or other allies, Georgia provides no legal foothold for Russian troops beyond the occupied regions, and Georgian society remains largely inoculated against overt pro-Russian sentiment (Sikharulidze, 2025). The aspiration to join the West is deeply entrenched, and even the ruling party publicly insists it is not abandoning European integration. This reflects an important reality: Russia's influence in Georgia lacks popular legitimacy. The Kremlin cannot win hearts and minds; it can only coerce or induce through narrow channels. This is a stark contrast to the 1990s, when many Georgians, disillusioned by civil war and instability, saw Russia as a necessary security partner. Today, few in Georgia harbor such illusions,  Russia is widely viewed as the author of Georgia's territorial dismemberment and an obstacle to its prosperity. Even in the economic sphere, the recent uptick in Russia ties is seen by many as a double-edged sword boosting short-term growth but at the cost of greater vulnerability to an unpredictable neighbor (Transparency International Georgia, 2024).

On the other hand, Georgia's experience also shows that Russia's influence has not vanished outright and could resurge under certain conditions. The Kremlin continues to signal that a full normalization and the restoration of diplomatic relations broken in 2008 would only be possible if Georgia makes the unthinkable concession of accepting Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence (Anjaparidze, 2025). This remains a non-starter for Tbilisi. The war in Ukraine, while absorbing Russia's attention and military resources, also created an opportunity for Moscow to pull Georgia closer economically and politically in the vacuum of effective Western anchoring. Western policymakers have grown alarmed that Georgia could "drift further into Russia's sphere of influence" if its Euro-Atlantic path falters (Kakachia & Kakabadze, 2025). This concern is not idle: in late 2024, after questionable elections, the Georgian Dream government announced a freeze on EU accession efforts for several years, a move that many interpreted as kowtowing to Moscow's preferences and cementing "Georgia's geopolitical realignment" away from the West (Sabanadze, 2025). Such steps suggest that Russia's waning

influence can be partially restored when local actors choose to align with Kremlin interests, intentionally or by default. However, any pro-Russian realignment faces strong reactions, Georgia's vibrant opposition and media, all pushing back against slipping into autocracy or Russia's orbit. Internationally, the US and EU have signaled that anti-democratic shifts will jeopardize Georgia's integration prospects; for instance, in 2024 the US and UK imposed sanctions on certain Georgian officials implicated in protest crackdowns, underscoring that the West is paying closer attention. New regional dynamics could further limit Russia's grip: Türkiye and other Black Sea actors have bolstered ties with Georgia, providing alternative partnerships such as joint infrastructure like the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and energy transit pipelines that lessen Georgia's economic reliance on Russia (Colibasanu, 2024; Caspian-Alpine Society, 2025). China's rising involvement in the Caucasus (Popkhadze, 2025; Matchavariani, 2025), including investments in Georgia's ports and transport corridors, also introduces a counterweight, albeit one that comes with its own geopolitical strings.

### d. Drivers of Russia's Waning Influence in the South Caucasus

Beyond these country-specific factors, broader ideational shifts and identity-based dynamics have accelerated Russia's decline in the region. A new post-Soviet generation has come of age in the South Caucasus with little affinity for Russia's "big brother" role. As analyst Thomas de Waal observes, "a whole generation has now grown up independent of Russia," Russian language proficiency is declining and local societies have forged global connections not mediated by Moscow (de Waal, 2025) In Azerbaijan, Türkiye has supplanted Russia as the "strongest ally" culturally and politically; in Georgia, Europe and the West have captured the public imagination; even in Armenia, traditionally Russia's closest friend, France and the EU are emerging as preferred partners (de Waal, 2025). Constructivist theory highlights how shifting identities and narratives can realign foreign policy (Erbas, 2022): in all three states, Russia's image as a benevolent protector has been badly tarnished, replaced by narratives of Moscow as either irrelevant or exploitative. For example, many Armenians now view Russia as having betrayed them in their hour of need, a sentiment reflected in plummeting approval ratings for Moscow, only 31% of Armenians viewed ties with Russia positively in 2024, down from 93% in 2019 (Corcoran, 2025). This ideational estrangement limits Moscow's influence even where it maintains economic or military presence, it can coerce, but it cannot easily win hearts and minds. As de Waal notes, Russia still holds "negative levers" like the ability to cut off gas supplies, but exercising such tools only breeds resentment and fuels the desire for

alternative partnerships (de Waal, 2025). In essence, the soft power and legitimacy underpinning Russian hegemony in the Caucasus have disintegrated, leaving behind only hard coercive instruments that are costly to use. The constructivist lens thus complements the structural view: material power shifts set the stage, but changing regional identities seal Russia's loss of authority.

From a theoretical standpoint, the South Caucasus today starkly illustrates the interplay of structure and agency. Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003) posited that the post-Soviet space was a Russia-centric security complex, a unipolar "sphere of influence" in which Moscow managed periphery conflicts (Suikasyan & Davtyan, 2025). The Caucasus security complex is now fragmented and multipolar, with no single power able to dictate outcomes. Local states have gained agency to "securitize" issues on their own terms, as seen by the Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations proceeding without Russian mediation. Indeed, Baku and Yerevan recently held direct talks and even reached a tentative peace agreement independently of Moscow's frameworks (Gamaghelyan & Shiriyev, 2025). This development, unthinkable a decade ago, confirms that the region is no longer an exclusive Russian playground. Neoclassical realism helps explain how we got here: Russia's relative power decline (systemic factor) provided an opening, but the extent of Moscow's loss in each country was mediated by unit-level factors like leadership perceptions and domestic politics. For instance, Azerbaijan's Aliyev, perceiving Russia's weakness, aggressively asserted his "strategic autonomy," confident he could do so without incurring Russian retaliation (NEST Centre, 2025). Armenia's Pashinyan, driven by domestic outrage at Russia's betrayal, pivoted his country's orientation despite the risks of angering the Kremlin (Osborn, 2023). Georgia's government, by contrast, hedged, reflecting an authoritarian drift internally that kept ties with Moscow alive (Sirbiladze, 2024). In short, the filtering "transmission belts" of domestic politics (Rose, 1998) have led to varied responses to Russia's decline, but all point toward reduced Russian influence.

### e. Implications for Regional Order: A Multipolar Caucasus

The erosion of Russian primacy in the South Caucasus is fundamentally reshaping the region's power equilibrium, ushering in a more pluralistic and competitive regional order. In the absence of a single dominant arbiter, several actors,both regional powers and global players, are stepping in to fill the void. The most consequential of these is Türkiye, which has emerged as a decisive kingmaker in Caucasian affairs. Türkiye's role, already significant as Azerbaijan's

ally, expanded markedly after 2020. Ankara's steadfast military and diplomatic backing enabled Baku's Karabakh victories, and a formal Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance, sealed by the 2021 Shusha Declaration, now anchors the region's security axis. Türkiye is "emerging as the dominant external actor in the South Caucasus," using its partnership with Azerbaijan and even facilitating peace talks between Baku and Yerevan (Soufan Center, 2025). Turkish influence is visible not only in hard power terms but also via deepening economic integration: Azerbaijani oil and gas flow westward through Turkish pipelines, trade and investment between Ankara and Baku are at all-time highs, and joint infrastructure projects bind Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan into a transit corridor (Mikail et. al, 2020). In strategic terms, Türkiye's ascent marks the South Caucasus as no longer an "exclusively post-Soviet region" but part of a broader Middle Eastern and Eurasian strategic space (PONARS Eurasia, 2023). This dilutes the "Russia-first" orientation of the regional order and introduces new dynamics (Kakachia & Cecire, 2023).

Western actors are also playing a larger role, especially the European Union. The EU has seized the opportunity to increase its engagement as Russia's influence ebbs. Brussels has mediated high-level Armenia-Azerbaijan dialogues and deployed a civilian monitoring mission on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, something Armenia welcomed as an alternative to Russian peacekeepers (Fabbro, 2023; Aydin et. al, 2023). The EU's willingness to countenance a future membership perspective for Caucasus states is another game-changer: in 2022, the EU granted candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine, and in 2023 it was on the cusp of doing so for Georgia (Avdaliani, 2023). While Georgia's candidacy remains conditional on democratic reforms, the mere possibility has reoriented Tbilisi's strategic calculus and unnerved Moscow. European institutions are thereby becoming key forums for Caucasus diplomacy and reform incentives, supplanting Russian-led blocs. Regionally, the EU is also investing in connectivity and energy: it struck a major gas deal with Azerbaijan in 2022 to double Azerbaijani gas exports to Europe, part of Europe's effort to replace Russian energy. EU officials have frequented Baku and Yerevan to discuss transport corridors, digital connectivity, and post-conflict reconstruction (Mammadov, 2025). This burgeoning European role indicates that the South Caucasus is becoming an arena of East-West cooperation and competition, rather than a sealed Russian domain. Europe's approach, offering partnership without outright demanding a break with Russia,  also provides the Caucasus states with institutional support for multi-vector independence (Pkhaladze, 2025).

At the same time, Iran and China are asserting their interests more openly in the Caucasus, reflecting the region's new multipolarity. Iran, which borders both Armenia and Azerbaijan, views the strategic reordering with a mix of alarm and opportunism. Tehran is wary of Türkiye's rising influence and Israeli-Azerbaijani ties on its northwestern flank (Mammadov, 2025). Consequently, Iran has bolstered support for Armenia to ensure it retains a foothold in regional affairs and a corridor northward (Iran International, 2025; Kaya, 2011). Iran vehemently opposes the proposed "Zangezur corridor" because it would bypass Iranian territory and potentially host Western presence (Al-Jazeera, 2025). As Russia pulls back, Tehran has attempted to fill some gaps: for example, by conducting military drills near the Azerbaijani border (Mehdi, 2024) as a warning and by pushing its own ideas for regional cooperation that exclude Western powers. However, Iran's influence is constrained by its international isolation and economic limitations; it is a player, but not a dominant one. China, meanwhile, pursues primarily economic goals in the South Caucasus as part of its global Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Beijing sees the Caucasus as a critical transit route connecting the Caspian region to Europe. With Russia's position weakened, China has been able to engage all three Caucasus countries with less deference to Moscow's sensibilities (Markedonov, 2015). Chinese trade and investments have surged: since 2005, China's trade volume with Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia rose by 2070%, 380%, and 885% respectively (Popkhadze, 2021). Beijing has financed new highways, rail upgrades, and energy infrastructure, often via its policy banks and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (McBride et. al, 2023). For the Caucasus states, Chinese investment is attractive for infrastructure development and as a powerful tool to avoid over-reliance on any single partner. Moscow can "no longer ignore" China's role in its former backyard (Sirbiladze, 2024), indeed, the Kremlin, now heavily dependent on Beijing globally, has been relatively "calm" about China's Caucasus forays (Sigurdh, 2024). The result is a de facto tacit understanding: Russia tolerates China's economic advance as long as Beijing does not challenge Russia's fading security role. In sum, the regional order is shifting toward a complex multipolarity, with Türkiye and the EU as the most active new anchors, Iran and China as additional stakeholders, and Russia reduced to one player among many (Avdaliani, 2025).

For the South Caucasus countries, this new environment offers both opportunities and risks. These states enjoy greater strategic autonomy and agency than at any point in recent history. They can "diversify their foreign policy portfolios" (Avdaliani, 2025), utilizing multiple partnerships to serve their national interests. Azerbaijan, for instance, can court investment from China, security aid from Türkiye, and diplomatic support from Europe simultaneously; a far cry

from the days of sole dependence on Moscow. Armenia, though facing security dilemmas after Karabakh's loss, is exploring ties with the U.S., France, India, and others to reduce its vulnerability. Georgia continues to balance: it maintains economic links with Russia but is also integrating with NATO and regional initiatives with Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The freedom to maneuver among competing outside powers could enable these small states to secure better terms and prevent any single patron from dictating to them.

On the other hand, a multipolar Caucasus also means the umbrella of a clear security guarantor is gone, which could lead to uncertainty. The absence of Russia's hegemony might remove some constraints on conflicts, for example, Moscow often discouraged full-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but with Moscow's sway diminished, Baku felt free to press its military advantage. If future disputes arise, it is unclear who would step in to mediate or impose restraint. There is a possibility of new power vacuums and rivalries: Türkiye and Iran, for instance, have historically competed in the Caucasus and could find themselves at odds, as seen in Iran's protests over the Zangezur corridor. Likewise, while Western and Turkish interests align in backing regional stability and connectivity, they may conflict with Russian or Iranian interests, potentially making the Caucasus a theater for great-power competition by proxy. The Caucasus states will have to perform a delicate balancing act to avoid becoming arenas of confrontation among outside powers. They appear aware of this: Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani leaders have all professed a desire for a "balanced" policy where "no single outside power holds disproportionate influence" (Mammadov, 2025). If successful, the South Caucasus could transform from a pawn of great powers into a more self-reliant sub-region that engages all partners without being beholden to one, an outcome that seemed remote under Russia's shadow.

### f. Conclusion

Russia's diminishing hold over the South Caucasus marks not just the end of an era, but the emergence of a new, uncertain regional order. As Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia pursue independent strategies and diversify their alliances, the vacuum left by Moscow's retreat invites greater competition among regional and global powers. This newfound autonomy offers opportunities for stability through balanced partnerships, but it also risks renewed rivalries if external actors seek dominance rather than cooperation. The South Caucasus is entering a decisive decade, one in which local agency will matter as much as great-power maneuvering.

The question now is not whether Russia will regain its grip, but whether the region can chart a future that avoids simply trading one hegemon for another.

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