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The Strategy of Smart Power in Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Syrian Crisis

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Abstract

The study examines Turkey's smart power strategy in its foreign policy toward the Syrian crisis during the period (2011–2022). This strategy effectively combined hard power tools (military and economic) with soft power tools (cultural and diplomatic) within a framework aimed at achieving its national and regional interests and adapting to the crisis's dynamics. The purpose of the study was to analyze Turkish foreign policy and assess its success in achieving its objectives, relying on statements by officials, official publications, documented events, and works by specialists and experts. Turkey's objectives included safeguarding its national security from the threat of armed Kurdish groups, enhancing its role as an influential regional power, and reshaping the Syrian regime to align with its interests. The study also concluded that Turkey has successfully reduced security threats along its southern borders and has positioned itself as a regional player capable of contributing to the establishment of international peace and security. However, the risk of the emergence of a Kurdish entity in northeastern Syria remains, despite the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Keywords: Smart Power, Turkish Foreign Policy, Syrian Crisis, National Security, Kurds.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity, the world has witnessed several changes, especially the hegemony of the United States over the international system. These changes have been accompanied by a shift in the concept of power, as many scholars, have attempted to theorize new concepts related to power, as military power alone is no longer the means to control the international system and achieve the foreign policy goals of the United States and major countries.

The spread of globalization, free markets, and the development of technology have helped major international powers achieve their goals by combining various means of power, including soft power, to attract others, influence their preferences, and reduce heat casualties. In addition to its military and economic superiority, the United States has maintained the attractiveness of its culture and values, which strengthens the legitimacy of its leadership role in the global system.

Hence, the significance of the concept of smart power arises, which represents a combination of hard power and soft power to achieve foreign policy objectives (Callarotti, 2015), essentially

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linking tolerance with firmness. This concept provides an appropriate framework for addressing unconventional threats, as it entails the development of a comprehensive strategy based on a foundation of resources and a set of tools to achieve objectives through the simultaneous use of both hard and soft power (Al-Kaoud, 2016: 37).

As for soft power, [Joseph Nye] defined it as "the ability to influence desired outcomes and change the behavior of others when necessary. The association of power with the attribute of softness implies an ability to achieve objectives through persuasion and attraction rather than coercion" (Nye, 2007: 20). He excluded economic, political, and military sanctions from his definition, describing soft power as the type of power that relies on the use of cultural, economic, and informational means (Nye, 2007: 25-33).

In the same context, at the regional level, Turkey has emerged as a regional power with human resources, a large geographical area characterized by climatic diversity and a wealth of water resources, and an important geopolitical position in the center of the Eurasian continent overlooking two important waterways, namely the "Bosphorus" and "Dardanelles" straits, in addition to its growing economic power, its membership in the Group of Twenty, NATO, the United Nations and many other international organizations, not to mention the success of its democratic experience, the development and stability of its political system and the growing role of its cultural and scientific institutions. and information, regionally and internationally.

Therefore, with its foreign policy, especially after the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002, Turkey tried to mix the different instruments of power (hard and soft) according to the needs of each phase; in the first decade of the current century, it focused its foreign policy on soft power instruments and the policy of "zero problems" in order to achieve a prominent regional position and restore its regional role, then, after the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" in 2011 AD, it tended to use hard power, like many countries in the region, the revolutions of the "Arab Spring", especially the events in Syria, have raised concerns among decision-makers in Turkey, especially in the southeastern regions of Syria, which are already suffering from security problems as a result of attacks by the Kurdish minority in Syria on the Turkish army stationed on the border.

In general, the Syrian crisis has been an obsession for the Turkish state since the popular revolution turned into a military confrontation, a civil war and then into an arena for competition and conflict between international powers, as this crisis is an attractive arena for regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and other countries in the region, as well as for international powers such as Russia, the United States and others. Turkey also viewed the developments of the Syrian crisis with great seriousness, as it is connected to Syria via an 900 km border in the southeast and began to pose an imminent threat to its national security and vital interests. Therefore, the Turkish leadership was keen to play a role in all stages of the Syrian crisis, sometimes using the instruments of its hard power and sometimes its soft power according to the changes in the Syrian arena and on the regional and international stage.

This study deals in three sections with Turkey's strategy of combining hard and soft power to achieve its goals in the Syrian crisis between 2011 and 2022:

First topic: Turkey's smart instruments of power in the Syrian crisis.

Second topic: Turkey's objectives in the Syrian crisis.

Third topic: Assessing the success of Turkey's foreign policy in achieving its goals in the Syrian

First Topic: Turkey's Smart Instruments of Power in the Syrian Crisis

Turkey's use of smart power in Syria has become evident in both its hard and soft dimensions. The hard aspect has been applied directly or indirectly through proxies, with the primary aim of safeguarding national security and countering existential threats to its political structure. As these dangers, represented by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Islamic State (ISIS), drew closer to Turkey's borders, Turkish military forces entered Syria. Additionally, Turkey provided logistical support to a number of armed groups operating within the region.

In the same context, soft power was used by promoting the human dimension, as Turkey is the country with the most Syrian refugees in the world, with about four million refugees, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and it also used religion in political discourse as a tool to implement its foreign policy in Syria when he compared Turkey's reception of Syrians to receiving migrant supporters and [Erdogan] said in his statements, "We are children of a culture that is well aware of the importance of immigrants and supporters... Syrian refugees can return to their country whenever they want, but we will never expel them from our country" (Al Jazeera Net, 2022). He also called on Turkish citizens to go to the mosques and recite the Surat (Al-Fath) to achieve victory in the Turkish army's military operation in northwestern Syria in the [Afrin] region, Operation Olive Harvest, under the slogan "Support Innocent Muslims" (Mahmoud, 2018: 28).

Based on the above, the study in this section attempts to shed light on the instruments of Turkish smart power towards the Syrian crisis based on the following two requirements:

First Requirement: Smart Power to Eliminate Risks and Threats

Turkey fears the establishment of an independent entity or autonomy for the Kurds in northern Syria, which encourages the Kurds in Turkey to establish a similar entity. Furthermore, separatists are likely to support Kurds such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is classified as a terrorist group in Turkey, and the ongoing instability and insecurity in Syria has a direct impact on Turkey's security and stability.

In order to achieve the goal of pushing back risks and threats, Turkish behavior has been determined by the use of hard power rather than soft power, because intervening in an armed conflict requires the direct intervention of the armed forces, the provision of military support, the imposition of economic sanctions and other instruments of hard power, as well as the following forms of smart power:

First, Incremental Use of Hard Power and Support for the Armed Syrian Opposition:

Turkey imposed sanctions against the Syrian regime, tried to isolate it internationally and pass resolutions against the regime in the Security Council in coordination with some Arab Gulf states such as Qatar, and withdrew its ambassador from Damascus after freezing Syria's membership in the Arab League on November 13, 2011. After the emergence of ISIS, Turkey did not join the US-led international coalition to fight [ISIS]. It also delayed the coalition's use of the Incirlik military base, considering it necessary to work mainly on overthrowing the Syrian regime, and firmly refused to support the Kurdish units as the Syrian wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is banned in Turkey, with weapons. She called for the establishment of a safe zone to host displaced Syrians to reduce their influx into Turkey and to prevent the Kurds from controlling northern Syria to prepare for the establishment of their own entity, especially after

the Kurds' control over the area has expanded, especially after the expulsion [of ISIS] from Kobani.

Turkey also played a crucial role in the formation of the Syrian National Council, the civilian wing of the Syrian opposition, along with its military wing, the Free Syrian Army, to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Turkey hosted the Syrian Opposition Conference, from which the Syrian National Council emerged as a transitional council, which then evolved into the Syrian National Coalition after the inclusion of new personalities and blocs during a series of consultative meetings in Doha from November 8-11, 2012 (National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, 2012).

The armed Syrian opposition was also supported in many ways in order to overthrow the Syrian regime. This includes the formation and establishment of armed groups, training in martial arts, the provision of weapons, the deployment of military advisors and support from the intelligence service.

These developments marked a turning point in Turkey's policy towards Syria, as it began the gradual use of direct military force, starting with shelling northern Syria with artillery to prevent the advance of [ISIS] or Kurdish forces. Then Turkey made a limited push into Syrian territory for specific purposes, such as transferring the tomb of Suleiman Shah to Turkey under the pretext of preserving it in the face of fighting on Syrian territory, followed by the phase of large-scale direct military intervention through successive operations such as: Euphrates Shield north of Aleppo, Olive Branch in the city of Afrin and Peace Spring in northern Syria east of the Euphrates (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, 2022).

The Most Important Turkish Military Operations in Syria (Polat, 2020: 53-96):

1. Operation Euphrates Shield: between August 2016 and March 2017, Turkish forces on the northeastern Turkish-Syrian border between the Euphrates River and the [Afrin] area captured the city of Jarablus on the Euphrates River and then advanced westward to secure the strip of land up to the border of [Afrin Canton]. Turkish forces advanced south, 30 km² inside Syria, and took control of the city of al-Bab in February 2017.

Turkey has pursued several goals with this operation: to get rid of the Islamic State forces east of the Euphrates, to control a strip of territory connecting the Kurdish areas east and west of the Euphrates, to boost the morale of the Turkish army and restore its strength, especially after the failed coup attempt in June 2016.

2. Operation Olive Branch: The Turkish Armed Forces launched an intensive air campaign in the [Afrin] region in March 2018, targeting the positions of the armed Kurdish militias and using Bayraktar TB2 drones for the first time. This was the first time Bayraktar TB2 drones were used. It succeeded in liberating the rural areas north of [Afrin] from the Kurdish militias, especially the People's Protection Units (YPG), and the operation resulted in Turkish forces taking control of the area.

The operation was intended to achieve several objectives, including the expulsion of the YPG from [Afrin] and the search for safe areas for the resettlement of Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey.

3. Operation Peace Spring: In October 2019, Turkish forces, supported by the Syrian National Army (SNA) - an alliance of armed opposition groups backed by Turkey - advanced north-east of the Turkish-Syrian border between the towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al -Ain, where they

entered Syrian territory and managed to keep Kurdish forces away from the border. The military operation ended with separate understandings and ceasefire agreements between Turkey, the United States and Russia.

Through this process, Turkey has managed to achieve several goals, including: preventing the formation of an independent Kurdish entity along the Turkish-Syrian border and finding another potential target for the resettlement of Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey.

4. Operation Spring Shield: The operation began between February and March 2020 and aimed to prevent the advance of the Syrian army in Idlib province. Turkish drone strikes stopped the advance of the Syrian army, which was trying to take control of Idlib, the last area held by opposition forces in Syria. The operation ended with a Turkish-Russian agreement that provides for a ceasefire in the province. Syrian refugees are prevented from crossing the Turkish border.

Second, The Establishment of Buffer Zones:

The United States has been keen to deploy its forces in northern Syria (east of the Euphrates), where most of the oil fields are located, adjacent to Turkey's southeastern border, where the Kurds are stationed on both sides of the border amid a predominantly Kurdish nationalist social structure, on the Turkish side of the border, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is active and carries out its attacks against Turkish targets (Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü, 2012), while its command is stationed in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq, and on the Syrian side of the border are the Kurdish groups: the People's Protection Units (YPG), which militarily form the backbone of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, providing them with political backing and military support (Najjar, 2019).

Turkey views the presence of Kurdish forces on its borders as a direct threat to its national security, as it seeks to create an independent entity that would pave the way for separation from Syria and the proclamation of a Kurdish state that would support the secession of Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast. This dossier is also the main point of contention between Turkey and the United States. Turkey has succeeded in blocking the way to the establishment of a Kurdish entity west of the Euphrates River through the penetration of its army into Syrian territory during Operations Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch, and east of the Euphrates River through Operation Peace Spring (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, 2022).

Third, Participation in the International Coalition to Combat Terrorism:

Turkey played a key role in the international coalition to fight terrorism in Syria by allowing coalition forces to use its bases, participate in air operations, fight terrorist elements and limit ISIS's funding and recruitment opportunities, as Turkey allowed the deployment of more than 60 aircraft and more than 1,200 soldiers in operations against [ISIS]. in Syria and Iraq and provided aid and shelter to millions of Syrians displaced from their lands and homes. Due to its co-chairmanship of the Foreign Fighters Working Group in the international coalition, Turkey not only supports international initiatives in this area, but also leads them effectively and actively. 20.000 Turkish military personnel are involved in securing the border between Turkey and Syria and the main Turkish military contributions are: Participating in the joint planning of all operations against [ISIS] In northern Syria, it has taken all necessary steps to realize and implement these plans, and it has trained 7,000 Iraqi security forces, including professionals and volunteers, to fight ISIS as part of the international coalition to combat terrorism. This is in addition to military operations deep inside Syria to create safe zones free of armed groups, foremost among them [ISIS], as well as these operations: Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch and

Peace Spring (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, 2022).

Second Requirement: Smart Power in the Political and Humanitarian Sphere

Turkey is committed to actively shaping Syria's political future and being a partner in the process of settling the war. It is overseeing the construction of the new Syrian state to ensure that there is at least no hostile state and wants to establish a friendly state that will help preserve its security and take care of its other vital interests. In order to achieve the goal of taking care of Turkey's vital interests, Turkey has resorted to soft power more than hard power, because intervening in the shaping of Syria's future requires diplomatic work, participation in conflict resolution processes, holding international summits with the participation of key countries, providing a civilized model for hosting and caring for refugees, monitoring the needs of Syrians in opposition areas and other soft power instruments. The most important instruments of Turkish soft power in this area towards Syria can be summarized as follows:

First, Diplomacy:

Turkey has exercised soft power since the beginning of the Syrian crisis by communicating directly with the Syrian government and trying to convince it to accommodate the demands of the Syrian street before later announcing the severance of relations with it. It has also made efforts in international forums to mobilize international support for the opposition, confront and expose the crimes of the Syrian army, in addition to its active participation in international bodies dealing with Syria. Examples include:

A. Geneva Track:

The [Geneva] process began with the hosting of the United Nations office in the Swiss city of [Geneva] on June 30, 2012, with the convening of a meeting of the (Syria Action Group) at the invitation of the United Nations and the then envoy of the League of Arab States to Syria. Kofi Annan. Through its foreign minister, Turkey has supported the opposition's demands for the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power, the establishment of a civil, democratic and pluralistic state and the preservation of Syria's unity, territorial integrity and reconstruction (National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, 2012).

B. [Astana] Track:

With the escalation of the conflict in Syria and the failure of the [Geneva] track to reach a political solution in Syria, an [Astana] track was established to cease fire between the opposition and the regime in Syria and find a political solution to the conflict there, under the auspices and guarantee of Russia, Turkey and Iran, with the first round beginning in January 2017 (Bakir, 2019: 3).

C. Istanbul Summit:

The presidents of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russia [Vladimir Putin], France [Emmanuel Macron] and German Chancellor [Angela Merkel] met in Istanbul on October 27, 2018 for an unprecedented summit on Syria with the aim of strengthening the ceasefire in Idlib and making progress towards a political transition (Turkish Anadolu Agency, 2018).

D. Quartet summit:

On March 18, 2020, the summit meeting took place via video conference and was attended by the German Chancellor, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Frenchman [Emmanuel

Macron] and the British Prime Minister [Boris Johnson]. They discussed the Syrian crisis and the chances for its resolution, the ceasefire in Idlib and the humanitarian aid there, as well as bilateral relations, and it was an opportunity for Turkey to emphasize the importance of its membership in NATO and discussed the possibility of expanding the common customs area (Turkish Anadolu Agency, 2020).

Second, Humanitarian Instrument

1. Hosting Refugees:

According to the United Nations, Turkey has been the leading host of refugees for the past decade following the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, accommodating approximately four million Syrian refugees between 2011 and 2020 (Turkish Anadolu Agency, 2020). This influx has placed significant strain on the Turkish economy, demographic composition, and social and cultural structures. The Turkish government has expressed on many occasions that this hosting reflects Turkey's civilized role in accommodating those fleeing war, comparing it to the Ansar hosting the Muhajirun during the Prophet's migration. (Al-Raddad, 2019). This humanitarian effort has bolstered Turkey's regional and international reputation.

Turkey's support for Syrian refugees encompasses providing temporary protection, cash and in-kind assistance, scholarships, employment opportunities, and naturalization for hundreds of thousands. Efforts to integrate refugees into Turkish society include seminars and programs on Turkish culture and customs, organized by government institutions such as the Immigration Department and the Yunus Emre Center.

2. Relief Role:

Government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) oversee the development of infrastructure and relief services for Syrians in opposition-held areas in northern Syria. These efforts include constructing prefabricated housing, educational and healthcare facilities, and providing essential services and relief aid, particularly during winter.

In conclusion, Turkey's decision-makers have recognized the limitations of achieving Turkish interests in Syria through military power alone. By integrating soft power within a framework of smart power, Turkey has expanded its influence and capabilities, leveraging both hard and soft power to pursue its objectives amidst regional and international competition involving state and non-state actors.

Second topic: Turkish Goals in the Syrian Crisis

Nations implement their strategies through a combination of pillars, goals, means, and tools, which include both hard and soft power, collectively termed as smart power. Turkey's leadership has sought to protect its national security and achieve its strategic interests in Syria through a multifaceted approach. This approach operates within a complex environment characterized by civil war, regional conflicts, and international interventions.

The significance of Syria to Turkish foreign policy is multifaceted, involving historical ties, geographic proximity, ethnic and cultural connections, and economic and energy considerations. These factors compel Turkish policymakers to prioritize Syria in their strategic calculations, emphasizing national interests and security.

The study aims to explore the objectives of Turkey's smart power strategy in the Syrian crisis through two key areas:

First requirement: the importance of Syria in the Turkish political perception

Syria holds significant importance for Turkey and occupies a prominent position in its foreign strategy due to their shared history, geographic proximity, ethnic and cultural ties, and economic value, including energy security.

1. Shared History

Syria and the Levant were under Ottoman rule for nearly four centuries, from 1516 AD to 1917 AD. During this period, cultural interactions flourished, and various types of relations, particularly social ties, developed between the two peoples. However, bilateral relations deteriorated significantly following the end of Ottoman rule and the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the early 20th century. This decline was exacerbated by Turkey's westward orientation and Syria's eastward alignment, especially during the Cold War.

Several issues have historically contributed to tensions and conflicts between the two countries. Foremost among these are Syria's grievances over the annexation of the Alexandretta region by Turkey before the latter's independence from France in 1946. Additionally, disputes over water resources due to Turkish dam projects affecting Syria's water share, and Syria's support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which seeks to establish an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey, have been significant points of contention. The harboring of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan by Syria in the 1990s further strained relations, nearly leading to war. Mediation efforts eventually resulted in the signing of the Adana Agreement in 1998, which aimed to address these issues. Moreover, growing Turkish-Israeli relations have been perceived by Syria as a strategic threat and an attempt to encircle it from the north and east (Duran, 2011: 508-509).

2. Geopolitics

The Middle East, located at the southeastern border of Turkey, extends over more than 900 kilometers, making it critical for Turkey's border security and mutual security interests. The geographical proximity of Syria and Turkey necessitates a consideration of their interrelated geopolitical interests (Davutoğlu, 2014 : 87-88).

Fernand Braudel, a French historian, emphasized the significance of geography in shaping political dynamics with his statement: "It is the maps that tell the true story." This encapsulates the philosophy of geopolitics, where geography's influence on politics is a fundamental element of foreign policy.

From a geopolitical perspective, Syria holds considerable importance for Turkey. This importance is underscored by several factors (Al-Hajj, 2016: 4):

- The Turkish-Syrian border, extending over 900 kilometers, is Turkey's longest land border, embodying shared and mutual interests and threats across political, economic, security, and social dimensions.
- Turkey views Syria as its gateway to the Arab world, particularly for land trade, which partly explains Turkey's active involvement in Syrian affairs.
- Turkey's strategic location at the crossroads of the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East underscores its interest in maintaining strong connections with these regions to bolster its regional and global standing.

- The city of Aleppo holds exceptional significance for Turkey. Following the loss of Aleppo in the Treaty of Lausanne on July 24, 1923, Turkey continues to regard it as crucial for its border security, akin to its interventions in Iraq.

3. Ethnic Overlap and Cultural Interdependence

The ethnic and cultural connections between Turkey and Syria are profound. Turkmens are heavily concentrated in northern Syria, particularly in Aleppo province. Additionally, Turks of Arab origin inhabit areas along the Syrian border, and there is significant tribal overlap and intermarriage between the two populations. These connections were further strengthened during the centuries of Ottoman rule. The issue of Syrian Turkmens has been a priority in Turkish foreign policy, with Turkey aiming to protect their political, social, and economic rights (Bölükbaşı, 2018: 14). There is a notable convergence of racial, ethnic, and sectarian diversity on both sides of the border, fostering relationships of descent, intermarriage, and kinship between border towns in Turkey and Syria.

4. Economic Value and Energy Security

Turkey's reliance on tax revenues to sustain state activities underscores the importance of economic growth, a key objective for Turkish policymakers. This economic imperative drives Turkey to develop internal strategies and invest in the regional environment to ensure continued economic expansion (Refaat, 2017: 55).

Before the Syrian conflict began in 2011, Syria was a significant economic and commercial partner for Turkey, serving as a gateway to the Arab world. In 2010, the trade volume between Turkey and Syria was approximately \$2.3 billion (TÜİK, 2011). However, this trade significantly declined following the escalation of the Syrian crisis. Despite the conflict, Syria remains a vital conduit for Turkish goods to reach various Arab countries, including Jordan and the Gulf states.

Second Requirement: Turkey's Goals Towards the Syrian Crisis

The objectives of Turkish foreign policy towards the Syrian crisis center on safeguarding national security and protecting economic and commercial interests. These objectives can be summarized as follows (Turkish Anadolu Agency, 2020):

First, Risk and Threat Prevention:

With the onset of the Syrian revolution in 2011, Turkey quickly recognized the gravity of the situation along its southeastern border. As the revolution became militarized and hostilities escalated, Turkey intervened in support of the opposition and sought to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad's regime. This intervention exposed Turkey to several risks and threats concerning its national security, including:

1. Turkish Territorial Integrity and Unity

Turkey is concerned about the potential establishment of an independent Kurdish entity or autonomy in northern Syria, which could inspire Turkey's Kurdish population to pursue a similar objective. Such an entity might receive support from separatist groups, notably the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey designates as a terrorist organization.

2. Turkey's Security and Stability

The deteriorating security situation along Turkey's southeastern border, the proliferation of

weapons, foreign funding of fighters, and the weakened control of the central Syrian state created a conducive environment for anti-Turkish militant groups. Prominent among these are the PKK and its Syrian affiliate, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), as well as the Islamic State (ISIS). The hostility of the Syrian regime, which supported some armed Syrian opposition factions against Turkey, further exacerbated the situation. Consequently, Turkey experienced unprecedented bombings in cities such as Ankara and Istanbul, and armed attacks on security headquarters and state facilities across the country.

3. Security of the Border with Syria

The presence of a hostile entity along Turkey's southeastern border, extending over 900 kilometers, poses a significant threat to its national security. This situation hampers Turkey's ability to control its borders effectively, preventing hostile operations and cross-border smuggling. The instability and insecurity in northern Syria, coupled with the presence of various controlling parties, including regime forces, Kurdish armed groups, ISIS, and Turkey-supported armed groups, further complicate the border security issue. Turkey's establishment of buffer zones following military interventions has been a response to these challenges.

4. Refugee Flow

The armed conflict in Syria has resulted in substantial waves of refugees fleeing the destruction and devastation of numerous Syrian cities. Turkey has been a major destination for these refugees, hosting approximately four million Syrian refugees between 2011 and 2020, according to Celine Onal, spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Turkey. This influx has imposed a significant burden on the Turkish state, creating unprecedented demographic pressures and leading to social and cultural issues, including the growth of hostility and resentment towards refugees.

Second, Protecting Turkey's Vital Interests:

Given the involvement of local, regional, and international actors in the Syrian crisis, Turkey has prioritized safeguarding its interests and ensuring it remains a key player in any future resolution of the conflict. The primary interests Turkey has sought to protect include:

1. Establishing a Friendly State in Syria

Turkey aims to be actively involved in shaping Syria's political future to ensure its role in the post-war settlement process. This involvement is intended to prevent the emergence of a hostile state and to foster a friendly government that will help safeguard Turkey's security and other vital interests.

2. Achieving Regional and International Standing

By maintaining a presence in Syria, Turkey has played an influential role in determining Syria's fate and future. This has allowed Turkey to participate in international conferences on Syria, such as the Geneva process with Western participation, the Astana process with Russian and Iranian involvement, and the Istanbul meeting in October 2018, which included leaders from Russia, Germany, and France alongside Turkey.

3. Leveraging the Syrian Crisis for Regional Negotiations

The Syrian refugee crisis has significantly impacted Turkey's relationships with other countries. The influx of refugees into Turkey, many of whom sought to reach Europe, has compelled

European countries to engage in dialogue with Turkey to manage the crisis. Numerous agreements have been made, including financial support for Turkey to assist with refugee care, and arrangements for accepting a portion of refugees into Europe. These negotiations have also touched on other outstanding issues, such as lifting the visa requirement for Turkish citizens traveling to EU countries and Turkey's EU accession efforts.

In conclusion, Turkey's involvement in the Syrian crisis has been driven by a range of political, security, and economic objectives. However, the primary focus of the Turkish leadership has been on national security. This includes preventing the establishment of a Kurdish entity in northern Syria and combating ISIS, which has conducted attacks within Turkey. These efforts have sometimes strained Turkey's relationships with major powers, particularly the United States and Russia.

Third topic: Evaluating the Success of Turkish Foreign Policy in Achieving its Goals in the Syrian Crisis

With the escalation of conflicts and insecurity in the Middle East in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Turkey has sought to protect its national security while continuing its attempts to regain its regional status as a rising power. By comparing Turkey's goals regarding the Syrian crisis with what it has achieved on a practical level, one can assess the success of its strategy towards the Syrian crisis.

First: Turkey's Successes in Using the Smart Power Strategy to Achieve Its Goals in Syria

Turkey has achieved several successes through its smart power strategy in Syria:

1. Weakening armed organizations, such as ISIS and the People's Protection Units (YPG), and pushing them away from the Turkish borders through the buffer zone established along its southeastern border.
2. Combining Hard and Soft Power: Turkey successfully utilized both hard and soft power tools in its foreign policy. It employed hard power through military operations and control on the ground, while leveraging soft power in the political and diplomatic arena. This included active participation in international negotiations related to Syria and hosting Syrian refugees, providing them with various services.
3. Enhanced Regional and International Role: Turkey's strategies in the Syrian crisis have bolstered its regional and international standing. It has balanced its relations with both Russia and the United States. By utilizing the Astana process, Turkey enhanced its role in the Syrian conflict, gaining tacit approval and understanding from Russia regarding its military operations in northern Syria. This was evident in Russia's passive stance towards Turkey's incursions during operations such as Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch in Afrin, and Peace Spring in Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain.
4. The Turkish-backed Syrian forces, as part of Operation *Dawn of Freedom*, contributed to the liberation of areas in northern Syria. This operation coincided with military offensives by Syrian opposition factions on November 27, 2024, lasting for 11 days and ultimately resulting in the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime.
5. Advancements in Military Capabilities: Turkey's involvement in Syria has led to significant advancements in its military capabilities and progress in military industrialization. This includes the development of the Bayraktar TB2 combat drone, which has gained international recognition

for its effectiveness in various conflict zones, including Syria, Libya, and Azerbaijan.

Second: Turkey's Failures in Using the Smart Power Strategy in Syria

Despite these successes, Turkey has also faced several failures in implementing its smart power strategy:

Domestic Challenges: Domestic factors, particularly the resistance from the armed forces, hindered the implementation of the government's policies in Syria. The Turkish military was reluctant to intervene directly in the Syrian crisis until the failed coup attempt in mid-2016. This event led President Erdoğan to make significant structural changes in the military, allowing for more direct intervention in northern Syria. However, the delay in Turkey's involvement, coupled with the early engagement of regional and international actors like Iran, Russia, and the United States, complicated Turkey's efforts to achieve its strategic objectives.

On the other hand, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have maintained control over the area east of the Euphrates with the protection and support of the United States. This increases the likelihood of the establishment of Kurdish self-rule in the region, given the prevailing uncertainty surrounding the Syrian landscape following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. In the event of continued instability, the outbreak of local conflicts, and the involvement of multiple foreign actors in Syria, the country may be pushed toward partition—a scenario that would be the worst possible outcome for both Syrians and Turkey.

In either case, the emergence of an autonomous or independent Kurdish entity in Syria would have negative implications for Turkey, as it would strengthen the aspirations of Kurdish factions within Turkey to establish a similar entity in the country's southeast. However, Turkey may be able to mitigate these concerns if it reaches an understanding with the United States that leads to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria. This remains a plausible outcome, particularly following Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. elections, as he has repeatedly expressed in past statements his desire to withdraw American forces from Syria.

Conclusion

In light of the review of Turkey's smart power strategy toward Syria from 2011 to 2024, it can be concluded that Turkey has employed multiple policies and strategies in dealing with the Syrian crisis, adapting to the realities imposed by unfolding events. At the onset of the crisis, the Turkish leadership sought to intervene peacefully, mediating between the Syrian government and opposition forces in hopes of finding a solution that would end the unrest and restore stability to the Syrian streets.

However, as the situation escalated, with protests expanding and intensifying—accompanied by repression, killings, and arrests carried out by the Syrian army against demonstrators—Turkey began to adopt a more assertive stance in its media discourse, political behavior, and military approach. It called for the necessity of either the departure or overthrow of the Syrian regime, labeling it as a criminal and terrorist entity. Turkey subsequently increased its support for the Syrian opposition, training its members and providing them with financial aid, weapons, and military equipment.

With the intervention of influential regional and international actors such as Iran, Russia, and the United States, Turkey's room for maneuver in Syria became more constrained. Consequently, the Turkish leadership sought alternative means to achieve its objectives by employing a smart power strategy in managing the Syrian crisis. To a certain extent, this strategy

succeeded in achieving its goals, particularly in mitigating the Kurdish threat along Turkey's southern borders—an essential objective for Turkish national security. Additionally, Turkey aimed to contribute to the establishment of a stable, unified, and democratic state on its southern frontier, one that would ensure security and stability in the region.

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