

TURKIYE in the GLOBAL POWER STRUGGLE: A KEY ACTOR of the TRANSFORMING ORDER

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Abstract: The second quarter of the 21st century stands out as a period of a radical transformation in the international system. The transition from one -polar structure to polarity has made the global power distribution more complex and uncertain. In this process of change, China's economic rise, Russia's military revisionism, the European Union's strategic autonomy efforts and the US claims of leadership came to the forefront; There are both risks and opportunities for countries such as Turkey (Waltz, 1979; Nye, 2004). This article examines the theoretical foundations of multiple polarity and analyzes the transformation of global power centers in the context of current geopolitical developments; It evaluates Turkey's strategic role in this new order with a multidimensional approach. While the versatility in Türkiye's foreign policy continues its institutional ties with the Western alliance, it is handled through its deepening relations with Asia, Middle East and Africa; Military capacity is discussed within the framework of soft power tools and diplomatic maneuvering areas. In this context, the article aims to provide an analytical response to the question of whether Turkey will be “balancing actor or “playicual power ”.

Keywords: Multi -polarity, Türkiye, international relations, strategic orientation, medium power, foreign policy.

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Introduction

Following the end of the Cold War, an united US -based one -pole order was formed in the international system; This structure, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, paved the way for the spread of liberal norms and Western hegemony on a global scale (Fukuyama, 1992). However, as of the second decade of the 21st century, this order began to evolve into a multipolar structure; With the diversification of power centers, instability, uncertainty and multi -layered interactions in international relations have come to the fore (Waltz, 1979; Kupchhan, 2012). While the economic, ideological and diplomatic superiority of the US is shaken; China's economic development and technological leadership claim (ZHAO, 2020), Russia's Aggressive and Revisionist Foreign Policy (Mearsheimer, 2014), and the European Union's Strategic Autonomy Calls (Howorth, 2010) have reshaped the balance of global power. These developments create a new international competitive environment shaped by hybrid threats, economic addictions and cultural impact means beyond the patterns of power struggle envisaged in classical realist approaches (Nye, 2004). In this context, Türkiye is not only due to its geographical location; At the same time, it has become one of the remarkable actors of this new system thanks to its historical accumulation, multi -layered identity and dynamic foreign policy. While Türkiye continues its institutional ties such as NATO, Council of Europe

and Customs Union with the Western Bloc; At the same time, Russia, China, Turkish States Organization and African countries are pursuing a pragmatic and multi -axis foreign policy to deepen cooperation (Keyman, 2017; Kalın, 2019). This article analyzes the major actors and power blocks of the new era by addressing the very polarity process in the theoretical framework; It aims to evaluate the role, risks and strategic options of Turkey in this transformation process from a multidimensional perspective.

Aim

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the transition to multiple polarity in the second quarter of the 21st century in the light of international relations theories and to evaluate the meaning of this transformation for Türkiye. This new structure, which emerged as an alternative to the unilateral order after the Cold War, requires not only the re -positioning of the great powers, but also the redefinition of the foreign policy capacities of the middle forces (Waltz, 1979; Zakaria, 2008). In this context, the study aims to establish a theoretical basis by discussing the concept of multipupality within the framework of realist, liberal and structuralist theories. Then, the positions of the main global actors such as the USA, China, Russia and the European Union will be examined and the current power dynamics will be put forward. The factors that determine these power structures; not only military and

economic power, but also as multidimensional elements such as technological competence, soft power capacity and diplomatic activity (Nye, 2004; Mearsheimer, 2001). Within the framework of this analysis, Türkiye's multi -faceted approach in foreign policy will be evaluated especially through the strategic cooperation it established with the East while maintaining its relations with the West. The article aims to provide a multidimensional analysis by addressing the debates on whether Turkey will be a balancing actor or a play -in -law in this new order, together with factors such as domestic politics, public opinion and economic dynamics. Finally, the study not only defines the current situation; It aims to provide a guiding framework to decision -makers, researchers and policy makers by revealing the strategic options in front of Türkiye and the possible results of these options.

Method

This article is based on the technique of Litementary Analysis, one of the qualitative research methods. Within the framework of the discipline of international relations, the theoretical and empirical studies on multiple polarity, moderate powers, power balance theories and Türkiye's foreign policy strategies have been used. Within the scope of the study, both classical theoretical works and current academic articles, policy reports, diplomatic documents and strategic analyzes were examined (Creswell, 2014; Bowen, 2009). Methodically, this study is designed with a descriptive-analytical approach. In the first stage, the concept of multiple polarity was defined on a theoretical ground and its historical development in international relations was examined. Subsequently, current foreign policy tendencies of global forces (USA, China, Russia, EU), military-political capacity analyzes and soft power strategies were evaluated. In the third stage, in line with official documents, academic publications and expert analyzes on Turkey's foreign policy, Türkiye's strategic orientation in multi -polarity was analyzed (George & Bennett, 2005). In the study, the Case Study method was used limited to a limited extent; In particular, China's generation-road project, Russia's Ukraine intervention and Turkey's Syrian policy, such as the concrete developments in the context of the very polar system's fragility and alliance relations were evaluated. This method was preferred to make complex international processes more understandable and to show the relationship between theory and practice (Yin, 2018). This methodical structure has made it possible to analyze Türkiye's position in the multipolar system objective, theoretical and multidimensional. In addition, both academic and decision -making levels have made inferences to policy developers.

Melting Centers of the Poles: New Power Map

In the post -Cold War period, the USA was marked by the absolute superiority of the US, and this period was called one polarity (Krauthammer, 1990). The US military, economic and cultural leadership was the main determinant of the global order in the 1990s and 2000s. However, the 2008 global economic crisis damaged the US financial reliability; The cost of the following Afghanistan and Iraq wars seriously questioned the foreign policy performance of America (Nye, 2011). These developments increased the doubts about the sustainability of one polarity, and especially with the rise of China, a transition to very polarity began to be observed. While the "liberal international order", representing the leadership of the USA, has suffered a loss of legitimacy in various regions, while multi -centered power clusters have become remarkable (Ikenberry, 2011). This dissolution is not only with

power transfer; It also led to the questioning of normative values, alliance systems and international institutions. The relative loss of power of the US has created gaps in the international system and these gaps have been tried to be filled by various actors. China has become one of the most important filler of this gap with its economic development and its breakthroughs in the field of technology. The formation of infrastructure and trade network for Asia, Africa and Europe through BELT and Road Initiative), especially the generation-road project, has increased its global impact (ZHAO, 2020). Russia is trying to expand its regional and global influence by using military power and energy sources. The Ukrainian crisis, its role in the Syrian civil war and the tension with NATO are the concrete reflections of this effort (Mearsheimer, 2014). On the other hand, countries such as India, Brazil and Indonesia have started to rise as global economic actors and form the lower stones of the multipolar structure (Zakaria, 2008). The rise of these actors not only fills the power gaps, but also brought about the potential to create alternative norms, institutions and regional blocks. This leads to weakening the single dominant values structure of the Western -centered international system. In a multi -polar environment, "Middle Powers" (Middle Powers) stand out with its cooperation -founding and crisis balancing roles. Although middle powers often do not have a military superiority in a military point of view, they play an active role in the system with their diplomacy capacities, economic ties and regional effects (Cooper, Higgot & Nossal, 1993). Countries such as Türkiye, South Korea, Indonesia and Brazil; It supports multilateral roles in the competition areas of the great powers and supports multilaterality and tries to balance power. In this context, Türkiye maintains its institutional relations with the West as a member of NATO and develops multi -faceted diplomatic expansions in Eurasia, Africa and the Middle East (Keyman, 2017). The increasing impact of the middle powers ensures that the international system evolves into a more horizontal structure; They provide balance as intermediate actors in cases where hegemonic conflicts do not directly result (Paltiel, 2016).

Power Cards are redistributed: Main Actors on the Field

The US, the main architect of the international order in the post -Cold War period, has tried to establish a world system based on liberal norms (Ikenberry, 2011). However, the 2008 economic crisis, the abundant effect of Afghanistan and Iraq wars and increasing polarization in domestic politics has made a controversial global leadership of the US (Nye, 2011). The distant attitude towards the isolationist policies and alliances with the Trump era has created question marks among its allies on the reliability of the United States. Although the "leadership claim" has been revived with the Biden administration, the US is still experiencing a dilemma between "maintaining the liberal order" and "establishing a new global vision". Strategic interest towards Asia-Pacific region is a reflection of an effort to balance against China (Campbell & Ratner, 2018). However, economic inequality in domestic politics, migration crisis and political polarization weakens the consistency of the US in foreign policy. In the last twenty years, China has become a global actor not only economic but also in technological and diplomatic fields. Generation-Yol Initiative (BRI) is not limited to physical infrastructure projects; It also formed the backbone of China's digital globalization strategy with digital silk road, Beidou satellite system and 5G infrastructure investments (Zhao, 2020; Hong, 2020). In addition to the order of the West, the rise of China brought about the claim to present an alternative development model. This model is called authoritarian

capitalism and is an attractive alternative, especially for developing countries (Jacques, 2009). The goal of establishing a global digital hegemony through technological companies (Huawei, Alibaba, Tencent) forms the basis of the increasing technology war with the US (Segal, 2021). Russia has turned to aggressive foreign policy instruments in order to recover the geopolitical effect lost in the post -Cold War period. The 2008 Battle of Georgia, the Annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and the Ukrainian occupation, which he initiated in 2022, is a challenge open to the Western -based order of Moscow (Mearsheimer, 2014). Russia, which uses energy resources as a foreign policy tool, has tried to increase its political impact by playing Europe's energy addiction. However, the diplomatic price of these military moves was also heavy. Relations with the EU and NATO have reached the point of breaking and Russia has faced serious economic sanctions. This has made Russia more dependent on China; It has pushed its own alliance networks (BRICS, SCI) on an isolated axis from the West (Lo, 2015). Although the European Union has made significant progress in economic integration, it has long been partly fragmented in security and foreign policy issues. The Brexit process shaken the internal integrity of the EU; Authoritarian tendencies in countries such as Hungary and Poland weakened the common vision that walks through democratic values (Bickerton, Hodson & Puetter, 2015). Shaking confidence in the US accelerated the search for strategic autonomy within the EU; In particular, France and Germany argued that the EU should build its own security architecture (Howorth, 2010). However, with the Ukrainian crisis, the tendency to restore the United States revealed the limitations of this autonomy effort. The global role of the EU is not only with its economic power; It is also shaped by value -based diplomacy, climate leadership and soft power capacity. However, there has not yet been enough collective will in the defense area (Tocci, 2019).

Blocks and Alliances: New World Coalitions

The diversification of power centers in the international system did not compete only between large actors; It has also led to the emergence of different regional and global alliances. NATO continues to exist as the basic basis of Western security architecture; In recent years, it has attracted attention with its expansion strategies especially against Eastern Europe and Asia-Pacific (Shea, 2020). The membership processes of Finland and Sweden have brought NATO's expansion to the East to a new phase. On the other hand, structures such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and Shanghai Cooperation (SCO) represent a vision of a non -Western global order. These platforms constitute the infrastructure of a non -hegemonic multipolar order with alternative financial mechanisms, digital money systems and energy collaborations (Stuenkel, 2016). In particular, the activities of the SCO in the field of security and the Development Bank initiative of BRICS points to corporate growth. Middle powers like Türkiye are trying to pursue a balance policy between these structures; Although they are a member of NATO, they are dialogue with platforms such as SCI or BRICS+ (Keyman, 2017). This increases the foreign policy flexibility of these countries; It also brings "Parties Selection Edition". The Middle East is one of the most fragile fields of global power competition. With the Arab Spring after 2010, the regional status quo, was largely shaken; Actors such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Türkiye have begun to be re -positioned. In recent years, the Chinese -backed normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Iran has the potential to soften the polarization in the region (Fulton, 2023). Abraham agreements between Israel and Arab

countries constitute a new axis between the US regional allies. On the other hand, Iran's nuclear activities, the effectiveness of Shiite militias and the increase in Russia-China influence constantly change the balances (Gause, 2014). In this environment, Türkiye has taken a multifaceted position as both diplomatic mediator and military actor. Although periodic changes have occurred in relations with Syria, Libya, Qatar and the Gulf, the regional role of Ankara is still decisive (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2021). Global energy transition is not only environmental; It also brings a geopolitical transformation. The control of energy resources during the transition from fossil fuels to renewable resources continues to maintain its strategic value. Russia's interruption of natural gas flow to Europe has brought the concept of energy security again (Goldthau & Sitter, 2015). China makes energy investments in a wide geography from Central Asia to Africa; EU countries have been looking for new supply chains to reduce their dependence on Russia. Turkey has become an important actor in energy diplomacy with projects such as TANAP, TÜRKAİM and Black Sea natural gas as an energy transit country (Bilgin, 2019). Energy relations are not only economic; It also has decisive effects on political alliances and security architecture. This can lead to direction changes in foreign policies of countries through energy addiction.

Türkiye's Smart Power Strategy: Neither in the East Nor in the West, Both with Both

Türkiye has a unique geopolitical position as it is historically located at the intersection of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. As a bridge that combines the three continents, it is located at the center of energy transition roads, trade corridors and security lines (Bilgin, 2007). Its proximity to the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Middle East; It has made Turkey not only a "transition country" but also a regional "balancing actor .. This location offers Turkey the capacity of both diplomatic maneuvering and military deterrence capacity. The ability to carry out balance policy in the Black Sea through the Montreux Straits Convention; With being a member of NATO, its involvement in Western security architecture makes it possible to design versatile foreign policy (Robins, 2003). Türkiye's foreign policy is shaped with a understanding of pragmatism in order to manage the fragility caused by asymmetric structure in its relations with great powers. While strategic partnership with the US, there are occasional crises (eg S-400 and F-35 issues); With Russia, competition and cooperation were intertwined (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016). Türkiye carries out a balance policy based on flexibility by establishing "simultaneous" relations with both the West and the East. This pragmatic approach also manifests itself in the form of active diplomacy in foreign policy crises and turning to multilateral platforms. In particular, economic-diplomatic relations developed with Africa, South Caucasus, Central Asia and Gulf countries reveal Turkey's multi-faceted engagement capacity on a global global scale (Altunışık, 2020). In recent years, a concept that has been increasingly expressed in Turkey's foreign policy is "strategic autonomy" *. This concept refers to the capacity of Turkey to move independently and multidimensionally in line with its own interests without being fully dependent on a single block in foreign policy (Kalin, 2021). Strategic autonomy is built both on military competence (defense industry), as well as energy, diplomacy and economic diversity. National UAV and SİHA production, domestic defense technologies, energy discoveries and new trade partnerships; It has become the means of Turkey's will to act autonomously (Karataş, 2022). However, this orientation also causes incompatibilities with the West from time to time;

Especially in relations with NATO and the EU, it reveals wavy cruise. Strategic autonomy should not be read as a breakdown in Türkiye's foreign policy, but as a flexibility required by the multipolar system; It is considered as a foreign policy approach that does not get stuck between the East and the West and transforms this dual structure into an advantage.

Rise of Soft Power: Turkey's Cultural Impact Area

One of the orientations that Turkey has watched since the 2000s is the use of soft power as an instrumental element. In the sense that Joseph Nye (2004) describes, the soft power concept based on the strategy of *görme* persuading others "strategy stands prominent in Turkey's efforts to create influence by using cultural, human and communication channels. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has become a structure that increases Turkey's visibility especially in Balkans, Africa and Central Asia with its development aid, infrastructure projects and humanitarian activities (Özkan, 2012). Maarif Foundation aims to institutionalize the impact of Turkey in the field of education abroad; Yunus Emre Institute introduces the cultural heritage of Turkey with its language, art and cultural activities (Ayhan, 2019). TRT World is an information channel that aims to influence the public by offering a Turkish -based perspective in the global media arena (Kraidy, 2020). These institutions are not only a means of promotion; He also plays a strategic role in transferring the foreign policy vision to the public and target countries. Classical diplomacy has become a versatile form of interaction aimed at addressing directly to the peoples and perception and image management. In Türkiye, using the opportunities offered by digitalization in this field, it aims to reach global public opinion with social media, international media channels, cultural festivals, scholarship programs and diaspora activities (Seib, 2009). Scholarship programs and relationships with the Diaspora strengthening Turkey's global ties through the Scholarship Programs and Diaspora; It allows public diplomacy to carry both soft and "sharp power" elements together (Özkan, 2021). Türkiye's public diplomacy is shaped on the basis of humanitarian aid, cultural proximity and historical ties with the Islamic world, especially in the Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East. Media, educational and cultural policies are one of the most important dimensions of "perception competition" in the international system. Media organs such as TRT World, Anadolu Agency and Daily Sabah have turned into platforms that enable Türkiye to be involved in global discourse production (Kraidy, 2020). In the field of education, thanks to the Turkish Scholarships and Maarif Foundation Schools, individuals who learn Turkish in many countries, who have education in Turkey and later play managerial roles in their own countries become part of the "chain of influence" (Ayhan, 2019). These voluntary bonds, which are gained through cultural activities, serve both to create social bases that will support Turkey in times of crisis and to strengthen economic-diplomatic relations. In this context, Türkiye aims to be perceived as a "alternative power model" in both Western and non -Western public opinion through cultural diplomacy; normative soft power capacity as a strategic foreign policy tool.

Care of the Future: Will the Party be Selected or a Balance will be Established?

In a multipolar international order, "impartiality" or position close to impartiality has both opportunities and risks in terms of medium powers. Neutrality provides the opportunity to play a role in diplomatic flexibility and mediation between

conflicting blocks; It can also bring the risk of security deficits and loneliness (Rüland, 2012). Turkey's foreign policy moves in accordance with the very polarity are sometimes identified with impartiality; However, in practice, he manifested as "active balance" or "versatility .. Neither a structure that is completely connected to the western axis nor a structure that was engaged in the East was preferred. This makes Turkey open to alternative alliances and creates the need to keep traditional alliance relations alive (Keyman & Gumuscu, 2014). However, the discourse of impartiality may have a risk of perception as a passive stance in geopolitical crises. In this context, it seems more sustainable for Turkey to monitor "active multipolar balance" strategy instead of "proactive neutrality". Turkey's multidimensional identity in foreign policy has been defined in different roles over time: the gamers actor, balancing power and mediating country. Particularly in the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans and Africa, diplomatic initiatives show that Turkey has become an effective actor not only in crisis regions but also on international platforms (Dalay, 2020). While the *çözmeyen* play holder "identity expresses Turkey's initiative (eg Karabakh, Libya, Grain Corridor agreement); The "balancing" role defines Turkey's ability to maximize its own interests by establishing relationships with different power centers at the same time (Önis, 2011). Mediation identity shows the potential of Turkey to contribute to peace processes-for example in negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. These multiple identities offer a foreign policy repertoire in accordance with the dynamics of the multipolar system; It shows that Turkey has evolved from a regional power to a significant actor on a global scale. Foreign policy is under the influence of not only international developments, but also domestic political actors, public opinion and ideological orientations. The increasing wave of nationalism in Türkiye is to strengthen the security -centered approach; Economic fluctuations have led to a balance of cost/benefit in foreign policy (Aydın-Düştün & Keyman, 2013). Election periods increase the sensitivity of the public to certain aspects of foreign policy; Governments can also instrumentize foreign policy moves in order to gain support in domestic politics (Grigoriadis, 2022). This makes the balance between consistency and flexibility in foreign policy; From time to time, it can also cause fluctuations on Türkiye's global image. Therefore, the sustainability of foreign policy is not only with international rationality; domestic political stability, democratic institutionalization and the attitudes of the public in foreign policy are also directly linked to.

Conclusion

The international system quickly moves away from the single polar structure in the post -Cold War period and evolves into a more complex, multi -layered order based on multiple polarity. This transformation; It is characterized not only by the increase of power centers, but also the diversification of alliance structures, technological hegemony struggles, energy addictions and public diplomacy tools (Nye, 2004; Ikenberry, 2011). In this process, Türkiye maintains its classical alliance relations, but is trying to determine its own strategic aspect on a regional and global scale. Türkiye protects the institutional ties with the West (NATO, Customs Union, Council of Europe, etc.); At the same time, Russia, China, Turkish States Organization and African countries by establishing multi -axis relations by establishing a balanceist approach in foreign policy (Kalın, 2021; Önis & Yilmaz, 2016). Turkey's geopolitical advantage, soft power capacity and developing defense industry, such as elements, a global level of

“players”, “balancing” and from time to time a “mediator” actor. However, this multi-faceted position also brings the risk of being between great power competition, open to external pressures and influenced domestic political dynamics (Dalay, 2020; Aydın-Dütütün & Keyman, 2013). In this context, “strategic autonomy” in Türkiye's foreign policy is not only a discourse; In practice, it should be institutionalized as a sustainable and rational orientation. This autonomy should not mean neither an isolated neutrality nor a unilateral axis shift. On the contrary, it should indicate a flexible and multi-layered foreign policy capacity to increase the effectiveness of Turkey in multipolar order (Keyman, 2017). In addition, in order to increase the effectiveness of foreign policy, structural elements such as democratic stability, economic strengthening and social reconciliation in domestic policy should be supported. Inside, a strong, external active Türkiye goal, but this holistic approach can be possible. As a result, this article revealed that Turkey is facing both difficulties and opportunities in the dynamics of multiple polarity; He argued that smart power strategies and multi-axis orientation in foreign policy can turn Turkey into a more meaningful actor in the global order of the future.

Recommended development areas and open areas for future studies:

- The effects of Turkey's African opening on Soft Power
- Use of Turkish Defense Industry Products as a Foreign Policy Tool
- Regional Analysis of Turkey's Digital Public Diplomacy Performance
- Measurement of the impact of the internal public opinion on foreign policy orientations

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