



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of International Relations

**THE BALANCE OF POWER POLITICS IN THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:
EXPLAINING THE US APPROACH TOWARD TÜRKİYE
AND GREECE**

Emre ÖZER

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2026

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KABUL VE ONAY

Emre ÖZER tarafından hazırlanan “Doğu Akdeniz’de Güç Dengesi Siyaseti: ABD’nin Türkiye ve Yunanistan’a Yönelik Yaklaşımını Açıklamak“ başlıklı bu çalışma, 15.09.2026 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Emre ZER

ABSTRACT

ÖZER, Emre. *The Balance of Power Politics in the Eastern Mediterranean: Explaining the US Approach toward Türkiye and Greece*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2026.

This thesis analyzes whether Greece has become an intra-alliance balancing actor in the United States policy toward Türkiye within the framework of deepening strategic relationship between the United States and Greece since 2016. The theoretical framework is based on neorealist balance of power theory and the alliance literature. In this study, intra-alliance balancing refers to a strategy to alter patterns of dependence, expand strategic options and influence leverage among allies with different interests and threat perceptions. The study uses qualitative document analysis to examine official U.S. strategy documents, defense agreements, legislation, congressional hearings, statements at the presidential and ministerial levels, military doctrines, and relevant secondary literature.

Keywords

Intra-Alliance Balancing, Türkiye-US Relations, Greece, Eastern Mediterranean

ÖZET

ÖZER, Emre. *Doğu Akdeniz’de Güç Dengesi Siyaseti: ABD’nin Türkiye ve Yunanistan’a Yönelik Yaklaşımını Açıklamak*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2026.

Bu tez, 2016’dan bu yana ABD ile Yunanistan arasında derinleşen stratejik ilişkiler çerçevesinde, Yunanistan’ın ABD’nin Türkiye’ye yönelik politikasında bir ittifak içi dengeleme aktörüne dönüşüp dönüşmediğini analiz etmektedir. Teorik çerçeve, neo-realist güç dengesi teorisine ve ittifak literatürüne dayanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada ittifak içi dengeleme; farklı çıkarlara ve tehdit algılarına sahip müttefikler arasındaki bağımlılık örüntülerini değiştirme, stratejik seçenekleri genişletme ve nüfuz kapasitesini etkilemeye yönelik bir stratejiyi ifade etmektedir. Çalışmada resmî ABD strateji belgeleri, savunma anlaşmaları, yasama metinleri, Kongre oturumları, Başkan, Cumhurbaşkanı ve bakanlık düzeyindeki açıklamalar, askerî doktrinler ve ilgili ikincil literatür nitel belge analizi yöntemiyle incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

İttifak İçi Dengeleme, Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri, Yunanistan, Doğu Akdeniz.

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INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

NATO was established in response to the military and ideological threat posed by the Soviet Union within the bipolar structure of the Cold War. Türkiye became part of this Western security system with its accession in 1952. The Turkish-American alliance developed around the two states' shared concern about the Soviet Union. The US provided security guarantees, military and political support while Türkiye was expected to follow US and NATO policies against the Soviet Union. However, this cooperation did not prevent disagreements. The Johnson Letter, the 1974 Cyprus crisis and the US arms embargo revealed differences between the two allies' priorities during the Cold War. Later disputes over Syria, the S-400 system and US sanctions under CAATSA demonstrated that these differences persisted beyond the Cold War.

After the Cold War, the shared Soviet threat disappeared and differences in how Ankara and Washington viewed regional security threats became more apparent. Although Türkiye supported the US-led coalition during the Gulf War, developments in northern Iraq and the Kurdish question created new security concerns for Ankara. The Turkish Grand National Assembly's rejection of the March 2003 motion showed that Washington could no longer take Türkiye's support for its regional policies for granted. Further disagreements about regional security emerged during the Syrian civil war. Both states saw Daesh as a serious security threat but they disagreed about the role of PYD/YPG. Washington cooperated with these groups in its campaign against Daesh while Türkiye viewed them as extensions of the PKK and as a direct threat to its national security. This disagreement strained relations between the two states. Disputes over the S-400 system and Türkiye's relations with Russia added to these tensions.

These disputes increased mutual distrust and pushed both sides to diversify their strategic options. Washington turned to alternative regional partners and security arrangements while Türkiye aimed to gain greater autonomy with a broader network of foreign and security relations. Meanwhile, Greece provided greater military access to the United

States, aligned more closely with US priorities and links its ties with regional partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, the expansion of US-Greece relations became part of Washington's response to Türkiye's policies and positioned Greece as a balancing actor within the alliance.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

This thesis analyzes two developments that are often discussed independently. Disagreements between Türkiye and the US and the expansion of US-Greece cooperation after 2016. It does not consider closer US-Greece relations as a purely bilateral development. It examines this relationship as part of broader changes in US alliance policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its main contribution is to assess whether Greece has become a balancing actor in US policy toward Türkiye.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND ARGUMENT

The thesis tries to answer the following research questions. How has the United States used its strategic relationship with Greece as a form of intra-alliance balancing toward Türkiye since 2016?

This thesis argues that Washington's perception of Türkiye has shifted from that of an ally expected to align generally with US strategic priorities to that of a strategically important but more autonomous partner and whose policy alignment can no longer be taken for granted since 2016. Washington did not respond to this shift by ending its alliance relationship with Türkiye. Rather, it expanded its military, diplomatic, and regional cooperation with Greece. Through this process, Greece gradually assumed an intra-alliance balancing role in US's relations with Türkiye.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines the research problem from a neorealist perspective and uses balance of power as its main theoretical framework. Neorealism assumes that the absence of a

higher authority in the international system forces states to consider their security, relative capabilities and dependence on other states (Waltz, 1979). The balance of power can refer to the distribution of capabilities among states, whereas balancing refers to policies intended to prevent the emergence of a dominant actor (Haas, 1953). Alliances provide one way for states to respond to such concerns. However, alliance membership does not eliminate uncertainty, rivalry or differences in security priorities.

Although balance of power theory traditionally focuses on rival states or rival alliances, this thesis examines whether similar dynamics can also emerge among members of the same alliance. In this study, intra-alliance balancing refers to efforts to reshape patterns of dependence, strategic access and leverage among allies while the alliance relationship continues.

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This thesis employs a qualitative research method. The analysis in this thesis is based on a documentary analysis. Primary resources consist of official documents, strategy papers, and military doctrines. Speeches given by the US Presidents, US Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense will be collected for the period of Obama, Trump and Biden terms. Also, for the secondary data, journal articles, books and newspaper articles will be used to have a better grasp on Turkish-American relations.

The primary sources were obtained from official government websites. The principal body of primary sources covers the period from 2016 to 2024. Presidential statements and national security documents were accessed through the White House website. Diplomatic documents were obtained from the US Department of State and the Office of the Historian, while defense documents were collected from the US Department of Defense. Congressional hearings and legislative texts were accessed through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Congress.gov, and GovInfo. Official Turkish statements were obtained from the websites of the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Directorate of Communications. The primary sources includes the National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2017), the National Security Strategy (2022),

the 2018 and 2022 editions of Integrated Country Strategy: Greece, the protocols that amended the US-Greece Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2020 and 2022, and Senate hearings such as U.S. Policy in Europe (2018), Nomination of Antony J. Blinken to Be U.S. Secretary of State (2021), and U.S. Policy on Turkey (2021).

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This thesis consists of four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Following the introduction, the first chapter presents the theoretical framework, the second chapter explain the historical background of Türkiye-US-Greece relations, the third chapter analyzes US perception of Türkiye, and the fourth chapter focuses on the US perception of Greece. The conclusion summarizes the findings and evaluates the main argument of the thesis.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for analyzing Turkish-American relations through the lens of balance of power and intra-alliance balancing politics among allies. The focus on the concept of alliance stems from the historical context, where military and security policies form the foundation of relations between the two states. Given that both countries are NATO members and considering their cooperation, disagreements, and perceptions of one another during both the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods, it is necessary to focus on the concept of alliance. Questions concerning how alliances are formed, sustained, transformed, and dissolved remain relevant because they provide a foundation for understanding alliances as instruments of external balancing. Building on this foundation, the principal objective of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework to examine why and through which mechanisms intra-alliance balancing may emerge when divergent interests and security concerns arise among members of the same alliance.

1.2. REALISM

Alliance systems formed by states require explaining state behavior and its underlying reasons to understand well. Two types of realism, classical realism and neorealism, have different epistemologies for analyzing state behavior. Classical realism explains state behavior based on human nature, while neorealism explains it based on the international system. One of the pioneering figures of classical realism, Hans Morgenthau, referring to the ambitious nature of human beings, argues that statesmen pursue power and this led to state's desire, therefore international politics is a struggle for power (Morgenthau, 1985, p. 5). So, Kenneth Waltz criticizes classical realism for being reductionist and inadequate in describing international politics. He argues that states repeat certain patterns of behavior and examining statesmen and states internal characteristic individually is

insufficient to explain these patterns (Waltz, 1979, p. 62). Therefore, he adopts a more systematic approach. He argues that the internal structure of states is hierarchical, while the structure of the international system is anarchic. Because states have authorities within them that maintain order and security (police and military), whereas the international system lacks such an authority. Therefore, he defines the structure of the international system as anarchic. While classical realists argued that states pursue power, Waltz maintains that they pursue security. Because in an anarchic environment, the survival of states depends on their security (Waltz, 1979, p. 111).

Waltz argues that if a state acquires too much power, other states will seek cooperation to balance it, which would threaten that state's security. Therefore, the theory he presents is described in the literature beside neorealism and structural realism, as defensive realism too. However, unlike Waltz, John Mearsheimer who is pioneer of offensive realism, while acknowledging that the structure of the international system is anarchic, argues that the system forces states to maximize their power so that they will survive. Because he emphasizes that the intentions of states can never be known (Johnson & Thayer, 2016, p. 4). Mearsheimer's theoretical analysis is based on the great powers' competition. Because the distribution of power is main dynamic of the international system, and therefore the influence of great powers is felt more strongly. He argues that the anarchic nature of the international system, and consequently the self-help behavior of states and the uncertainty of their intentions, have driven great powers to seek hegemony in their own regions and try to prevent hegemons in other regions thus, it will not be under threat (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 41,42).

The distinction between defensive and offensive realism is not only about whether states seek security or power. Both approaches start from the same basic conditions: anarchy, uncertainty, self-help and survival. The main difference lies in how they interpret the consequences of these conditions. Taliaferro argues that defensive realism sees expansion as beneficial only in certain situations. Excessive accumulation of power can encourage other states to balance against the state that expands and may eventually weaken its security. In this sense, Waltz's balance of power theory provides an important structural

basis for later defensive-realist arguments. Mearsheimer, by contrast, offers the offensive-realist interpretation of anarchy (Taliaferro, 2001, pp. 134,135).

Taliaferro's interpretation of Waltz also helps explain the level at which balance of power theory works. Waltz's neorealism mainly focuses on outcomes that result from interactions among states. These include repeated balancing behavior, alliance patterns, arms races, and changes in the distribution of capabilities. The theory does not aim to predict the exact foreign policy decision of a particular state. The international system creates pressures, incentives, and constraints for states. Although states may respond to these pressures in different ways, their interactions generate recurring patterns at the systemic level. Balancing should therefore be understood as a recurring tendency at the systemic level. The way states balance, and the results of this behavior, can differ across countries and regions (Taliaferro, 2001, p. 133).

Robert Jervis (1978) explains this variation through the concept of the security dilemma. According to Jervis, a state may take measures to improve its own security but these measures can make other states feel less secure (Jervis, 1978, pp. 169,170). This can happen even when neither side seeks expansion or conflict. The severity of the security dilemma depends mainly on two factors. The first is offense or defense has the advantage. The second is whether offensive and defensive military capabilities can be clearly distinguished. When defense has the advantage and defensive measures are easy to recognize, states can increase their security without creating a serious threat to others. This makes restraint and cooperation more possible (Jervis, 1978, pp. 186,187,188). In contrast, when offense has the advantage or military capabilities are difficult to distinguish, even defensive policies may be seen as preparations for aggression. This can lead to arms races, countermeasures and insecurity.

On this basis, this thesis follows a defensive-realist interpretation of neorealism and places the balance of power at the center of its theoretical framework. This approach does not assume that every increase in power leads to the same response. Rather, it treats balancing as a conditional and relational process. states seek to protect or improve their relative security position through this process. Within this framework, the thesis examines

whether tensions in Turkish-American relations created situations for Greece to emerge as a balancing actor within the alliance.

1.3. BALANCE OF POWER AND BALANCING

Ernst B. Haas (1953) argues that the balance of power does not have a single and fixed meaning. The term has been used in different ways in literature. It can refer to the existing distribution of capabilities, relative equality among states, the pursuit of superiority, or efforts to prevent the rise of a dominant power (Haas, 1953, p. 446). More importantly, Haas distinguishes between a certain distribution of power and balancing as a principle of foreign policy. Balancing refers to deliberate actions taken by states to prevent another actor from gaining a position that could threaten their security or autonomy. These actions may include diplomatic coordination, alliances, or the creation of countervailing power (Haas, 1953, p. 468). This distinction is important because a change in relative power alone does not amount to balancing. Balancing also requires a political response aimed at limiting the effects of that change.

Waltz's explanation of the balance of power begins with the anarchic structure of the international system. Anarchy does not mean that international relations are always marked by conflict. It means that there is no higher authority that can make binding rules for states and enforce them when necessary. According to Waltz, the main difference between domestic and international politics is not whether violence exists. The difference lies in the way violence is controlled. At the domestic level, public authority has the legitimate right to use force. Individuals are therefore not expected to provide for their own security. At the international level, there is no similar authority that can protect states. For this reason, states cannot give the final responsibility for their security to another authority (Waltz, 1979, pp. 102, 104).

This structural condition leads to the principle of self-help. Self-help does not mean that states must always act alone or avoid cooperation with others. It means that states must secure the capabilities needed for their protection with their own resources or through arrangements they establish. States can cooperate, but they cannot be certain about the

future intentions of other states or about how those states may use the gains they obtain. For this reason, states consider not only the total benefits of cooperation but also how these benefits are distributed between them. If one state gains more than another, it may later turn this advantage into military or political capabilities that could threaten the other state's security. A self-help system does not make mutually beneficial cooperation impossible. However, concerns about survival, relative capabilities, and dependence may become more important than economic or political gains (Waltz, 1979, pp. 105,106,107). The actions and counteractions generated by the principle of self-help in state behavior constitute the systemic foundation of Waltz's balance of power theory.

According to Waltz, balance of power theory does not assume that states act together with the consciously aim to create a balance. The theory explains how independent actions of states can produce repetitive balances. States make their own decisions to protect their survival and their position in the international system. Balance may therefore be a direct foreign-policy goal, but it can also emerge as an unintended systemic result of actions taken for different security reasons. In other words, the combined result of independent security policies of states create a balance of power. Waltz focuses less on the stated intentions of states and more on the combined effects of their actions at the systemic level (Waltz, 1979, pp. 118,119,120).

Building on Waltz's structural argument, Parent and Rosato (2015) distinguish between balance as an "outcome" and balancing as "state behavior". A balance refers to the distribution of military capabilities among states. Balancing refers to actions taken by states to improve their security. States can balance internally by strengthening their own military capabilities and adopting successful military practices. They can also balance externally by cooperating with other states. Parent and Rosato argue that states usually give more importance to capabilities they control themselves. Dependence on other states creates uncertainty and may weaken their ability to protect their security (Parent & Rosato, 2015, pp. 51,57). This distinction helps to explain how states can strengthen their own capabilities while also seek security cooperation with others. In this context, it is important to examine how alliances established as external balancing mechanisms are formed, sustained, collapsed and transformed.

1.3.1. How Alliances Form?

For neorealism, alliances are a form of self-help. States feel a need for balancing in response to the threats and security pressures they face in the international system. Increasing their military and economic capacity is considered an “internal effort” of states, while forming or joining an alliance is considered an “external effort”. This external effort is essentially a balancing tool created in response to the encountered threat or perceived security pressure (Glaser, 1994, p. 57). Therefore, this reflects the behavioral pattern of self-help in the international system.

In the international system, an increase in the power of one state forces other states into two options: first, to increase their own capabilities; second, to join an alliance. These two options are considered a necessity because of the international system. Because states do not determine the balance of power according to their own wishes; the system led them to do so. Intentions of a state in increasing its power can never be fully known. Furthermore, the absence of a higher authority that can resolve this issue creates a security pressure too. Therefore, joining an alliance is not so much a normative outcome as a tendency to balance the distribution of power (Waltz, 1979, pp. 118,119). Parent and Rosato do not reduce alliances to mere tools for balancing against increasing power or threats. They argue that in a self-help environment, states will first seek to increase their own capabilities, and that they turn to alliances only when the threat and the possibility of war are felt very seriously. This is because alliances require trust in other states and the promised commitments (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 57).

The concepts of trust and power are insufficient to explain the concept of alliance. Stephen Walt argues that factors such as a state’s geography, whether it exhibits aggressive behavior or intention, and the nature of its military capacity (whether it is offensive or defensive) must also be considered. These factors determine the perception of threat. Therefore, he mentions that states balance threats rather than balance only power. (Walt, 1985, p. 9).

Walt argues that geography is a key factor in determining a threat, suggesting that states located closer may pose a greater threat than those further away because military intervention and the use of force are easier. A state's intentions and actions also determine its perception of threats (Walt, 1985, p. 12). For example, the Soviet Union and the United States were two great powers during the Cold War. Türkiye perceived the Soviet Union, rather than the United States, as a threat. The Soviet Union's intentions regarding Türkiye's territorial integrity, particularly concerning the Straits, were perceived as a threat by Türkiye (Walt, 1988, p. 293). Walt states that military power alone is insufficient to explain power; natural resources, population, technology, economy, and state structure constitute the total power, and the greater the total power, the greater the perceived threat (Walt, 1985, p. 10). States respond to threats with two options: balancing or band-wagoning. Walt argues that when states face a threat, they will either pursue a balancing policy by forming alliances with other states, or they will draw closer to the state that poses the threat which is known as band-wagoning. A state may seek closer ties with another state that poses a threat because it wants to avoid being attacked. But balancing is more common in the international system because band-wagoning can jeopardize a state's sovereignty and increase its dependence. Therefore, states generally prefer to respond to threats by developing cooperation with other states. (Walt, 1987, p. 3). Do states always apply the same form of balance? At this point, Christensen and Snyder (1990) adopt a complementary approach. Systemic repression does not cause states to behave in the same way or to form the same alliances. This would be a deterministic approach and would be insufficient for understanding the formation of alliances and behavior within them.

Christensen and Snyder (1990) argue that states do not engage in balancing in the same way in multipolar systems. They state that in multipolar systems, states sometimes become overly attached to their allies, for example, when a state calculates the possibility of an ally weakening or losing a war, instead of restricting that ally, they support it even more. This is because they believe their own security will be jeopardized due to many effective powers in the system. Christensen and Snyder call this phenomenon "chain-ganging" (Christensen & Snyder, 1990, pp. 140,141).

The second situation is when states engage in “buck-passing”, believing that remaining on the defensive is more advantageous because they think the aggressor state cannot advance quickly. This concept is a wait-and-see strategy, where they wait for other states to respond to the threat and simultaneously wish to reduce costs (Christensen & Snyder, 1990, pp. 140,141). Therefore, it is observed that states do not form alliance patterns or balances in the same way. The distribution of power, along with the system’s tendencies, threat perceptions, and the conditions in which states find themselves, create differences in the formation of alliances and balancing.

In alliance relationships, the cost-benefit analysis is also important. This is because one of the primary reasons states desire an alliance is the sharing of costs. Mancur Olson’s theory of collective action does not assume that actors with shared interests will naturally cooperate. This is because self-interested actors are reluctant to contribute voluntarily, even if they know it will provide a collective benefit. They know that not all actors will contribute to this collective benefit but rather will want to benefit from it (Worland, 1967, p. 121). Therefore, alliances are formed not only against a common threat, but also through negotiations and cost-benefit analysis.

States’ cost-benefit calculations are related to the intensity of the threat, and the comparison of the cost of alliances versus the cost of self-armament. States always seek solutions to problems within their own borders first because it is the most reliable option. However, arming a state requires both time and cost. Factors such as increasing personnel, technological investments, and even societal adaptation (increased taxes) are important. Therefore, the formation of an alliance is a result of a cost-benefit analysis, too (Morrow, 1993, p. 215). On the other hand, another factor influencing the formation of alliances between states is negotiation. Because alliances, in addition to providing security, require a negotiation process. What states gain and lose is influential in alliance formation. At this point, power differences also affect the negotiation process. An alliance between two major powers does not go through the same negotiation process as an alliance between one major and minor power. Morrow describes the latter as an asymmetrical alliance (Morrow, 1991, pp. 913,914). Since the subject of this thesis is Turkish - American relations, it is necessary to focus on asymmetrical relationships.

In asymmetric alliances, states strike a balance between security and autonomy. The major state providing security results in the minor state granting certain concessions, thereby limiting its autonomy. For example, the minor state allows the major state to establish bases on its territory for power projection, gather intelligence against threatening states, and is expected to comply with the major state's policies. These situations restrict the minor state's autonomy. Therefore, alliances are formed as a result of negotiations and trade between states regarding autonomy and security (Morrow, 1991, pp. 907,908).

1.3.2. Why Alliances Sustain Or Collapse?

Walt argued that alliances are fundamentally formed to balance threats. Explaining why some alliances persist when the perception of threat changes cannot be done by focusing solely on the threat itself. At this point, Walt does not reject institutionalization and the hegemonic leadership of the great power in asymmetrical alliances. He emphasizes that even if the threat disappears, the alliance can continue if the hegemonic leader bears the cost and preserves the institutional structure of the alliance (Walt, 1997, pp. 164,166).

Walt's difference within neorealism lies in his assertion that changes in domestic politics, and especially the influence of certain groups within the state, can affect alliances. He cites the influence of Jewish groups in the US on US foreign policy and the support given by Polish-Americans to NATO expansion as examples (Walt, 1997, p. 165).

Another factor determining whether an alliance will continue is credibility, as it shapes the relationship between allies. A state's dilemma within an alliance the fear of being drawn into war or conflict (entrapment) if given too much support versus the fear of abandonment if given too little is fundamentally based on credibility. From a neorealist perspective, since the intentions of states can never be known, this dilemma affects the structure of alliances. Therefore, states formulate strategies not only against threats but also against their own allies (Snyder, 1984, p. 467).

The burden-sharing within an alliance is crucial to its continuation. Olson and Zeckhauser (1966) describe the commitment of other states to act in the event of an attack on one

state, within defense alliances like NATO, as a collective good. Therefore, this comes at a cost. States that do not wish to bear this cost but prefer to benefit from the security benefits (free riders) can cause cracks within the alliance. This situation is causing the alliances of major powers, which bear the most of cost, to be questioned (Olson & Zeckhauser, 1966, pp. 266,267).

Finally, the scope of commitments within alliances also influences whether those alliances will continue. Benson's (2011) distinctions between conditional/unconditional, deterrent/compellent alliances highlight these factors in the structure of an alliance. Alliances with conditional and deterrent commitments offer advantages, particularly to smaller states, because the aggressor state is forced to consider the major state within the alliance. Unconditional alliances can lead states to act riskier and trigger unwanted wars-entrapment. Conversely, overly restrictive conditions can reduce credibility and lead states to feel abandonment (Benson, 2011, pp. 1125,1126).

1.3.3. How Alliances Transform?

More important than the continuation or dissolution of alliances is their transformation. Alliances are structures formed in specific periods and under specific conditions against a particular threat, containing specific commitments. Just as states react to or adapt to changes in the international system, alliances are also affected by these changes. Therefore, it is necessary to explain this transformation.

Wilkins explains the transformation of alliances based on the distinction between alliance and alignment. He defines alliances as a more formal structure involving written commitments, while alignments are described as a broader and more flexible structure. He establishes a conceptual hierarchy between the two concepts. While he characterizes every alliance as an alignment, not every alignment can be classified as an alliance. For example, coalitions, strategic partnerships, and security collaborations are examples of alignments (Wilkins, 2012, p. 59). The collapse of military blocs after the Cold War changed states' perceptions of threats and their priorities. Intensive military and security policies gave way to more selective, goal-oriented, and comprehensive approaches.

Turkish-American relations stand out in this context. The two states maintained their alliance, but their perceptions of threats and priorities regarding regional issues shifted (Altunışık, 2025, pp. 42-43).

Altunışık also links this situation to changes in domestic politics (Altunışık, 2025, p. 58). However, neorealists argue that ideologies and changes in domestic politics have limited influence on the behavior of states. Bismarck's nationalism was a driving force in the Prussian Wars, but Prussia's adaptation to the balance of power transformed Prussia into Germany (Mearsheimer, 2009, p. 246). Consequently, explaining changes in alliances solely through changes in the domestic politics of states is insufficient. The use of concepts such as strategic partnerships, coalitions, and security collaborations after the Cold War indicates that states prefer structures with low levels of commitment and flexibility. So, this is a way to adapt to and benefit from the shifts in the balance of power in the global system.

Alliance transformation does not only occur when alliances formally end or are replaced by more flexible arrangements. It can also take place within an existing alliance. Changes in dependence, bargaining power, and strategic support among members can change relations inside the alliance. Members can continue to cooperate against external threats while also trying to reinforce their position relative to one another. For this reason, the continuation of an alliance does not mean that security competition among its members has disappeared. This shifts the focus from the formation and survival of alliances to balancing within the alliance.

1.4. INTRA-ALLIANCE BALANCING

Neorealist approaches generally view alliances as instruments of external balance. States join their capabilities with those of other states to counter external threats. However, an alliance does not remove uncertainty, differences of interest, or rivalry among its members. After states establish an alliance, the main question is no longer only whether they will cooperate with one another. Another question concerns how far they will support their allies and how much assistance they will offer in specific disputes. Snyder defines

this situation as the “secondary alliance dilemma” (Snyder, 1984, p. 466). Alliance relationships are not only mechanisms for cooperation against external threats. They also constitute arenas in which members negotiate with one another. Snyder argues that intra-alliance bargaining power mainly depends on three factors: dependence, the level of commitment, and the importance each side gives to its interests. A state that depends heavily on an ally and has few acceptable alternatives will usually have less bargaining power. This position can change over time. A state may gain more influence if its strategic value increases, if new alliance options become available, or if its partner becomes more dependent on it. These changes can allow an alliance member to renegotiate its position within the alliance (Snyder, 2007, p. 166). As discussed earlier, the security-autonomy exchange in asymmetric alliances creates an unequal relationship between alliance members, but this relationship can change with negotiation (Morrow, 1991). Snyder develops this argument further and shows that bargaining power within an alliance is not fixed. Efforts to renegotiate alliance commitments do not always amount to balancing. Intra-alliance bargaining concerns how allies distribute costs, commitments, influence, and benefits. Intra-alliance balancing is more specific. It refers to efforts by one member to improve its relative security or bargaining position against another member of the same alliance. States’ consideration of alliance reliability helps to explain when intra-alliance bargaining turns into balancing.

Iain D. Henry (2020) distinguishes reliability from general loyalty. States do not expect an ally to support every partner in every situation. They ask whether the ally’s interests and policy preferences are compatible with their own. Henry defines reliability according to the degree of agreement between allies about which interests matter most and how these interests should be pursued (Henry, 2020, p. 53).

While alliances are one of the instruments of external balancing, alliance membership does not eliminate the uncertainty states face about the future behavior of other members. Similarly, being part of an alliance does not guarantee that the regional interests and security priorities of allies will remain aligned over time. Consequently, states continue to assess not only the capabilities and intentions of their adversaries but also the reliability of their allies. This consideration becomes particularly significant when there are

divergences in regional interests among alliance members, unresolved security issues, or asymmetric relationships with the alliance's dominant member.

Gregory Miller (2012) provides a useful starting point to explain how these assessments affect alliance relations. He distinguishes between "resolve," which refers to a state's determination toward its adversaries, and credibility in the eyes of its allies (Miller, 2012, p. 4). Credibility depends on how states interpret a state's past actions and anticipate its future behavior and an ally may be considered unreliable if it fails to support its partners, violates its commitments, or involves them in an unwanted conflict (Miller, 2012, p. 8). Credibility matters not only for expectations of future support but also for a state's bargaining position and freedom of action in the alliance. These perceptions can affect the degree of autonomy that states have within an alliance. States that are seen as credible usually have more freedom in their alliance choices. States that are seen as unreliable may have fewer alternatives and may become constrained by their allies (Miller, 2012, pp. 50,51). Building on Miller, Henry conceptualizes alliance reliability as an issue-specific and relational assessment. What matters is whether allies attach comparable importance to a particular interest and favour compatible means of protecting it. Divergent preferences may expose one partner to abandonment or entrapment, but disagreement in one policy area does not necessarily determine the reliability of the relationship in another. An ally's reliability may therefore vary across issues and over time as interests and security conditions change (Miller, 2012, pp. 56,57).

Miller examines how perceptions of allies' reliability affect alliance design and the autonomy of members. A state that is seen as reliable may retain greater freedom of action but an ally whose past behavior creates concerns about abandonment or entrapment may face stricter institutional limits (Miller, 2012, pp. 44,51; Henry, 2020, p. 52). These limits can take three main forms. The state may need to accept greater costs to demonstrate its reliability. Alliance commitments may define more clearly the conditions which they apply. Its armed forces may also be placed under joint command or integrated into a common military structure (Miller, 2012, pp. 51,54).

Henry shifts the focus from the formal design of alliance to the behavior of states. In this way, he extends Miller's argument. Perceptions of unreliability cannot affect only alliance design but also a state's defense and foreign policy choices (Henry, 2022, pp. 35,36). In Henry's approach, unreliability is not a fixed characteristic of an ally. Reliability depends on the relationship between the allies and on the specific issue involved. It is shaped by how far the allies agree on the importance of certain interests and on the methods used to pursue them (Henry, 2020, pp. 52,53,54). If an ally's behavior shows differences in strategic interests, priorities or preferred policies, the other state may change its expectations about that ally's future behavior. These differences can create fears of abandonment or entrapment. Abandonment refers to the risk that the ally may fail to provide support when needed. Entrapment refers to the risk that the ally may draw the state into an unwanted conflict (Henry, 2020, p. 54). The state then identifies the specific risk created by this perception of unreliability and takes measures to reduce that risk.

Seth A. Johnston (2025) considers Waltz's structural realism one of the main approaches within defensive realism. In this view, anarchy and the distribution of power shape state behavior. States still remain responsible for their own security, even when they are in an alliance. Their main goal is to survive and power is a means to achieve this goal (Johnston, 2025, p. 115).

Johnston uses this realist perspective to divide the main debates on NATO into three areas. The first area concerns "balancing against threats from outside the alliance". The second area focuses on "US leadership and its hegemonic position" within NATO. The third area focuses on "intra-alliance balancing," which refers to power and security relations among allies. NATO is not only a defense organization created to respond to a common external threat. It also provides a framework for managing different security priorities, power differences, and possible conflicts among its members (Johnston, 2025, p. 113). Intra-alliance balancing is based on the idea that alliance membership doesn't completely remove security competition between states. Allies may cooperate against external threats, but they can still have concerns about each other's capabilities, intentions, and future policies. In this situation, alliance can keep potential rivals within the same institutional framework and help to restrict competition between them. This

reduces the need for them to balance against each other from outside the alliance. The realist logic of intra-alliance balancing therefore depends on the distribution of power among members, their threat perceptions, and the uncertainty created by the anarchic international system.

Johnston uses West Germany's inclusion in NATO as an example of this function. After the Second World War, Western European states first tried to balance against Germany from outside. Their own capabilities were limited, and the Soviet threat became more serious. For this reason, West Germany was brought into NATO's military and institutional structure. This allowed NATO to use German capabilities against external threats. At the same time, the alliance reduced the risk that Germany could once again become an independent security threat (Johnston, 2025, p. 119).

Johnston argues that a similar intra-alliance balancing can also be seen in relations between Türkiye and Greece. Both states joined NATO in 1952. Their membership was not only part of external balancing against the Soviet threat. It also helped to limit existing disputes between Türkiye and Greece within the alliance structure. NATO membership also helped control the risk of conflict between the two states. But on the other hand, this shows that common NATO membership does not remove competition between states. Security concerns, power relations, and threat perceptions can continue to shape relations within the alliance in different ways (Johnston, 2025, p. 119).

1.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has developed a neorealist theoretical framework centered on the balance of power and intra-alliance balancing. In an anarchic international system, states seek to protect their security with internal and external balancing. Alliances are seen as an instrument of external balancing for states against common threats. Consequently, questions regarding the formation, persistence, transformation, and dissolution of alliances remain highly relevant. However, membership in an alliance does not eliminate uncertainty, asymmetric interdependence, and divergent security interests among its members.

Ultimately, this chapter extends the balance of power perspective to relationships within alliances. In this thesis, intra-alliance balancing refers to policies that an alliance member adopts to reduce its dependence on an ally with different strategic priorities and to strengthen its bargaining position toward that ally.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TÜRKİYE-US-GREECE RELATIONS

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The historical development of Türkiye-US relations has often been discussed in terms of Türkiye's strategic location, NATO membership and regional role. However, bilateral relations do not explain changes in the American approach to Türkiye alone, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. Both Türkiye and Greece have long held important positions in US regional security policy. Therefore, Washington's approach to Ankara cannot be distinguished completely from its relations with Athens and broader objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean. This chapter explains Türkiye-US relations within this triangular perspective.

The aim is not to provide a complete chronological history of bilateral relations but to explain changes in US alliance management in the region. During the Cold War, Washington tried to keep both Greece and Türkiye within the Western alliance and to limit the effect of their disputes on NATO's southeastern flank. The chapter then explains the post-Cold War period, the disagreements between Washington and Ankara after the 2003 Iraq War and the changing regional environment in the Eastern Mediterranean. The period after 2016 receives particular attention because disputes over Syria, US cooperation with the PYD/YPG, Türkiye's purchase of the S-400 system and other regional disagreements coincided with closer strategic and defense cooperation between the United States and Greece.

2.2. THE COLD WAR

Türkiye's post-war policies towards the West were shaped more than Soviet pressure. Aydın describes this shift as a move away from the relatively independent foreign policy of the early Republican period and links it to changes in both domestic and international

conditions (Aydın, 2000, pp. 105,106). The establishment of a bipolar order reduced Ankara's ability to pursue non-alignment as Soviet territorial demands and pressure over Straits increased Türkiye's need for external security support (Aydın, 2000, pp. 106,107). However, security concerns were only one part of this shift. Türkiye's transition to multiparty politics and desire to become part of the Western political community encouraged closer relations with the US (Aydın, 2000, p. 109). Economic factors strengthened this course as Türkiye began receiving assistance with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and joined Western economic and political institutions (Aydın, 2000, p. 110). Türkiye's entry into NATO formalized this Western orientation with military alliance (Aydın, 2000, pp. 111,112).

Türkiye's post-war alignment with the US formed part of a regional framework with Greece. After the Second World War, the two countries faced security problems because of the Soviets. Greece dealt with domestic political conflict and communist activities. Türkiye faced Soviet demands over the Straits and eastern territories. So, both states looked for American commitments and security guarantees. Washington therefore viewed the security of Türkiye and Greece as closely related parts of its Cold War policy (Kalaitzaki, 2005, p. 109). Britain could no longer sustain its regional assistance, and the Truman Doctrine subsequently placed both countries under a shared system of American economic and military support. Their accession to NATO and later bilateral agreements on American bases further strengthened the US presence in both countries (Kalaitzaki, 2005, p. 110). However, NATO membership did not resolve disputes between Türkiye and Greece. The Cyprus conflict intensified tensions between two states. Washington tried to manage disputes to preserve stability on NATO's southern flank (Kalaitzaki, 2005, p. 111).

The regional dimension of the Truman Doctrine was clear in Truman's address to Congress. Truman mentioned that "If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East." (Truman, 1947, para. 40). His statement shows that Washington did not view the security of Türkiye and Greece as separate issues. Developments in Greece could directly affect Türkiye and

the stability of the Middle East. The Truman Doctrine thus treated Greece and Türkiye as part of the same regional strategy.

Although the Truman Doctrine placed Greece and Türkiye within the same US framework, it did not give Türkiye an immediate defense guarantee. Melvyn P. Leffler shows that American policymakers initially gave priority to the defense of Western Europe and were reluctant about additional military commitments (Leffler, 1985, p. 819). Washington therefore tried to benefit from Türkiye's strategic location and military capacity without the full security guarantee of NATO membership. One proposal was to give Greece and Türkiye "associate status". This would allow both countries to take part in NATO's military plans but would keep limited in decision making process (Leffler, 1985, p. 821). However, US concerns over the possibility of Turkish neutrality, Türkiye's cooperation in Korea and its strategic importance for the Mediterranean and the Middle East increased the US support for full membership (Leffler, 1985, p. 823). The joint admission of Türkiye and Greece to NATO in 1952 gave formal alliance status to the regional commitment that had begun with the Truman Doctrine.

The Cyprus question was the first important test of the regional security structure after Türkiye and Greece joined NATO. According to Ayşe Ö. Atmaca, Washington was primarily concerned that violence on the island could lead to a direct conflict between Türkiye and Greece. Such a conflict could weaken NATO's southern flank and damage US military and political relations with both countries. It could also put American bases in the region at risk (Atmaca, 2011, pp. 167,168). For this reason, the US gradually took a more direct role and increased diplomatic pressure on Ankara. The Johnson Letter was the clearest example of this policy. Washington tried to prevent a Turkish intervention. It warned Ankara that US-origin weapons could not be used for such an intervention and made clear that NATO protection was not guaranteed if Türkiye's action led to a Soviet response (Atmaca, 2011, p. 168).

The Cyprus dispute showed the limits of NATO membership in Turkish-Greek relations. Brands show that Washington faced a diplomatic dilemma. Support for one ally could harm relations with the other. A neutral position could also create problems with both

governments (Brands, 1987, p. 351). By mid-1964, however, Washington could no longer stay outside of the crisis. Türkiye's preparations for military action raised the possibility of a Greek response. This could lead to a conflict between two NATO allies in a strategically important region (Brands, 1987, p. 350). Washington also wanted to keep the dispute within NATO. US officials believed that discussion at the United Nations could give the Soviet Union a greater role in the crisis (Brands, 1987, pp. 349, 350). In this context, the Johnson Letter became a tool of US pressure on Türkiye. Washington warned Ankara that it could not assume NATO protection if a Turkish intervention led to a Soviet response. Washington subsequently exerted pressure on Athens to enter bilateral talks with Ankara over the Cyprus dispute (Brands, 1987, p. 355).

Although Washington prevented an immediate confrontation in 1964, the Cyprus dispute remained unresolved and Turkish-Greek tensions continued (Güney, 2004, p. 31). When violence on the island returned in 1967, the US conducted shuttle diplomacy and placed greater pressure on Athens. This approach differed from the direct pressure that Washington had applied to Ankara in 1964 (Güney, 2004, p. 32). The 1964 Johnson Letter had seriously damaged Turkish-American relations and contributed to closer ties between Türkiye and the Soviet Union. For this reason, Washington avoided the same level of direct pressure on Türkiye during the later crises.

The 1974 crisis, however, showed the limits of this policy. After the Greek junta's coup against Makarios, Washington did not openly condemn the new authorities. It focused on the possible regional effects of the political change (Güney, 2004, p. 33). Therefore, US's main objective was to prevent a war between Türkiye and Greece that could weaken NATO's position in the Eastern Mediterranean (Güney, 2004, pp. 33,34). So, according to Aylin Güney, Washington could not prevent Türkiye's military intervention. Because of the concern that stronger pressure on Ankara could worsen bilateral relations and push Türkiye closer to the Soviet Union (Güney, 2004, p. 34). After the crisis, the Aegean became one of the main sources of tension between the two states. US relations with both countries also deteriorated. Greece withdrew from NATO's military command structure, while the congressional arms embargo weakened security cooperation between the US and Türkiye (Rizas, 2009, pp. 371,372). Washington therefore aimed to preserve its

relations with both allies, while it avoided support for either side in the Aegean dispute. According to Sotiris Rizas, bilateral security ties and NATO provided the US to limit military escalation. However, US diplomacy neither resolved the core disputes nor changed the fragile nature of the balance between Türkiye and Greece (Rizas, 2009, pp. 367,368).

In the 1980s, US bases and military aid became important for the management of the Turkish-Greek balance. Karamouzi argues the base talks within the triangular security relationship among the US, Türkiye and Greece. After the Cyprus crisis, Greek officials saw Türkiye as the country's principal security concern. So, Athens asked the US for a security commitment and a more balanced distribution of military aid (Karamouzi, 2022, pp. 2,3). These demands occupied a central place in the base talks under Papandreou. PASOK adopted strong anti-American rhetoric but the Greek government still considered US military assistance necessary for national defense. The US tried to preserve its rights at the facilities in Greece and maintain the military balance between the two allies (Karamouzi, 2022, pp. 7,10). The 1983 US-Greece "Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement" reflected a compromise between these positions. The agreement preserved US access to the bases and connected American defense support to the regional balance of power (Karamouzi, 2022, pp. 11,12). Political tension therefore did not end US-Greek security cooperation. The Türkiye effect continued to shape relations between Athens and Washington, as well as US policy towards both allies (Karamouzi, 2022, pp. 13,14). The end of the Cold War changed the broader strategic environment, but it did not immediately change the triangular structure of US relations with Türkiye and Greece.

2.3. POST-COLD WAR

The end of bipolarity did not remove the assumptions that had shaped US policy towards Türkiye and Greece (Coufoudakis, 1996, pp. 168,169). Coufoudakis argues that Washington still viewed Türkiye as an important strategic partner. Ankara reinforced this perception with its claim to a broader regional role in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia. Greece had expected the end of the Soviet threat to produce a more balanced US policy. This expectation weakened as Washington supported Türkiye's broader

regional role (Coufoudakis, 1996, pp. 173, 174). The 1996 Kardak/Imia crisis demonstrated the consequences of this approach. Washington helped to prevent military conflict and then proposed international arbitration (Coufoudakis, 1996, p. 175). But this did not resolve the sovereignty disputes in the Aegean in terms of the claims of both sides.

The 1996 Kardak/Imia crisis showed that tensions in Turkish-Greek relations remained high. The S-300 missile issue further increased these tensions, and the Öcalan issue led to another serious crisis. The political consequences of the Öcalan crisis led the Greek government to adopt a more conciliatory policy towards Türkiye (Grigoriadis, 2012, p. 2). Greek foreign minister George Papandreou opened a channel of communication with İsmail Cem. The two governments initially focused on less controversial issues such as “trade, tourism and environment” (Grigoriadis, 2012, p. 2). The 1999 earthquakes increased mutual sympathy in both countries but did not initiate the diplomatic dialogue which had already started before the disasters. The Helsinki European Council later provided an institutional basis for this process. Greece accepted Türkiye’s EU candidacy, while the European framework linked the bilateral disputes and the Cyprus question to the expectation of a peaceful settlement (Grigoriadis, 2012, p. 3). The new framework reduced bilateral tension and supported cooperation in several practical areas. But it did not resolve the main disputes in the Aegean and Cyprus.

The limited improvement in Turkish-Greek relations at the end of the 1990s coincided with a broader transformation in the strategic relationship between Ankara and Washington.

The end of the Cold War weakened the common Soviet threat that had supported Türkiye-US cooperation, but Türkiye retained its strategic importance for the US. The two states tried to broaden their relations beyond defense and gave more attention to political and economic cooperation. In 1991, this new approach became known as an “enhanced partnership” (Güney, 2005, p. 345). Türkiye’s contribution to the US-led coalition during the Gulf War confirmed its continued regional importance. However, the economic costs of the war and disagreements over the future of northern Iraq also revealed the limits of common interests between the two allies (Güney, 2005, pp. 345, 346). In 1999, the Clinton

administration used the term “strategic partnership” to emphasize Türkiye’s contribution to regional stability and its ties with Europe and the global economy (Güney, 2005, pp. 346,347). But The 2003 Iraq War exposed important differences between Ankara and Washington. Türkiye was reluctant to support the war because it was concerned about further economic losses, instability in northern Iraq and the possible creation of an independent Kurdish state (Güney, 2005, pp. 347,348). On 1 March, the Turkish Grand National Assembly rejected the motion that would have allowed US troops to deploy in Türkiye. According to Güney, the decision showed that Washington could no longer assume assured Turkish support for US regional policies (Güney, 2005, p. 354).

The Obama presidency created new expectations for Türkiye-US relations after the problems of the previous decade. During his visit to Türkiye in 2009, Obama introduced the idea of a model partnership and called for closer coordination between Ankara and Washington. However, the Mavi Marmara incident and Türkiye’s opposition to UN sanctions on Iran revealed important disagreements in 2010 (Üstün and Kanat, 2013, pp. 82,84). The Arab uprisings created several areas of coordination between Türkiye and the US, despite differences in their responses to individual crises. Türkiye’s decision to host a NATO missile-defense radar also showed that the Atlantic alliance remained important in bilateral relations (Üstün and Kanat, 2013, p. 84). Despite this cooperation, differences over regional policy continued. The Syrian crisis brought these differences to the center of Türkiye-US relations and tested the limits of the model partnership (Üstün and Kanat, 2013, pp. 88,89).

Developments in Syria created new problems in Türkiye-US relations. Ankara and Washington initially agreed that Assad should leave power but this issue became less important as the conflict evolved. Daesh was a major security threat for both states, and two allies disagreed with the PYD/YPG. The US worked with the PYD/YPG in its operations against Daesh, while Türkiye saw these groups as extension of PKK and viewed their presence as a threat to its national security. “Operation Euphrates Shield” in 2016 showed that Türkiye was prepared to use its own military capability when talks with Washington failed to resolve the dispute (Alim, 2024, pp. 599,601). In 2023, a US aircraft targeted a Turkish drone. This event showed how close the two allies had come to a direct

military confrontation. (Alim, 2024, pp. 601,603). Alim argued that NATO membership still gives Türkiye some institutional advantages, but it no longer prevents serious disputes with Washington. Also, he mentioned that Turkish government viewed the increased US military presence in Greece as an attempt to surround Türkiye. This view shows that distrust between Ankara and Washington extends beyond Syria and also shapes Türkiye's perception of US policy in the Eastern Mediterranean (Alim, 2024, p. 606).

2.4. CONCLUSION

During the Cold War, US policy aimed to preserve a balance between Türkiye and Greece because both states were important to NATO's southeastern flank. Washington tried to prevent disputes between the two allies for the stability of alliance. However, after 2016 diverging priorities between Türkiye and the United States changed this balance. Because Washington became more concerned about Türkiye's regional policies and Greece gained greater importance as a possible balancing actor. This was reflected in closer defense cooperation, wider US access to military facilities in Greece and new regional partnerships. US-Greece relations reflect the security and foreign policy priorities of both countries, but they cannot be separated from Washington's response to Türkiye's regional policies. This thesis's empirical analysis therefore examines whether the United States still seeks to preserve a balance between the two allies or has moved towards a closer strategic relationship with Greece to balance Türkiye. Washington's perception of Türkiye is therefore central to the analysis of this change.

CHAPTER 3

THE U.S. PERCEPTION OF TÜRKİYE

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, Türkiye-US relations have been shaped by significant issues arising between Ankara and Washington about security and regional matters such as the US support for PYD/YPG in Syria, Türkiye's purchase of the Russian S-400 system and problems over F-35 program. This chapter examines how Türkiye was perceived by the US Presidency, Congress, and broader American foreign policy circles during the Trump and Biden administrations. Developments concerning Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean are not addressed in detail here, as such an approach could blur the distinction between the general perception of Türkiye and the regional policies to be analyzed in the empirical section. Based on this backdrop, the chapter examines Washington's perceptions of Türkiye's role within the alliance and its regional policy priorities, as well as Ankara's continued strategic importance to the United States.

3.2. PATTERNS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Although the idea of a "model partnership" reflected the optimism of the early Obama years, Ankara and Washington adopted a more cautious approach after 2013 and revised their expectations of the relationship. The term gained prominence when President Obama used it to describe Turkish-American relations during his visit to Türkiye in 2009. According to Nuh Yılmaz (2011), the term represented an attempt to replace the earlier asymmetric relationship that the US occupied the dominant position with a partnership that would provide Türkiye with greater room for maneuver and allow the two states to act as complementary partners (p. 19). Over time, however, Washington began to view the autonomy associated with the model partnership as a sign of uncertainty about Türkiye's strategic orientation. Although Türkiye continued to meet many of its NATO commitments, its closer relations with Russia and its pursuit of greater autonomy in

regional affairs led to raised questions in Washington about the degree of policy convergence between Ankara and its Atlantic allies (Erpul & Kirişçi, 2025, pp. 140, 143).

After the Cold War, changes in the strategic environment and the growth of Türkiye's foreign policy capabilities allowed Ankara to assume a more active regional role. During the same period, the United States tried to reduce its military presence and costs in the Middle East. This policy increased Washington's need for regional partners that could assume greater responsibility (Özel, 2012, p. 56). Türkiye therefore occupied an important place in Washington's effort to share regional responsibilities with its allies. The capabilities that allowed Türkiye to assume greater responsibility also gave Ankara more autonomy in regional affairs. Türkiye developed its economic and military capacity, diversified its diplomatic activities and adopted a more active regional role. These developments made it difficult to view Ankara merely as a regional extension of the Western alliance (Özel, 2012, pp. 60,62). Türkiye did not use its new capabilities only to support American strategy. It also used them to pursue its own regional priorities. As a result, Ankara became a more important strategic partner for the US but also a more difficult one to influence. The rivalry between Türkiye and Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean reflected this change. Türkiye's effort to gain a more central role in the region showed that Ankara's vision of regional order did not always align with Washington's existing partnerships and the regional balance of power (Özel, 2012, p. 61).

According to the Congressional Research Service Report (2025), Washington's view of Türkiye has changed over the past decade. The US once saw Türkiye as a traditional Western ally that generally supported American strategic priorities. It now sees Türkiye as a more autonomous actor that follows its own regional priorities, seeks room for maneuver among major powers and cooperates with the United States on an issue-by-issue basis (Zanotti & Thomas, 2025, p. 4). The CRS's classification of Türkiye as a "global swing state" alongside countries like Saudi Arabia and India show that Washington perceives Ankara not as a state that has directly shifted into the Russian or Chinese orbit but rather as a regional power seeking to leverage its relationships with rival powers while maintaining its position within the Western alliance (Zanotti & Thomas, 2025, p. 4). From this perspective, Türkiye possesses NATO's second-largest military

force, controls Straits, hosts strategic facilities such as İncirlik and Kürecik and can influence developments in Syria, Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, and the South Caucasus these developments constitutes the Türkiye's strategic value for the United States (Zanotti & Thomas, 2025, pp. 11,12). Although the alliance remained important to both countries, differences over security priorities, threat perceptions and expectations gradually eroded mutual trust between Ankara and Washington.

3.3. THE EROSION OF MUTUAL TRUST AFTER 2016

The coup attempt of July 15, 2016 has had a significant impact on the developments in Turkish-American relations over the past decade. The coup attempt has triggered anti-Americanism which has a long-standing presence in Türkiye and influenced political leanings. According to Alan Makovsky (2016), the way the US and Europe communicated after the coup played a primary role in this development. American criticisms about the post-coup measures became more visible than the condemnation of the coup, the solidarity shown with Turkish society and the satisfaction expressed over the elected government's survival. This created an imbalance that reinforced the perception in Türkiye that Washington had failed to take a sufficiently strong stance against the coup (Makovsky, 2016, p. 2). The fact that Gülen is not extradited, it has been interpreted as a sign that the US is shielding the coup plotters or failing to take Türkiye's security concerns into account (Makovsky, 2016, p. 6).

After 2016, each new dispute was interpreted through the broader distrust between Ankara and Washington rather than as a separate issue. Pastor Andrew Brunson was arrested after the coup attempt on allegations of links to FETÖ and the PKK. Washington later demanded Brunson's release and the dispute escalated in August 2018 when the US imposed sanctions on Türkiye's justice and interior ministers. The decision showed that Washington was prepared to use economic pressure against a NATO ally to secure his release. As the BBC observed, "It is unprecedented for the US to hit a Nato ally with sanctions. The relationship has plunged to its lowest level in decades" (Lowen, 2018, BBC News). The sanctions thus demonstrated that the dispute had evolved into a broader confrontation between Washington and Ankara. According to Aslı Aydıntaşbaş (2018),

the Brunson dispute reflected the broader loss of confidence between Türkiye and the United States. As she observed, “the knotty set of problems in the Turkey-US relationship - from S-400s to Syrian Kurds, F-35s, and the Halkbank fine - have all somehow become intertwined with Brunson at the center of it all” (Aydıntaşbaş, 2018, “it is hard to predict” section). Therefore, the Brunson dispute came to represent the wider divergent of bilateral relations after 2016. Ali Mammadov (2026) presents recent tensions in Türkiye-US relations as more than a collection of disputes over individual issues. According to this assessment, these tensions have prompted broader debates in both states: in the US about Türkiye’s regional role and security priorities and in Türkiye about trust in the US as an ally. Mammadov interprets that:

Turkey’s use of veto power added to the perception that it had become a more transactional ally. In order to force greater attention to its security concerns, Ankara blocked or threatened to block NATO initiatives including cooperation with Austria, defense planning for Poland and the Baltic states, and Nordic enlargement. Turkey eventually approved Finland’s and Sweden’s accession, with the two becoming NATO’s thirty-first and thirty-second members in 2023 and 2024, but only after a prolonged diplomatic process involving Turkish demands on counterterrorism, arms restrictions, and political commitments. While critics saw this as exploitation of NATO’s consensus procedures, Ankara viewed it as an effort to use available institutional leverage so that allies would take Turkish security concerns seriously (Mammadov, 2026, para.16).

However, an assessment of Türkiye’s position within the framework of transactional ally remains insufficient for a full understanding of all dimensions of the process. NATO’s consensus principle gives every member an equal voice in alliance decisions. Ankara used this principle to raise security concerns that it believed its allies had not adequately addressed, particularly those related to the PKK and groups Türkiye regards as affiliated with it. Türkiye’s approval of Finland’s and Sweden’s accession after negotiations on counterterrorism suggests that its objective was not to obstruct enlargement but to secure concrete measures on issues that it regarded as vital to its national security. In this context, the consensus principle allowed Türkiye to raise these concerns effectively within the alliance’s decision process and to ask its allies to give them due consideration.

Mammadov’s (2026) account leaves an important question unresolved. Türkiye retains much of the military capacity and geographical importance that once made it central to

NATO but this value now brings less political support from Washington. Selin Bölme (2022) helps to explain this change by framing Türkiye's position in NATO through its unequal relationship with the US. As Bölme observes, "the US was once the main supporter of Türkiye in the alliance against the opposition and criticism of Europeans in exchange for Türkiye's commitment to US policies" (Bölme, 2022, p. 106). This support was closely connected to Ankara's commitment to American policies and its strategic military role during the Cold War. Türkiye's position within the alliance therefore rested on both its geopolitical importance and continued American support. This arrangement became more difficult to sustain as Turkish and American interests gradually moved apart after the Cold War with the divergence were seen more after 2010. Bölme states that the disagreement over Iran marked an important point in the political basis of the Türkiye-US alliance. Türkiye's mediation of the 2010 nuclear fuel-swap agreement, its vote against additional UN sanctions and its resistance to explicitly identifying Iran as a threat in NATO's missile-defense framework demonstrated that Ankara was no longer willing to align automatically with Washington's regional security agenda (Bölme, 2022, p. 106).

A comprehensive analysis of Türkiye-US relations must also examine how US policies eroded Türkiye's confidence in the alliance. Richard Outzen (2025) draws particular attention to US cooperation with the PYD/YPG, which began in 2014 despite Turkish objections about the group's relationship with the PKK. According to Outzen, the Obama administration's decision to cooperate with these groups in the campaign against Daesh reflected its desire to avoid a large-scale deployment of US ground forces in Syria. (Outzen, 2025, pp. 20,21). Although Washington thought this decision necessary to meet its immediate operational priorities, it eroded Ankara's confidence in the US as an ally. From the Turkish perspective, the United States had chosen to cooperate with a group that Türkiye regarded as closely linked to the PKK and therefore as a direct security threat (Outzen, 2025, p. 26). Outzen's argument connects the transactional nature of bilateral relations to this American policy choice rather than explaining only with Washington's concerns about Turkish policies. Outzen explains why Washington chose the PYD/YPG as a local partner, while Henri Barkey (2024) considers how Ankara understood the possible consequences of that choice. For Türkiye, US support for the PYD/YPG raised a wider concern. It might help establish a Kurdish autonomous region along its southern

border. Barkey (2024) relates this concern to the experience of Iraq after 2003, where American policy contributed to the consolidation of the Kurdish autonomous region (Barkey, 2024, “How Does Turkey’s Campaign Against Syrian Kurds Figure Into Developments?” section). This precedent shaped how Turkish policymakers viewed US involvement in northern Syria. Thus, Türkiye did not view US cooperation with the PYD/YPG as a temporary arrangement campaign against Daesh. Ankara believed that this cooperation could lead to a lasting political entity with territorial control along the Turkish border. The disagreement over US support for the PYD/YPG deepened mistrust between Ankara and Washington. That mistrust later carried into defense relations and formed part of the context that the United States responded to Türkiye’s purchase of the Russian S-400 system.

3.4. THE S-400 DISPUTE

The CRS report (2025) describes Türkiye’s acquisition of the Russian S-400 system in 2019 as a major crisis in Türkiye-US security relations. Washington argued that the simultaneous operation of the S-400 and the F-35 could give Russia access to sensitive information about the aircraft’s stealth technology. These concerns led the United States to remove Türkiye from the F-35 program in July 2019 (Zanotti & Thomas, 2025, p. 13).

Congress reinforced the restriction of the transfer of F-35 aircraft while Türkiye retained the S-400 system. The dispute widened in December 2020, when the United States imposed CAATSA sanctions on Türkiye’s Presidency of Defense Industries and several officials. Despite these measures, possible solutions remained on the bilateral agenda such as deactivating or relocating the system. The report cautions, however, that it remains unclear whether either option would satisfy the requirements of existing US law (Zanotti & Thomas, 2025, p. 14).

On 3 April 2019, Vice President Mike Pence state,

Turkey must choose: Does it want to remain a critical partner in the most successful military alliance in history of the world? Or does it want to risk the security of that partnership by making reckless decisions that undermine our alliance? (The White House, 2019a, para.44)

His remarks showed that Washington interpreted the dispute not only as a purchase problem, but as a test of Türkiye's strategic orientation within the alliance. Türkiye's then Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, described the S-400 purchase as a "done deal" and rejected that Ankara had to choose between Russia and her Western allies. According to Çavuşoğlu, Türkiye turned to the Russian system only after it could not obtain a comparable air-defense system from the United States. He also pointed to Ankara's proposal for a joint technical group to assess American concerns about the simultaneous use of the S-400 and the F-35 (Lawler, 2019). Lawler connects these arguments to Türkiye's effort as a more independent regional actor and capable of making major security decisions based on its own national priorities rather than Washington's preferences. Washington justified Türkiye's exclusion from the F-35 program on the grounds that the simultaneous operation of the S-400 and F-35 systems could compromise sensitive information about the aircraft. The subsequent CAATSA sanctions imposed political and economic costs on Ankara's acquisition of the Russian system. While Washington intended these measures to discourage further defense procurement from Russia, Ankara viewed them as constraints on its ability to pursue alternative defense options in accordance with its own security requirements.

According to Mustafa Kibaroglu (2020), Türkiye's decision to acquire the S-400 system should not be interpreted as a sudden or radical departure from its established foreign policy orientation. Rather, the decision followed nearly three decades to develop an effective and sustainable nationwide air-defense capability (Kibaroglu, 2020, p. 162). After prolonged negotiations to purchase of the US Patriot system and access to relevant defense technologies failed to produce an agreement, Türkiye began considering alternatives offered by China, Russia, and European countries. Therefore, the S-400 deal can be understood not the outcome of a pro-Russian strategy, but as an attempt to meet a

long-standing defense requirement (Kibaroglu, 2020, p. 162). Kibaroglu (2020) also places Türkiye's decision within the uncertain international environment that emerged after the Cold War. Kibaroglu describes this environment as an "international political non-order," in which the military blocs and stable rules that once constrained state behavior have weakened. As a result, states may cooperate with a particular actor in one area while competing with that same actor in another (Kibaroglu, 2020, p. 177). Türkiye purchased the S-400 system from Russia while it confronted Moscow in Syria and Libya. At the same time, Türkiye remained a US ally within NATO despite disagreements over Syria policy (Kibaroglu, 2020, p. 178). In this context, the S-400 acquisition can be interpreted as an effort to strengthen Türkiye's own defense capabilities rather than as evidence of a shift into Russia's strategic camp.

Steven A. Cook (2018) argues that Türkiye's NATO membership alone is not sufficient to assess the state of the Türkiye-US strategic relationship, which also depends on bilateral coordination and the degree of convergence between the two states' interests. Although the institutional alliance remained intact, differences in regional priorities narrowed the areas of policy convergence between Washington and Ankara and increased mistrust and uncertainty in bilateral relations. He therefore concludes that future cooperation would be based on specific issues rather than on a broader strategic understanding between the two states (Cook, 2018, p. 2). Cook (2018) mentions that the Soviet threat had disappeared and two states had interpreted regional security in different ways. Washington viewed Türkiye's expanding relations with Russia, its purchase of the S-400 system, its military operations against the US-supported groups and its opposition to US policy toward Iran as signs of a broader divergence. Therefore, he presents Türkiye as an important state that could obstruct American interests rather than support. Also, he argues that this shift was not only the result of President Erdoğan's leadership. Distrust of the US in Türkiye extended across much of the Turkish political spectrum and this made the disagreement more difficult to resolve (Cook, 2018, p. 1).

During the Trump administration, the alliance security dilemma intensified as Ankara's confidence in Western protection continued to decline. Türkiye initially expected Trump's realist approach to place greater emphasis on its security concerns. However,

Washington continued to arm the PYD/YPG. Trump's shifting statements at times praising President Erdoğan and at other times threatening Türkiye also made US policy appear unreliable. The expansion of US access to Greek military bases and Washington's cooperation with Greece and Israel raised concerns in Ankara about Türkiye's strategic importance. Türkiye's military operations in Syria, its acquisition of the S-400 system, and its closer relations with Russia and Iran can therefore be understood as attempts to reduce its dependence on security guarantees that Ankara increasingly viewed as uncertain (Gulmez, 2020, pp. 483,484).

Despite these tensions, the alliance did not collapse. Gülmez (2020) argues that from Türkiye's perspective, NATO still help to limit excessive dependence on Russia and Iran. NATO membership also supports Türkiye's international status as a rising middle power. So, distance from the US did not create a complete away from the Western alliance. Ankara followed a hedging strategy by maintaining NATO membership while expanding cooperation with Russia and Iran and other non-Western actors (Gulmez, 2020, p. 484). This situation reduced its dependence on Washington and created a diplomatic maneuver. On the other hand, the US alliance continued to protect Türkiye against excessive dependence on alternative regional powers. This allowed Ankara to operate across both Western and non-Western actors (Gulmez, 2020, pp. 486,487). Due to its geographical position and historical experience, Türkiye has developed a security outlook shaped by the perception of being surrounded by powers with hostile intentions. On the one hand, this perception has increased its need for external support; on the other hand, it has strengthened its desire to avoid excessive dependence on any single power. As a result, Türkiye's alliance policy has aimed to preserve its security relationship with the US and maintain its strategic autonomy (Gulmez, 2020, p. 477).

The concept of strategic autonomy is a relatively new concept in international relations literature. Therefore, its application may vary across studies due to its ambiguity. While it is primarily used to explain the EU's approach, it is increasingly being preferred to understand Turkish foreign policy. According to Niklas Helwig and Ville Sinkkonen (2022), strategic autonomy is not a choice between dependence and independence; it is the management of external dependencies (Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022, p. 1).

Nathalie Tocci (2021) examines strategic autonomy from two perspectives. First, he links it to the internal developments within the EU, highlighting the impact of Europe's economic growth and the formation of the single market. The second factor that he considers is the changes within the international system, particularly the declining US hegemony and the Trump administration's tendency to acting unilaterally and selectively engaging (Tocci, 2021, pp. 3,4). Sven Biscop's (2019) concept of strategic autonomy for Europe demonstrates that autonomy does not mean breaking away from the alliance, but rather the capacity to act without allied support when vital interests are at stake (Biscop, 2019, p. 19).

Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy does not mean diverging from the West and NATO. It refers to the creation of alternative networks in a multipolar international system, lower dependence in the economy and defense industry, and greater bargaining power with flexible relations (Aydın-Düzgit, Kutlay & Keyman, 2026, p. 189). In this way, Türkiye aims to expand maneuver both in international politics and in regional developments.

Cook's assessment shows that policy differences between Ankara and Washington calls in Washington for a tougher and more restrictive policy. However, Gülmez argues that Ankara's behavior does not represent a move away from the West. It reflects declining confidence in Western security guarantees and an effort to avoid excessive dependence on any single power. Türkiye's closer relations with Russia and Iran, its purchase of the S-400 system and its more independent regional policy did not amount to a complete break with the West. These policies reflected an effort to preserve strategic autonomy while maintaining existing alliance ties.

Özgür Özdamar (2024) explains the deterioration in US-Türkiye relations during the Trump administration as a role conflict stemming from incompatible expectations about alliance behavior (Özdamar, 2024, p. 44). Based on 26 elite interviews with policymakers and experts in Washington and Ankara, the study reveals that the Trump administration failed to develop a comprehensive strategy for either Türkiye or the broader Middle East (Özdamar, 2024, pp. 46,52). However, American political actors largely shared the view

that Ankara was away from the US and NATO, Ankara's closer ties with Russia and pursuing regional policies incompatible with the traditional concept of a "faithful ally" (Özdamar, 2024, p. 52). This perception shaped the US effort to steer Türkiye toward a specific role that is the process of "role altercasting" (Özdamar, 2024, pp. 45,53). Washington tried to define Türkiye's allied role in terms of closer coordination within NATO, more limited cooperation with Russia, and greater alignment with US regional policies. Ankara, however, resisted a role shaped primarily by Washington's expectations, since it regarded equality and reciprocity rather than subordination, as the proper basis of alliance relations. Ankara expected the United States to give consideration to Türkiye's security concerns and to demonstrate greater consistency and reliability as an ally. Türkiye therefore tried to define the bilateral relationship on the basis of equality, reciprocity, and mutual recognition of each side's security priorities. The parties' refusal to accept the roles assigned to them by the other further deepened the existing role of conflict (Özdamar, 2024, p. 53). This bilateral dispute on alliance expectations was embedded in a broader uncertainty in Washington's own conception of its international role.

According to Üstün and Kanat (2017), the uncertainty in Turkish-American relations stems not only from issues within Washington's policy toward Türkiye but also from the US failure to clearly define the leadership role it intends to assume in the international system (Ustun & Kanat, 2017, p. 59). While attempting to reduce military burdens and direct intervention, the Obama administration has not sufficiently clarified that crises the US would take responsibility or what it expected from its allies (Ustun & Kanat, 2017, p. 60). Meanwhile, Trump's rhetoric challenged traditional alliances, trade arrangements and the basic principles of American foreign policy. This further complicated the search for a clear direction (Ustun & Kanat, 2017, p. 65). This situation has undermined the confidence of regional partners to Washington and negatively affected the US' own strategic position. The lack of a clear and comprehensive US approach in Syria allowed Russia and Iran to expand their influence. It also reduced Washington's ability to shape regional developments and maintain a common position among its allies (Ustun and Kanat, 2017, p. 60). Faced with uncertainty over the extent and reliability of US support,

traditional allies such as Türkiye diversified their external relations and pursued issue-specific forms of cooperation to protect their national security interests.

As a result, uncertainty about US leadership weakened Washington's credibility among its allies. It also made policy coordination more difficult, encouraged regional actors to pursue separate strategies and contributed to the fragmentation of the regional order.

3.5. MANAGED COOPERATION

Trust between the two countries appears to have weakened on both sides. Ankara believed that Washington had failed to address security concerns that were important to Türkiye (Ülgen, 2021, pp. 6,7). This reduced Turkish confidence to the United States as an ally. Meanwhile, US policymakers gradually viewed Türkiye as acting more independently and taking positions that did not always align with Washington's expectations in bilateral disagreements (Siccardi, 2021, p. 21). Two important official documents issued under the Trump and Biden administrations on Türkiye's military operations in Syria show the differences between Ankara's and Washington's positions. In Trump's letter to Congress for the executive order that declared a national emergency about Syria, Trump stated that:

I have taken this action because recent actions by the Government of Turkey undermine the campaign to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, endangers civilians, and further threatens to undermine the peace, security, and stability in the region, and thereby constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States (The White House, 2019b, para. 1).

Two years later Biden extended the national emergency under same framework and declared that the situation "continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States" (The White House, 2021, para. 2).

Ankara's assessment of the operations rested on the link it identified between the PYD/YPG and the PKK. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye stated that "PYD/YPG is the Syrian offshoot of PKK which is recognized as a terrorist organization

also by the EU and NATO” (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019, para. 4). From Ankara’s perspective, the operation was against a direct security threat connected to a terrorist organization that the EU and NATO already recognized. So, because of the US cooperation with the PYD/YPG, Türkiye felt a threat from the alliance to which it belongs. This perception of threat has formed part of its quest for strategic autonomy such as diversifying its foreign policy, enhancing its military defenses and reducing its dependence on the US and NATO (Aslan, 2024, pp. 765,766).

Despite these disagreements and Ankara’s pursuit of autonomy Washington continued to see Türkiye as strategically important in the alliance. Statements before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee show that US officials criticized certain Turkish policies but also emphasized Türkiye’s contributions to NATO and its broader regional importance.

In a 2018 Senate hearing, Assistant Secretary of State A. Wess Mitchell (2018) argued that “keeping Turkey on a track towards not only the political West, but the geostrategic West has to be a prime objective for U.S. strategy in the region” (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020, p. 27). At a 2021 hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Under Secretary Victoria Nuland (2021) characterized Washington’s relationship with Türkiye as “multi-faceted and complex” (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2021b, p. 5). She emphasized that Türkiye “makes crucial contributions to NATO missions around the world” (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2021b, p. 5). Türkiye’s military capacity, strategic position, refugee assistance and involvement in Afghanistan also supported important US objectives. On the other hand, she acknowledged “profound disagreements with the Turkish Government” (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2021b, p. 5). Her speech therefore showed that Washington continued to recognize Türkiye’s strategic importance and contributions to the alliance despite serious disagreements over specific policies. Nuland’s remarks captured the balance at the center of the Biden administration’s policy toward Türkiye. Despite disagreements in several policy areas, Washington maintained cooperation with Ankara on shared strategic priorities. This approach reflected Washington’s continued

recognition of Türkiye as an important NATO ally and an influential actor in regional security. (Nuland 2021).

When the Biden administration took office, Türkiye-US relations were marked by deep policy disagreements that made a return to the earlier partnership model difficult (Danforth, 2021, p. 1). According to Danforth (2021), communication between Trump and Erdoğan had delayed the escalation of some disputes into crises but had not resolved the underlying mistrust between the two countries. For this reason, Danforth argues that the Biden administration's main task was to manage the obstacles that Ankara might pose to US interests rather than restore the former strategic partnership (Danforth, 2021, p. 1). He suggests that the US should reduce its military and geographic dependence on Türkiye, coordinate its response to Turkish policies with allies in Europe and the Middle East and engage with Türkiye only on issues where their interests coincide. Danforth does not imply a total break of relations with Türkiye. He implies controlled interactions that include both pressure and dialogue (Danforth, 2021, pp. 6,7).

However, this perspective gives insufficient attention to Türkiye's security concerns and the role of US policies in the erosion of mutual trust. It also shows one of the fundamental tensions within asymmetric alliances. The stronger ally may expect its own strategic priorities to guide the relationship and view the less powerful ally's independent policy choices as problems to be managed. In this context, Danforth's recommendation that the US reduce its dependence on Türkiye and strengthen coordination with other allies can be interpreted as a strategy of intra-alliance balancing that seeks to expand Washington's options and bargaining power toward Ankara while the alliance itself remains in place.

At the January 19, 2021 hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on Antony Blinken's nomination for Secretary of State, the exchange between Democratic Senator Robert Menendez and Blinken showed that they regarded, despite Türkiye's NATO membership, some of Ankara's defense and regional policy choices as inconsistent with their expectations of allied conduct (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2021a). Menendez (2021) argued that "Türkiye's acquisition of the S-400 system from Russia, its activities in Syria and Libya, its energy policies around Cyprus,

the Türkiye-Libya agreement affecting maritime areas claimed by Greece, and its support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as indicators of Ankara's broader regional orientation" (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2021a). In this context, Menendez portrayed Türkiye as a regional actor whose policies raised concerns in Washington. Blinken's responses were broadly consistent with Menendez's assessment and suggested that similar concerns would shape the incoming Biden administration's approach toward Türkiye. Blinken characterized a NATO member's decision to turn to the Russian-made S-400 system as unacceptable and referred to Türkiye as a "so-called strategic partner" of the US (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2021a). While Türkiye's status as a NATO ally was acknowledged during the hearing, the remarks of Menendez and Blinken reflected reservations about whether some of Ankara's defense and regional policy choices.

This assessment was not limited solely to the alignment of views between Menendez and the Biden administration's nominee for Secretary of State. Republican Senator James Risch also expressed that he shared the concerns Menendez had mentioned regarding Türkiye (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2021a). Although the hearing record does not establish a bipartisan consensus on the specific policy responses that the United States should adopt, it indicates that concerns about Türkiye's acquisition of the S-400 system and certain aspects of its regional policies crossed party lines. This conclusion describes the perceptions expressed by participants in the hearing and does not constitute an independent assessment of Türkiye's policies or intentions.

3.6. CONCLUSION

The assessments examined above indicate that, across the Trump and Biden administrations, Washington no longer assumed that Türkiye would automatically align with US policies. It viewed some of Ankara's defense and regional policy choices as difficult to reconcile with its own expectations of allied conduct (Hoffman, 2021). This divergence also reflected different threat perceptions as Ankara and Washington did not always agree on which regional actors and developments imposed security risks or on how the alliance should respond to them (Gulmez, 2020, p. 482).

The consequences of this divergence were not limited to bilateral relations; they affected the ties the US established with countries in Türkiye's neighborhood (Danforth, 2021, p. 6). In particular, the cooperation Washington has developed with Greece, Israel and Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus in the fields of defense, energy, and diplomacy highlights the question of how American policy toward Türkiye is being restructured at the regional level. Therefore, the subsequent section of this study empirically examines the policy pursued by the US in the Eastern Mediterranean and whether Greece has transformed into a balancing actor against Türkiye within this policy framework.

CHAPTER 4

THE U.S. PERCEPTION OF GREECE

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Disagreements over Syria and the S-400 dispute reflected differences between Ankara and Washington in their security priorities and expectations associated with alliance membership, these differences gradually weakened mutual trust between the two sides. During the same period, Greece tried to strengthen its position in US regional security policy through closer defense cooperation and expanded military access. This section examines these parallel developments and traces how Washington's perceptions of the two NATO allies evolved after 2016.

4.2. INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

US policy in the Eastern Mediterranean should not be understood only with its separate bilateral relations with Türkiye and Greece. It should also be seen as an institutional relationship in which Washington has to manage two competing NATO allies within the same framework (Katsoulas, 2022, pp. 1,3). Katsoulas explains this dynamic through the concept of the “guardian's dilemma”, a situation a powerful state faces when managing disputes between two rival states that they are allied (p. 20). Within this dilemma, US inaction in a crisis can increase the risk of escalation, while intervention perceived as favoring one side can generate fears of abandonment in the other ally and encourage the supported side to behave more assertively (Katsoulas, 2022, pp. 21,24). To manage these competing risks during the Cold War, Washington adopted a policy of “dual restraint,” aimed at constraining both Türkiye and Greece simultaneously (Katsoulas, 2022, pp. 24,27). The main objective of this policy was not primarily to resolve the underlying Turkish-Greek disputes, but to prevent a possible conflict between the two states from undermining NATO's southeastern flank and US regional interests (Katsoulas, 2022, p. 205). The end of the Cold War did not remove this strategic concern. Katsoulas mentions that “given the geographical positions of Türkiye and Greece between Europe, Black Sea,

Caucasus, and Middle East, maintaining relations with both countries remained important for the United States” (Katsoulas, 2022, p. 207). But the continued strategic value of both states did not guarantee that their shared membership in a highly institutionalized alliance would moderate the disputes between them.

Ronald R. Krebs (1999) uses the concept of “perverse institutionalism” to argue that highly institutionalized alliances do not always foster cooperation among their members and may increase conflict under some conditions. In the Turkish-Greek case, NATO’s security guarantee reduced the significance of the common Soviet threat and enabled both states to devote greater attention to their regional disputes. Military assistance in the alliance enhanced the capabilities of both countries. But each side could perceive the other’s military gains as a potential advantage in bilateral disputes which increased mutual suspicion and deepened the security dilemma. NATO’s institutional mechanisms could also serve as arenas of political negotiation and competition, because the parties linked disputes over Cyprus and the Aegean to alliance decisions (Krebs, 1999, pp. 344,345, 369). Nevertheless, NATO facilitated regular communication, gave the US a degree of influence over the conduct of both allies and helped prevent the rivalry from escalating into a full-scale war (Krebs, 1999, p. 369). Thus, common alliance membership constrained both Türkiye and Greece, but it also provided them with institutional and strategic resources to advance their respective positions. This dual effect complicated Washington’s management of relations with the two allies. An examination of Greece’s strategy toward Türkiye provides a clear empirical example of this dual effect.

Greece has sought to strengthen its position in relations with Türkiye through both its own material capabilities and external support. It has also used international institutions to increase its diplomatic leverage (Alioğlu Çakmak, 2019, pp. 164–165). Greece’s support for Türkiye’s EU accession process after 1999 did not mean that bilateral disputes had disappeared. Athens used the accession process as part of Tsakonas (2006) description as a “socialization strategy” aimed to shape Ankara’s policy choices through EU norms and membership conditionality. From Ankara’s perspective, however, this approach could be interpreted not merely as a process of adaptation to EU norms, but also as the transfer of bilateral disputes to an institutional framework in which Greece, as a

member state, possessed greater influence than candidate Türkiye (Öniş, 2001; Alkan, 2021). From a balance of power perspective, this strategy enabled Athens to complement its national approaches with the EU's institutional leverage and broader political weight (Alioğlu Çakmak, 2019, p. 169). Greece's closer relations with the US after 2016 can therefore be understood as an effort to secure the kind of external support and balancing role that Athens had previously sought through the EU. The development of this relationship also reflected changes in the regional security environment.

4.3. REGIONAL FACTORS

After 2016, military capabilities assumed a greater role alongside diplomacy in Türkiye's efforts to protect its national security and regional interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. This trend was particularly visible during the 2018-2020 period (Stergiou, 2022, p. 62). Türkiye's enhanced naval capabilities and simultaneous exercises in different regions also showed Ankara's ability to sustain a military presence across several maritime theatres and strengthen its deterrent posture (Stergiou, 2022, p. 62). This approach can be understood as part of Türkiye's search for strategic autonomy, intended to widen its room for maneuver within the alliance (Stergiou, 2022, p. 62). The development of the defense industry, particularly in aerial vehicles, missile systems and warships has supported this policy by reducing dependence on foreign suppliers (Stergiou, 2022, pp. 65,66). At the same time, the "Blue Homeland" approach placed Türkiye's understanding of its maritime rights and jurisdiction in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean within a broader geopolitical framework and assigned naval capabilities an important role in the protection of these interests. (Stergiou, 2022, pp. 65,66). However, regional consequences of this approach cannot be explained by Türkiye's military capabilities alone. They also need to be considered within the broader security environment of the Eastern Mediterranean where the policies of individual states increasingly shaped how neighboring countries perceived threats and chose their regional partners.

Tziampiris (2019) presents the Eastern Mediterranean as an interconnected security arena that needs to have separate analysis. He also shows that Greek governments, despite their different political approach, placed greater emphasis on regional diplomacy after 2010,

especially through regular trilateral cooperation with Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt (Tziampiris, 2019, p. 24). The participation of Greek, Israeli, and American forces in the 2015 Noble Dina naval exercise shows that this cooperation had already begun to move beyond diplomatic coordination (Tziampiris, 2019, p. 25). Stivachtis (2019) mentions that based on Barry Buzan's approach, regional security cannot be understood only by looking at the distribution of material power. Relationships that develop among neighbour states also matter because security concerns are often closely connected at the regional level. Historical problems, political and military alignments and perceptions of friendship or hostility can influence how states assess both threats and potential partners. These patterns may remain important even when the regional balance of power changes. Turkish-Greek relations provide a good example, since their long-standing rivalry continues to shape the security environment of the Eastern Mediterranean. Regional alignments should therefore be examined not only in terms of changing capabilities, but also in relation to the existing patterns of rivalry and cooperation among regional states (Stivachtis, 2019, pp. 50,51). From this perspective, Türkiye's search for strategic autonomy and Greece's closer regional partnerships were part of the same regional change. These networks were not necessarily created by Washington to balance Türkiye. However, they later provided the US with an existing framework for strengthening Greece's strategic position.

The regional networks discussed above became more important because of Türkiye's search for strategic autonomy. This approach became more visible after 2016, when relations with the US and the European Union deteriorated, and the regional balance began to change. The US's "partial withdrawal" from the Middle East has provided regional actors with more room to pursue their own policies (Bardakçı, 2022, p. 519). At the same time, the wars in Syria and Libya and closer cooperation among Greece, Israel, and the Greek Cypriot Administration strengthened Ankara's view that Türkiye was being left outside the developing regional order in the Eastern Mediterranean (Bardakçı, 2022, p. 517). This perception of exclusion formed part of the context in which Ankara tries to get greater capacity to protect its interests with less reliance on allied military support.

Türkiye's relative dependence on its NATO allies for military support also declined. The expansion of Türkiye's domestic defense industry, particularly in weapons and naval systems, gave Ankara more room to act independently in the region (Bardakçı, 2022, p. 520). The "Blue Homeland" doctrine placed Türkiye's efforts to protect its maritime rights and interests within a broader strategic framework (Bardakçı, 2022, p. 517). It linked concerns over maritime rights and jurisdiction with energy security and Türkiye's regional position. Türkiye contested maritime arrangements that disproportionately favored Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration (Bardakçı, 2022, pp. 520-521). Ankara therefore supported its exploration activities with naval forces and signed a maritime agreement with Libya in 2019. These steps showed that Türkiye was prepared to protect its maritime rights through both military presence and diplomacy (Bardakçı, 2022, pp. 521-522).

However, these disputes emerged within a broader strategic transformation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Issues such as energy security, military access, and the influence of external actors connected regional competition to great-power competition. In this context, US relations with Türkiye and Greece gained importance not only for alliance management but also for Washington's efforts to preserve its regional influence.

4.4. GREAT POWER COMPETITION

As great power competition regained importance in US strategy, Washington tried to preserve its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and enhance the capabilities of regional partners. Kontos and Georgiou (2023) place this policy within the framework of great power competition. They argue that the Eastern Mediterranean is not a central priority for US foreign policy, but it is also not a region Washington can afford to ignore. Competition with China and Russia was in a central place in the 2017 National Security Strategy. The document stated that "China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity" (The White House, 2017a, p. 2). Although the document did not mention the Eastern Mediterranean, its section on Europe noted that "European allies and partners increase our strategic reach and provide access to forward basing and overflight rights for global

operations.” (The White House, 2017a, p. 48). In this context, US partnerships and military access in the Eastern Mediterranean assumed greater importance within the wider competition with Russia and China (Kontos & Georgiou, 2023, pp. 1015,1016,1019). As a result, US partnerships in the region came to support efforts both the management of local crises and to limit the influence of rival powers. Within this broader strategic framework, Washington placed greater emphasis on regional partnerships that could provide military access and support a sustained US presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Greece acquired particular importance in this regard, The 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act reflected this change. The Act described Greece as “a key pillar of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean” and called for “a robust United States naval presence” at Souda Bay (Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019, sec. 202(2), sec. 203(4)). Greece therefore became important not only as a NATO ally but also as a platform for US security and energy policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. This act emphasized Greece’s contribution to regional security and promoted closer US cooperation with Greece, Greek Cypriot Administration, and Israel in fields such as intelligence and maritime surveillance. Kontos and Georgiou (2023) connect these measures to US efforts to limit Russian influence in the region (Kontos & Georgiou, 2023, p. 1021). Therefore, Greece became important to Washington as a regional security partner that the US could preserve its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Vildan Meydan (2025) mentions that Greece has given the US another option for its military presence in the region. The defense agreement was revised in 2019 and extended for an indefinite period in 2021. This allowed US forces to make greater use of facilities in Greece strategic locations (Meydan, 2025, pp. 371,372). These locations also support US operations outside the Eastern Mediterranean. They provide access to Balkans, Black Sea region, Syria, and Libya (Meydan, 2025, pp. 373,374). Meydan (2025) argues that Greece has become an attractive security partner for Washington because of its political approach, close ties with Western institutions, and the military access it provides to the US (Meydan, 2025, p. 372). These developments do not mean that Türkiye has been

excluded from Washington's regional security framework. Ankara retains its strategic importance for the US. However, Washington tried to get greater operational flexibility by diversifying its regional security relationships. Closer defense ties with Greece have provided the US with additional military options and reduced its relative dependence on Türkiye. (Meydan, 2025, p. 377). Meydan (2025) describes this policy as a form of diversification through which the US strengthens cooperation with Greece, expands its regional options and reduces its relative dependence on Türkiye (Meydan, 2025, pp. 379,380). But the significance of this diversification extended beyond military access and operational flexibility. In Türkiye, it also raised questions about whether Washington continued to maintain its traditional position in Turkish-Greek disputes.

The 2020 tension between Turkish and Greek warships illustrates how this shift was perceived in Türkiye. During the crisis, a US warship arrived in Crete, although Washington stated that the visit had been scheduled in advance. In the same period, the US eased arms restrictions on the Greek Cypriot Administration and expanded its military presence in Greece. These developments reinforced the perception in Türkiye that Washington had begun to move away from its earlier role as a neutral mediator (Şahin, 2024, pp. 125,126). But this development did not create perception on its own. It reinforced concerns that had accumulated over the previous two decades.

The Turkish Grand National Assembly's rejection of the March 2003 motion meant that US forces could not use Turkish territory to open a northern front during the Iraq War and became an early indication of divergence between the two states. Later, their different approaches to Egypt and Israel during and after the Arab uprisings added further tensions. The disagreement over Türkiye's request for Gülen's extradition after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt further eroded Ankara's trust in Washington (Şahin, 2024, p. 129). The dispute over Türkiye's acquisition of the S-400 system and the CAATSA sanctions subsequently imposed by Washington added a military dimension to these tensions and further eroded mutual trust between the two allies.

As these disagreements accumulated, Greece gained greater importance in Washington's regional strategy because its policies were more closely aligned with US regional

priorities. This growing importance also reflected Greece's position within a broader network of regional partners with close ties to the United States. During this period, Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration deepened their cooperation with Egypt and Israel through separate trilateral frameworks. These partnerships strengthened Athens's diplomatic position and reinforced Ankara's perception that new regional alignments limited Türkiye's room for maneuver (Şahin, 2024, p. 130). From Ankara's perspective, the 2019 Türkiye-Libya maritime delimitation memorandum can be understood as a response to these cooperation frameworks. It also represented an effort to protect Türkiye's maritime rights and preserve its room for maneuver in the Eastern Mediterranean. These regional alignments later became more firmly established as the "East Mediterranean Gas Forum" moved toward formal institutionalization and Greece and Egypt signed an agreement on the delimitation of their exclusive economic zones (Şahin, 2024, pp. 132-133). Greece's deeper defense cooperation with France, the expansion of the US military presence in Greece and Washington's closer engagement with the Greek Cypriot Administration strengthened Athens's role within Western security strategy. These developments provided the United States with additional diplomatic and military options in the Eastern Mediterranean (Şahin, 2024, p. 133). Turkish official statements on regional energy cooperation emphasized inclusion. In response to the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated, "Had the purpose of the forum indeed been cooperation, surely Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots would have been invited to the forum" (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, para. 4). Ankara therefore did not reject regional cooperation itself. It objected to arrangements that excluded Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots from decisions on regional energy resources.

Devrim Şahin argues that the US deviated from its traditional mediator role in Turkish-Greek disputes. The change in US policy toward Cyprus provides a concrete example of how this perceived shift intersected with the wider competition with Russia discussed earlier. Mallinson, Kanevskiy and Petasis (2020) place this change within a wider struggle for power in the Eastern Mediterranean. They argue that geopolitical divisions did not disappear after Cold War. They have returned in a different form with new actors and different tools. From this perspective, Greece and Cyprus became more important in

wider efforts to reduce Russian influence over the European security order (Mallinson, Kanevskiy & Petasis, 2020, pp. 326,327). The change in US policy toward Cyprus shows more clearly how this regional strategy has developed. In 2014, then-Vice President Joe Biden described the Greek Cypriot Administration as a strategic partner of the US. This approach became more formal with the “Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019” that aimed to bring Cyprus closer to the Western security system (Mallinson, Kanevskiy & Petasis, 2020, p. 324). The removal of US arms restrictions was linked to several conditions. Greek Cypriot Administration was expected to follow CAATSA requirements, refuse port access for Russian warships, and replace Russian military equipment with systems compatible with NATO standards (Mallinson, Kanevskiy & Petasis, 2020, p. 324). Washington presented its closer ties with the Greek Cypriot Administration as part of a broader strategy to limit Russia’s military and political influence in the region. From Ankara’s perspective, however, the expansion of this cooperation particularly the relaxation of arms restrictions on the Greek Cypriot Administration risked disturbing the balance between the two sides on the island and raised questions about Washington’s impartiality in the Cyprus dispute. The statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 2022, “We strongly condemn the expansion of the scope of the decision taken by the U.S. in September 2020 to lift the arms embargo towards the Greek Cypriot Administration.” (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b, para.1). In the same statement, “We call on the U.S. to reconsider this decision and to pursue a balanced policy towards the two sides on the Island.” (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b, para.4).

These developments formed part of a broader reconfiguration of US policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, in which Greece gained importance as a balancing actor toward Türkiye.

4.5. GREECE’S ROLE IN THE U.S. STRATEGY

Greece’s role as a balancing actor in Eastern Mediterranean was not simply developed by the US administrations. It also developed with regional cooperation shaped by changing security concerns. Zenonas Tziarras (2016) describes the partnership that emerged after 2011 between Israel, Greek Cypriot Administration and Greece as a “loose quasi-

alliance” (p. 412). However, this cooperation did not include a formal obligation of mutual defense (Tziarras, 2016, p. 408). The three countries perceived certain aspects of Türkiye’s regional policies as sources of security concern, while economic interests particularly the potential benefits of Eastern Mediterranean energy resources also encouraged closer cooperation (Tziarras, 2016, pp. 407,408). Ankara, however, presented its approach as an effort to protect Türkiye’s maritime rights. Türkiye’s then Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu defined Ankara’s principal objectives as “fair and equitable delimitation of maritime boundaries” and “protection of our continental shelf rights against maximalist and excessive maritime boundary claims” (Çavuşoğlu, 2020, “Our Basic Objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean” section).

The divergence between Ankara and Athens over maritime rights formed part of the regional context that shaped Greece’s search for new partnerships. At a time of serious economic and political pressure, Athens tried to establish closer cooperation with other regional actors. Its interest in hydrocarbon exploration, the need to delimit maritime zones, and its maritime disputes with Türkiye in the Aegean led to this policy. (Tziarras, 2016, pp. 415,416). These partnerships offered both security benefits and economic opportunities. Greece became part of a broader regional network instead of trying to balance Türkiye on its own. This network brought together Israel’s military and technological capabilities with Cyprus’s geographic position and energy links. This cooperation gained a stronger security dimension over time. Greece and Israel signed military agreements in 2009. In 2011, they created joint mechanisms to deal with broader security issues. Their military ties were strengthened again with a new cooperation agreement in 2015 (Tziarras, 2016, p. 417). At the same time, projects such as the “EuroAsia Interconnector”, energy talks, and joint crisis-management efforts expanded the relationship beyond security. Security, energy, and economic interests increasingly became connected and supported closer ties among states (Tziarras, 2016, pp. 417,418).

Alexandros Zachariades (2025) argues that Greece try to deal with its security weaknesses to develop regional partnerships. This strategy was pursued as the power gap between Greece and Türkiye became larger. While Türkiye’s economy and defense spending continued to grow, Greece faced a long economic crisis. Deterioration of relations

between Türkiye and the US made Athens less confident that the alliance could effectively manage a future Turkish-Greek crisis (Zachariades, 2025, p. 20). Therefore, Greece faced two problems at once: economic problems and increasing security concerns. Athens did not respond to these security concerns only by increasing military spending. Zachariades (2025) identifies four main parts of Greece's balancing strategy. First, Greece tried to keep defense spending at a level that would prevent the gap with Türkiye. Second, cooperation with Israel and Egypt helped Greece support its own capabilities with regional partnerships. Third, Athens sought to present itself as a reliable partner to the US in order to gain stronger political and military support. Finally, Greece aimed to use its geographic position to become an important energy transit country (Zachariades, 2025, p. 21).

These policies are closely connected. So, these strategies show that Greece combined military, diplomatic, and geoeconomic tools to improve its security position. Greece followed both internal and external balancing strategies. It supported its own military capacity with defense spending and built partnerships with regional actors and used tensions in Türkiye's regional relations to strengthen its own diplomatic position and gain greater freedom of action.

In 2019, Mike Pompeo took part in the summit between Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration. Zachariades (2025) interprets this as a sign that Washington supported Greece's regional approach (Zachariades, 2025, p. 23). In the same year, the US and Greece renewed their defense agreement. In 2022, Greece also gave US forces access to additional military facilities. These steps turned political support into a more practical military partnership (Zachariades, 2025, p. 23). Athens used regional partnerships to reduce its security concerns in relation to Türkiye. It has also given US access to military facilities and regional networks that show the US has an alternative. Greece has connected its regional cooperation with stronger US support in this way. Washington did not originally create this framework. However, US involvement and closer defense relations with Greece have strengthened the balancing role of this regional structure against Türkiye.

It is important to demonstrate that Greece used its regional partnerships to gain credibility and strategic status in the eyes of the US. However, this closer relationship cannot be explained only by Greek initiatives. It is also necessary to examine the broader US strategy to understand why Washington attaches importance to Greece's regional networks and military capabilities.

4.6. US STRATEGY AND POLICIES

Greece's policies to strengthen its position in Washington also fit the broader US security strategy of this period. The 2017 National Security Strategy states that "Changes in a regional balance of power can have global consequences and threaten U.S. interests" (The White House, 2017a, p. 45). The strategy therefore calls on the United States to "prevent unfavorable shifts in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East." It also emphasizes the importance of close cooperation with allies and partners to achieve this goal (The White House, 2017a, p. 45).

The 2018 National Defense Strategy is important to show US effort to preserve balance of power. It presents competition between states as a major issue for American security. For this reason, the strategy calls for the combined use of military forces, overseas military deployment and partnerships (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 1). It also identifies the preservation of balances that support US interest in Europe and the Middle East as an important US defense objective (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 4). This shows that Washington does not depend only on its own military capabilities. It also aims to use the resources and capabilities of its partners as part of a defense strategy.

Official American documents issued in 2018 provide direct evidence that Greece's strategic importance in US policy. The Integrated Country Strategy (2018) stated that,

Greece, an EU member state and NATO ally, is a pillar of stability in a complicated region. Its position in the Eastern Mediterranean in close proximity to the Balkans, the Black Sea region, North Africa, and the Middle East elevates Greece's importance in addressing U.S. national security and energy priorities. (U.S. Department of State, 2018a, p. 2).

In the same year, the US Assistant Secretary of State A. Wess Mitchell (2018) mentioned Greece's strategic importance and show Türkiye perspective of US administration. In his assessment of Türkiye he stated, "At the same time, we cannot be silent when Turkey's leaders curb democratic freedoms and rule of law, harangue Israel, and wield rhetoric or pursues policies that unnerve Ankara's neighbors and our close friends and allies" (Mitchell, 2018, para. 43). Mitchell then described the corresponding American policy, "In parallel, we are working to put the pieces in place for a stronger long-term U.S. strategic presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. We are cultivating Greece as an anchor of stability in the Eastern Med and Western Balkans" (Mitchell, 2018, para.44).

Mitchell's statements show a clear difference between the roles of Türkiye and Greece in US regional policy. He described Türkiye's policies as a source of concern for Ankara's neighbors and for close US friends and allies. By contrast, he presented Greece as an "anchor of stability" that could support a stronger and more stable US presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Mitchell's use of the phrase "in parallel" links these two parts of US policy. This situation reveals one of the fundamental tensions within asymmetric alliances: the relationship between security cooperation and foreign policy autonomy. When the relatively less powerful ally tried to expand its room for maneuver in accordance with its own threat of perceptions and national security priorities, the more powerful ally perceived this pursuit of autonomy as a source of concern. The concern did not arise because Türkiye constituted a source of regional instability. It arose because Ankara formulated its security and foreign policy decisions with greater independence from Washington's priorities. In this context, Greece aligned its policies more closely with those of the US and therefore emerged as an actor through which Washington could balance Türkiye.

US policy in the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be explained only by differences between Washington and Ankara. Alterman et al. (2018) place this policy within the transformation of the regional order. The security architecture inherited from the Cold War was originally designed to stabilize Europe and contain Soviet influence (Alterman et al., 2018, p. vii). A 1947 State Department memorandum stated: "Italy, Greece, Turkey and Iran constitute a bastion, in both the political and strategic sense, which, if breached,

would create a situation, the virtually inevitable result of which would be Soviet domination of the entire Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.” (U.S. Department of State, 1947, doc. 402, p. 577).

Greece and Türkiye were incorporated into the Euro-Atlantic security system as important components of the US regional posture in this framework (Alterman et al., 2018, p. 4). Türkiye subsequently became a central pillar of US defense planning in the Eastern Mediterranean (Alterman et al., 2018, p. 14). However, the authors considered this inherited framework increasingly inadequate for addressing the region’s changing security environment (Alterman et al., 2018, p. vii). Because regional alignments and security challenges have changed. This transformation involved several related developments. Regional conflicts and the weakening of state authority such as Syria, Libya and Lebanon increased migration pressures and economic problems across the Middle East and Europe. On the other hand, natural gas discoveries created new opportunities but also intensified disputes over sovereignty and regional connections.

They also argue that Washington had approached regional developments mainly through narrowly defined military operations and short-term responses rather than a coherent long-term strategy (Alterman et al., 2018, p. vii). Also, they mention that Russia, China, Iran, and Türkiye were expanding their regional influence with combining economic, diplomatic, and military instruments (Alterman et al., 2018, p. 60). The report’s reference to Türkiye alongside Russia, China, and Iran is particularly noteworthy. This juxtaposition shows that Ankara’s pursuit of its own regional priorities was treated as part of the broader competition for regional influence.

However, this association does not mean that Türkiye shared the objectives of those states. Rather, it reflects the analytical framework through which the report assessed Turkish policies that did not fully align with US regional priorities.

The report does not suggest excluding Türkiye from the Western alliance or ending relations with Ankara. It proposes a two-part approach. The first part is to keep Türkiye closely connected to the Euro-Atlantic system. The second is to develop additional

military options in other countries. These alternatives would reduce the risks for the US if access to Turkish military facilities became limited or unavailable (Alterman et al., 2018, p. 50). Greece appears in the report as more than a NATO ally with its own disputes with Türkiye. It is also presented as a country that could provide some strategic functions. After discussing the need for alternatives to Turkish bases, the report calls for stronger US-Greece relations. It also recommends the defense dialogue between Washington and Athens (Alterman et al., 2018, pp. 54,55). Greece's role as a balancing actor is not based only on hosting US forces. Athens also built close ties with Israel and Greek Cypriot Administration. These relations give Washington access to an existing regional network. The report therefore calls for a trilateral dialogue between the US, Greece, Greek Cypriot Administration and Israel to form a broader regional partnership (Alterman et al., 2018, p. 57). The regional partnership gained official US support during the inaugural US-Greece Strategic Dialogue in December 2018. The joint statement mentions that "Greece discussed its trilateral partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean and the United States expressed interest in increasing its support for the Greece-Israel-Cyprus trilateral discussion" (U.S. Department of State, 2018b, "Regional Cooperation" section, para. 1). This interest was followed by direct high-level US involvement in the framework.

In March 2019, representatives of the US, Israel, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration met in Jerusalem for the summit of the existing trilateral mechanism. The meeting was important because of formal participation of the United States in this regional cooperation framework. The joint declaration stated that "Secretary Pompeo underlined U.S. support for the trilateral mechanism established by Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, noting the importance of increased cooperation" (U.S. Department of State, 2019a, para. 1). This diplomatic engagement provided the political foundation for the more concrete US commitments and policies that followed.

4.6.1. Official Commitments And Policy Practices

The 2022 National Security Strategy shows that the Biden administration did not completely depart from the approach outlined in the Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy document. The 2022 National Security Strategy placed similar

ideas within the concepts of “integrated deterrence” and “integration across regions”. It defines deterrence as the combined “use of military power, diplomacy, economic tools, security assistance, and force posture” (The White House, 2022, p. 22). It also mentioned closer planning with allies, stronger interoperability and the development of shared military capabilities (The White House, 2022, p. 22). In this model, the US does not depend on a single ally. It relies on a broader network of partners whose capabilities can be used together. This framework demonstrates that Greece’s value within the US policy cannot be explained only with the bilateral defense relationship. Greece is an actor capable of integrating its NATO membership, military facilities, position within the European Union and relationships it has cultivated with Israel and Egypt into a single strategic sphere. These attributes have made Athens more than a host for US forces. They have also allowed to connect Washington with established regional networks. The US includes the “East Mediterranean Gas Forum” among international mechanisms that support energy security. This shows that Washington uses regional partnerships that already exist as part of its strategy (The White House, 2022, p. 28). Turkish official statements framed these regional mechanisms as a question of inclusion. In response to the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated, “Had the purpose of the forum indeed been cooperation, surely Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots would have been invited to the forum” (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, para. 4). Ankara therefore did not reject regional cooperation itself. It objected to arrangements that excluded Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots from decisions on regional energy resources.

The Biden administration does not treat Türkiye as an actor outside the Western security framework. The 2022 National Security Strategy makes clear that Washington still wants to strengthen Türkiye’s strategic and institutional ties with the West (The White House, 2022, p. 39). This is important to understand the closer relationship between the United States and Greece. Because the expansion of this relationship did not mean that Greece had replaced Türkiye in Washington’s regional strategy. Washington has expanded its military, diplomatic and economic options through closer cooperation with Greece and other regional partners. This has given the US greater flexibility in the region and reduced its relative dependence on Türkiye.

The gradual operationalization of US-Greek defense cooperation is visible in successive Strategic Dialogue statements. In 2019, the two governments linked their partnership to “promoting stability and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean” (U.S. Department of State, 2019b, “Defense and Security” section, para. 1). By 2024, the joint statement highlighted the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement’s role in providing “strategically important access, basing, and overflight for U.S. forces” (U.S. Department of State, 2024, “Defense and Security” section, para. 1). The two statements show that the bilateral relationship developed into a broader framework in which the general commitment to regional policies was increasingly accompanied by cooperation on military access, infrastructure, and force mobility.

The US-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, introduced in the Senate as S. 2000, reflected Greece’s growing importance in Congress. The bill declared that “Greece is a pillar of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean region” (U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, 2021, sec. 3(1)) and mention “support the modernization of the Greek military” (U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, 2021, sec. 3(3)). It further described naval cooperation at Souda Bay and Alexandroupolis (Dedeğaç) as beneficial to both countries and encouraged investment in strategic Greek ports and shipyards and recommended measures to “increase rotational deployments” at Greek bases (U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, 2021, sec. 3(6), (10), and (11)). The bill also supported the restoration of military construction funds for projects at Souda Bay (U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, 2021, sec. 3(12)). While these provisions primarily concerned military access and infrastructure, the F-35 issue added a separate but related dimension to bilateral defense cooperation because of its potential implications for the military balance between Türkiye and Greece.

The F-35 provisions are especially relevant to the military balance between Türkiye and Greece. The bill states that Türkiye was removed from the F-35 program “as a result of its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system” (U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, 2021, sec. 2(19)). It also suggests “support the sale of F-35 Joint Strike Fighters to Greece” and notes that such a sale could include

aircraft originally produced for Türkiye but never delivered (U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, 2021, sec. 3(7)). This shows more clearly how a capability lost by Türkiye could be used to strengthen Greece's military position. Even if not all the provisions in this bill are adopted, it is significant to show Congress's stance. The 2021 congressional initiative built on changes that had already begun within the US administration. An important step in this process was the amendment of the US-Greece Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement, signed on 5 October 2019. The agreement provided an important basis for the expansion of US defense cooperation with Greece.

An important step in this process was the First Protocol of Amendment to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement, signed on October 5, 2019, and entered into force on February 13, 2020. The Protocol allowed US forces to use and operate facilities at "Larissa Air Base and Stefanovikio Army Aviation Base" (U.S. Department of State, 2020, art. I, para. 3). Other Greek military facilities could also be added to the agreement with the consent of both countries (U.S. Department of State, 2020, art. I, para. 3). US access covers more than training and joint exercises. It also included "refueling, accommodation of personnel, movement of forces and equipment, pre-positioning, logistical support, and emergency operations" (U.S. Department of State, 2020, art. I, para. 5,6). The Protocol also gave the US priority and unimpeded access to the Port of Alexandroupoli (Dedeğaç) for the movement of forces and equipment. This strengthened Greece's role as a transit point for US military operations in the region (U.S. Department of State, 2020, art. I, para. 8).

A further step in US-Greece military cooperation came with the Second Protocol of Amendment to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement, signed on 14 October 2021 and entered into force on 24 May 2022. It marked a shift from the expansion of US military access to its long-term institutional consolidation. It also added "Camp Georgoulas, Litochoro Range, Camp Giannoulis, and Souda Naval Base" to the agreement and US forces have access to more locations across Greece (U.S. Department of State, 2022b, art. II, para.3). These changes made US military access to Greece more regular and predictable rather than dependent on temporary arrangements. The US states

that it uses its military presence in Greece to balance Russia. However, from Türkiye's perspective this situation has been called into question. In January 2023, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated that "although Greece has repeatedly stated that the nine bases were established to balance Türkiye, we have yet to see a clear statement from the United States that refutes this claim" (Çavuşoğlu, 2023, para. 41, author's translation).

Official American policy documents define the importance of the expanded US military presence in Greece not only in terms of bilateral relations but also from an operational perspective. The 2022 Integrated Country Strategy for Greece states that:

The Naval Support Activity at Souda Bay and the Port of Alexandroupoli provide unique capabilities to the U.S. military. The defense relationship is also increasingly important as U.S. operational requirements in the region expand; Greece's location is critical for EUCOM, CENTCOM, and AFRICOM requirements and directly support strategic competition (U.S. Department of State, 2022a, p. 9).

This is important because it places these facilities within a broader geographical area beyond the Eastern Mediterranean. Souda Bay supports the US maritime presence and regional operations. Dedeagaç (Alexandroupoli) helps move personnel and military equipment toward southeastern Europe and the Black Sea. Its ability to support deployments without the need to pass through the Turkish Straits also increased its importance after Russia's invasion of Ukraine (U.S. Department of State, 2022a, p. 1). Greece therefore became important not only because of its alignment with Washington's priorities but also because it could connect several operational areas and give the US greater logistical flexibility. The updated MDCA made this function more regular and predictable. Before the agreement, US access could depend on temporary political arrangements. After the update, this access became a more stable part for the American military policies. The 2022 Integrated Country Strategy also state, "A loss of strategic access in Greece would also significantly impact the U.S. military's ability to meet operational and contingency requirements in the region and beyond." (U.S. Department of State, 2022a, p. 11). This shows the importance that Washington placed on these facilities.

Türkiye has not viewed the American military presence in Dedeağaç (Alexandroupoli) only as a logistical arrangement developed by NATO against Russia. From Ankara's perspective, Dedeağaç represents part of the US's expanding military access across Greece. President Erdoğan's statement in November 2021 "In fact, it is not just Dedeağaç that is a base, Greece itself has now effectively become an American base" demonstrates that the Turkish government perceives these developments as a strategic restructuring rather than a port arrangement (Kaplan & Türkten, 2021, section "Amerikan üslerinin sayısını ben saya saya bitiremedim" para. 1). This assessment reveals that the activity in Dedeağaç is interpreted in Türkiye not only as an increase in military presence but as an indicator of the strategic priority Washington assigns to Greece. In another speech by President Erdoğan "the establishment of such a base there causes our people and us great distress" (Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 2021, "Our sole concern, as Türkiye, is to be powerful" section para.1). This statement indicates that Ankara did not assess the US presence in Dedeağaç only as a logistical development. It also considered the possible implications of this presence for Türkiye's security and for the regional balance.

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu linked this concern to the balance of power between Türkiye and Greece. Ankara did not regard the US decision to lift restrictions on arms sales to the Greek Cypriot Administration as a development confined to the Cyprus issue. Turkish officials interpreted the decision as part of a wider shift toward greater US strategic support for Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Çavuşoğlu argued:

The United States had previously pursued a policy of balance between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot sides on the island, as well as between Türkiye and Greece. However, it began to depart from this policy over the preceding two years despite our repeated warnings. With its latest decision, the United States has demonstrated that it has completely abandoned this balance and adopted a position in favor of the Greek Cypriot side by allowing it to acquire weapons (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a, para 23, author's translation).

In the same speech, Çavuşoğlu expressed skepticism about explanations about the military buildup in Dedeağaç to Russia, energy security, or logistical needs (Republic of

Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a, para.33). His remarks connected the developments in Cyprus and Dedeağaç to the same concern about Washington's regional approach. Çavuşoğlu's statement regarding the Cyprus issue after his meeting with Secretary Blinken in January 2023:

This amounts to a disruption of the balance; in other words, it shows that the United States' policy of balance has disrupted. Likewise, although Washington has recently sought to restore this balance through some of its statements, in practice we see that the balance in Türkiye-Greece relations has disrupted (Çavuşoğlu, 2023, para. 41, author's translation).

These statements indicate that Ankara did not interpret closer US security cooperation with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration as a purely technical or logistical development. Also, for Turkish decisionmakers, Dedeağaç has come to another represent a change in the US approach to the balance between Türkiye and Greece. This assessment was later reinforced by President Erdoğan's remarks.

President Erdoğan argued,

We would rather the US maintained its policy of balance in its relations with Türkiye and Greece. We, Greece and the USA are NATO members. We believe that maintaining a distance in line with the rules of the alliance, fostering constructive dialogue, will be beneficial (Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 2024 "Our visit to the USA was postponed due to conflicting schedules on both sides" section).

The following section examines whether this perceived shift was also reflected in the approaches of US presidents toward Türkiye and Greece.

4.6.2. The Approaches Of US Presidents

Presidential statements provide direct evidence of how Greece's strategic role was perceived at the executive level. In November 2016, in his meeting with Greek Prime Minister Tsipras President Obama stated that "Greece has continued to be a reliable ally" and added that the US was "proud to count Greece as one of our closest allies and one of our greatest friends" (The White House, 2016, para. 38).

Obama also commended Greece as “one of the five NATO allies” that met the target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense and emphasized that “Greece has done this even during difficult economic times” (The White House, 2016, para. 33). (The White House, 2016, para.33). These statements establish an important baseline for the post-2016 period. These remarks indicate that the Obama administration already regarded Greece as a reliable NATO ally before the subsequent expansion of US military access to Greek facilities. Therefore, the subsequent rapprochement did not represent the sudden discovery of Greece as an alternative to Türkiye but the strategic development of an existing alliance relationship.

During the Trump administration, presidential rhetoric gave greater emphasis to Greece’s contribution to American regional strategy. In October 2017, in his meeting with Greek Prime Minister Tsipras, President Trump said that “I want to thank the Prime Minister and the Greek people for serving as gracious hosts to our U.S. naval forces at Souda Bay.” (The White House, 2017b, para.9) He also praised Greece’s fulfillment of NATO’s defense-spending target and its contribution to the diversification of European energy supplies. When asked about Greece’s regional role, Trump stated that the country had “a great role in stability in the area” and described it as a “very reliable ally.” (The White House, 2017b, para. 94,95). These statements indicate that Greece was not only perceived as a NATO member but also as a partner providing military access, burden sharing, regional stability, and energy-security benefits (The White House, 2017b).

The strategic importance that Washington attached to Greece became even more explicit in January 2020. Trump described the bilateral relationship as “really extraordinary” in his meeting with Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis (The White House, 2020, para. 2). He also emphasized its military dimension and stated, “We’re doing a lot of things together-military.” (The White House, 2020, para.2). Nevertheless, the same meeting also revealed the limits of Washington’s alignment with Athens. When asked whether he agreed with the characterization of Turkish activities in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean Trump initially responded, “We are talking to him,” and explained that Washington was consulting President Erdoğan and other regional actors (The White House, 2020, para.66). Rather than publicly approval Athens’s position, Trump stated that the US

would try to “work out some kind of a plan for peace.” (The White House, 2020, para.69). This response shows that the US expanded its military cooperation with Greece but maintained diplomatic caution toward Türkiye. This approach reflected a strategy of diversification rather than unconditional alignment with Athens.

The Biden administration continued to develop US’s strategic partnership with Greece. On 16 May 2022, President Biden and Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis attended a White House reception remembrance Greek independence. During his remarks at the reception, Biden characterized the bilateral relationship as unprecedented and declared that “our friendship and partnership and our alliance is closer and stronger than it has ever been” (Office of the Federal Register, 2022, p. 2). He also emphasized the broad scope of the partnership and referred to the two countries’ cooperation “on climate and energy, on trade and investment, on defense and disaster response” (Office of the Federal Register, 2022, p. 2). In the same speech, Biden connected Greece’s strategic role directly to the war in Ukraine and NATO security. He praised the Greek government for its condemnation of Russian aggression and its acceptance of Ukrainian refugees. He also described Greece as “a bulwark of security for NATO’s eastern and southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean” (Office of the Federal Register, 2022, p. 3). These statements show that the Biden administration viewed Greece both as a bilateral defense partner and as a contributor to NATO’s broader regional security architecture.

The approaches of the Trump and Biden administrations show both continuity and change. Greece was already seen as an important NATO ally before 2016. However, the Trump and Biden administrations gave more importance to its military, logistical, energy, and regional position. Also, US presidents continued to see Türkiye as an important NATO ally. Greece therefore did not replace Türkiye in US strategy but became a strategic balancing actor that Washington could turn to when disagreements with Ankara intensified. This role reduced US’ relative dependence on Türkiye and gave Washington more flexibility in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The main finding of this study is not that Greece has developed the capacity to balance Türkiye’s overall military power on its own but that it has become an actor that gives the

US more options in the region. Washington has not officially described its growing defense cooperation with Greece as a balancing policy against Türkiye. However, it has gained an important alternative that could be used if relations with Türkiye deteriorate. Athens has used its military facilities, geographical position, and regional partnerships to increase its strategic value for Washington. Its cooperation with the Greek Cypriot Administration and Israel later developed into the 3+1 framework with the participation of the US. This gave Greece a role in connecting regional cooperation with US policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Türkiye's perception of these developments as a form of encirclement is another important outcome of this process. Ankara has viewed the expansion of US military facilities and American support for Greece as part of a pressure directed at Türkiye. This perception has made it more difficult for Washington to be seen as a neutral mediator between the two allies. Since 2016, the problems in Turkish-American relations over Syria, the S-400 purchase, F-35 problem and Ankara's pursuit of strategic autonomy have coincided with the strengthening of US-Greece relations. Therefore, the divergences in relations between Ankara and Washington and the rapprochement between Athens and Washington are not independent developments (Gingeras, 2023, "The conspiracy theory became" section).

4.7. CONCLUSION

At the core of Turkish-American tensions are a dispute over the terms of an asymmetric alliance. For decades, US security guarantees and military support came with the expectation that Türkiye would remain broadly aligned with Washington on major regional issues. Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy changed this expectation. Its policies in Syria, its acquisition of the S-400 system, its relations with Russia and its position in the Eastern Mediterranean showed that Ankara no longer accepted the same limits on its freedom of action. Washington therefore expanded its strategic relationship with Greece. Access to Greek military facilities and Greece's regional partnerships provided the United States with additional options. The US-Greece rapprochement can therefore be interpreted as a form of intra-alliance balancing. Türkiye pursue autonomy

from more powerful ally, while the United States used Greece to limit the effects of this autonomy and preserve its influence within the alliance.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines how the United States used its strategic relationship with Greece as part of its intra-alliance balancing policy toward Türkiye after 2016. The main finding is that Washington tried to reduce its military and strategic dependence on Ankara while preserving Türkiye's position within NATO. For this purpose, the United States expanded its military access in Greece, developed closer defense relations with Athens, and supported regional partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean in which Greece played an important role. Periodic diplomatic crises alone cannot explain the transformation of Turkish-American relations. The two countries differ in their threat perceptions, regional priorities and expectations of each other as allies. During the Cold War, the shared Soviet threat sustained the alliance despite disputes between Ankara and Washington. However, the 1964 Johnson Letter, the Cyprus issue and the US arms embargo led Türkiye to question its dependence on the United States. Türkiye's pursuit of a more autonomous foreign policy can therefore be traced back to this period. The bipolar international system nevertheless limited Ankara's capacity for independent action.

The end of the Cold War exposed differences between Turkish and American security priorities as the shared Soviet threat disappeared. Developments in northern Iraq and the Kurdish question undermined Türkiye's trust in the United States. Türkiye also considered the alliance's support for its defense needs insufficient and therefore felt compelled to seek alternatives. The Turkish Grand National Assembly's rejection of the March 2003 motion showed Washington that it could no longer take Türkiye's support for US regional policies for granted. These differences became central to bilateral relations during the Syrian civil war. The United States accepted the PYD/YPG as a local partner against Daesh, although Türkiye identified these groups as a direct threat to its national security. Ankara's distrust of Washington deepened further after the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, as the US response fell short of the solidarity Türkiye expected from an ally.

This loss of trust led Ankara to assess US regional policies and their implications for its security interests with greater caution. Türkiye's autonomous military operations in Syria,

closer relations with Russia and acquisition of the S-400 system reinforced Washington's perception of Türkiye as an ally prepared to act independently. Washington did not respond to this change with a complete break from Türkiye. It preserved cooperation in selected areas and developed alternatives that reduced its relative dependence on Türkiye.

Israel's role should also be taken into account to explain why the US has sought to balance Türkiye. Given the close strategic ties between the US and Israel, Israel's assessments of Türkiye have shaped Washington's understanding of Ankara's independent role in regional affairs. US efforts to constrain certain Turkish foreign policy choices should therefore be viewed in the context of Washington's preference of an Israel-centered regional order.

Greece's role in this process is not only a consequence of the problems between the United States and Türkiye. Athens has developed political, military, and energy policies with Israel and the Greek Cypriot Administration in the Eastern Mediterranean and it tried to position itself as a reliable regional partner in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, the divergence of Turkish-American relations has increased the strategic importance of Greece's geographic position, military facilities, and regional connections for Washington. These assets have provided the United States with alternatives to the military and logistical facilities offered by Türkiye and have reduced its dependence on Ankara. Consequently, Greece assumed a concrete role in the US policy of intra-alliance balancing toward Türkiye. The expansion of US-Greece defense cooperation represents the military dimension of this approach. With the expansion of US military access to Dedeağaç (Alexandroupoli), Larissa, Stefanovikio and Souda Bay, Washington gained additional options for its regional operations and reduced its dependence. Dedeağaç in particular, became an important logistics hub for military deployments for US forces.

Greece's role within this strategy has extended beyond military facilities. US participation in the trilateral cooperation among Greece, Israel, and the Greek Cypriot Administration has connected Washington to an established political and security network in the region. This framework has provided the United States with an alternative regional platform to advance its energy, security and diplomatic objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Greece has therefore served two purposes for Washington: it has provided military access and established a pattern of regional cooperation in which the United States could participate alongside other regional actors.

The theoretical contribution of the thesis becomes clearer at this point. Traditional balance of power theory mainly explains relations between rival states or alliances. This study, however, shows that similar dynamics can also appear among members of the same alliance. From a neorealist perspective, alliance membership does not remove uncertainty, divergent interests or concerns about relative position in the international system. While common security commitments continue, allies may reconsider each other's intentions, reliability, and strategic value. Cooperation within an alliance can therefore coexist with efforts to preserve power, autonomy, and strategic flexibility. Ultimately, the regional structure that emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean after 2016 does not mean that Türkiye has been excluded from NATO or replaced by Greece. Türkiye keeps its strategic importance for the United States and NATO because of its geographical position, military capacity and regional influence.

This process shows that, within asymmetric alliances, balance of power dynamics can arise not only in response to external threats but also from relations of autonomy and dependence among allies. As Türkiye tries to get strategic autonomy, Washington's capacity to influence Ankara declined. The United States therefore expanded its cooperation with Greece and increased its regional options and reduced its relative dependence on Türkiye. In this context, Greece did not replace Türkiye but emerged as a balancing actor.

Future research may focus how Türkiye views Greece's role on the US regional policy and how Greek perceptions of Türkiye influence Greece's defense and regional policies. It could also consider the roles of other regional states in the US approach to Türkiye and how these compare with Greece's role.

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APPENDIX 1. ORIGINALITY REPORT

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu Form No.	FRM-YL-15
		Yayın Tarihi Date of Pub.	04.12.2023
	FRM-YL-15 Yüksek Lisans Tezi Orijinallik Raporu <i>Master's Thesis Dissertation Originality Report</i>	Revizyon No Rev. No.	02
		Revizyon Tarihi Rev. Date	25.01.2024

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA
Tarih: 30/09/2026
Tez Başlığı (Türkçe): DOĞU AKDENİZ'DE GÜÇ DENGESİ SİYASETİ: ABD'NİN TÜRKİYE VE YUNANİSTAN'A YÖNELİK YAKLAŞIMINI AÇIKLAMAK Tez Başlığı (Almanca/Fransızca)*:..... Yukarıda başlığı verilen tezin a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 89 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 29/09/2026 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezin benzerlik oranı % 16 'dır. Uygulanan filtrelemeler*: 1. ☒ Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç 2. ☒ Kaynakça hariç 3. ☐ Alıntılar hariç 4. ☒ Alıntılar dâhil 5. ☒ 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tezin herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumlarda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim. Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.
Ad-Soyad/İmza

Öğrenci Bilgileri	Ad-Soyad	Emre ÖZER
	Öğrenci No	N23132929
	Enstitü Anabilim Dalı	ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER
	Programı	ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER-TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS

DANIŞMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.
(Unvan, Ad Soyad, İmza)

* Tez **Almanca** veya **Fransızca** yazılıyor ise bu kısımda tez başlığı **Tez Yazım Dilinde** yazılmalıdır.

**Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları İkinci bölüm madde (4)/3'te de belirtildiği üzere: Kaynakça hariç, Alıntılar hariç/dahil, 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç (Limit match size to 5 words) filtreleme yapılmalıdır.

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu Form No.	FRM-YL-15
		Yayın Tarihi Date of Pub.	04.12.2023
	FRM-YL-15 Yüksek Lisans Tezi Orijinallik Raporu <i>Master's Thesis Dissertation Originality Report</i>	Revizyon No Rev. No.	02
		Revizyon Tarihi Rev.Date	25.01.2024

TO HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS Date: 30/09/2026 Thesis Title (In English): THE BALANCE OF POWER POLITICS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: EXPLAINING THE US APPROACH TOWARD TÜRKİYE AND GREECE According to the originality report obtained by myself/my thesis advisor by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options checked below on 29/09/2026 for the total of 89 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled above, the similarity index of my thesis is 16 %. Filtering options applied**: ☒ Approval and Declaration sections excluded ☒ References cited excluded ☐ Quotes excluded ☒ Quotes included ☒ Match size up to 5 words excluded I hereby declare that I have carefully read Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences Guidelines for Obtaining and Using Thesis Originality Reports that according to the maximum similarity index values specified in the Guidelines, my thesis does not include any form of plagiarism; that in any future detection of possible infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility; and that all the information I have provided is correct to the best of my knowledge. Kindly submitted for the necessary actions. Name-Surname/Signature
--

Student Information	Name-Surname	Emre ÖZER
	Student Number	N23132929
	Department	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
	Programme	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS-MA WITH THESIS

SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

APPROVED
(Title, Name and Surname, Signature)

**As mentioned in the second part [article (4)/3] of the Thesis Dissertation Originality Report's Codes of Practice of Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences, filtering should be done as following: excluding reference, quotation excluded/included, Match size up to 5 words excluded.

APPENDIX 2. ETHICS COMMISSION FORM

	HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ	Doküman Kodu Form No.	FRM-YL-09
		Yayın Tarihi Date of Pub.	22.11.2023
	FRM-YL-09 Yüksek Lisans Tezi Etik Kurul Muafiyeti Formu <i>Ethics Board Form for Master's Thesis</i>	Revizyon No Rev. No.	02
		Revizyon Tarihi Rev.Date	25.01.2024

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA
Tarih: 30/09/2026
Tez Başlığı (Türkçe): DOĞU AKDENİZ'DE GÜÇ DENGESİ SİYASETİ: ABD'NİN TÜRKİYE VE YUNANİSTAN'A YÖNELİK YAKLAŞIMINI AÇIKLAMAK Tez Başlığı (Almanca/Fransızca)*:
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