

The Rise of Neo Ottomanism in Turkey for Strategic Autonomy in Liberal World Order

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Abstract

This research paper aims to investigate Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy in the Liberal World Order. As per these ambitions, Turkey has increasingly distanced itself from the European Union (EU) and the transatlantic alliance and has shifted its focus towards China, Russia, and the Global South. These developments are a direct consequence of the 2023 termination of the Treaty of Lausanne, along with the shift to multipolar world order. Turkey has viewed these shifts as a chance to gain strategic autonomy in the region and proclaim itself as the leader of the Muslim world. As a result, intervention in Syria, Libya, and the Black Sea was utilized to assert influence, and the atrocities of Israel and India against the Muslim community were also called out. Turkey's ambitions to cash on the shifting international system and redirect its foreign policy can be associated with neo-Ottomanism, implying that the Turkish state aspires to regain the lost glory of the historic Ottoman Empire and its regional dominance. US is creating hurdles in this process however, Turkey is adamant about its goals and continues to invoke strides in that direction.

Key words: World Order, Strategic Autonomy, Neo-Ottomanism, Regional Dominance, International system

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Introduction

Turkey's foreign policy has been changing in the past from an Islamic Ottoman Empire to a secular republic and now under the regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to neo-Ottomanism.² Currently, it is aligning with Russia, China and the Global South and distancing itself from the European Union. Moreover, Turkey is increasing its influence in the Middle East. All these signs demonstrate Turkey's desire for strategic autonomy.³ This can be associated with the Ottoman Empire's historical glory and the Turkey's strategic significance in the post-Treaty of Lausanne context. Nevertheless, such aspirations face the hurdle of the contemporary world order, as the US and its allies influence the international system by virtue of dollar dominance, military strength and strategic alliances like NATO.⁴ Accordingly, this research paper aims to investigate the rise of Turkey within the constraints of the existing world order.

For this research paper, neo-Ottomanism refers to a political ideology, seeking to revive aspects of the historical Ottoman Empire, emphasizing regional influence. While strategic autonomy refers to Turkey's ambitions for reviving neo-Ottomanism by acquiring regional dominance over the Muslim World. Thus, aspiring for greater engagement in regional and global affairs.

The Lost Glory of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was one of the greatest empire in the history that became transcontinental after it entered Balkans in 1354. It further

²Hakan Yapar, "From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond: Understanding Turkey's Drift towards Greater Strategic Autonomy," https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2021/DIEEEE040_2021_HAKYAP_Turquia_ENG.pdf.

³ Hakan Yapar, "From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond.

⁴ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence?" *International Affairs*. July 5, 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/97/4/1085/6314232>.

expanded when in 1453 it was able to subjugate Constantinople after the dismantling of the Byzantine Empire. Ottomans ruled over southeast Europe throughout the 13th century.⁵ However, the empire reached the peak of power and prosperity under Suleiman the Magnificent.⁶ During Suleiman's reign, the empire comprised 32 provinces, with Constantinople as the capital.⁷ The strategic location of Constantinople resulted in the empire being connected to both the Middle East and Europe, thus engendering great economic benefits. Despite the glorious years of the Ottoman Empire, it eventually met its demise due to its alliance with the defeated central powers in World War I and was colonization by Britain, Greece, Italy, and France. Subsequently, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk fought against the European powers through the Turkish War of Independence. After this war the Treaty of Lausanne was signed⁸ which reduced the jurisdiction of the erstwhile Ottoman Empire to present day Turkey, thus losing lost control over Libya, Egypt, Cyprus, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, and the Levant.⁹

The Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923 as part of the peace settlements after World War I in Lausanne, Switzerland, after a seven-month-long negotiation.¹⁰ This agreement established the conditions for peace between Turkey and the Allied nexus of Britain, France, Greece, Romania, Japan, Italy, and Yugoslavia. Turkey lost its claim over its former Arab territories and recognized British possession of Cyprus and Italian possession of the Dodecanese.¹¹ Moreover, the straits between the Aegean and the Black Sea were declared open shipping territories and

⁵ "Ottoman Empire," *History*, last modified February 28, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/ottoman-empire#:~:text=The%20Ottoman%20Empire%20was%20one,for%20more%20than%20600%20year.>

⁶ "Ottoman Empire," *History*, last modified February 28, 2020.

⁷ "Ottoman Empire," *History*.

⁸ "Ottoman Empire," *History*.

⁹ "Treaty of Lausanne," *Britannica*, last modified June 14, 2023.

[https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Lausanne-1923.](https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Lausanne-1923)

¹⁰ "Treaty of Lausanne," *Britannica*.

¹¹ "Treaty of Lausanne," *Britannica*.

Turkish autonomy over the seas was lost.¹² Nevertheless, the allied powers recognised Turkish sovereignty over its contemporary territory, thereby forgoing the demands of Kurdistan and the cession of Armenia.

Despite these setbacks, Atatürk carried aspirations of stabilizing Turkey through modern secular principles and rejecting former Ottoman values. Turkey was deemed a republic, and sovereignty was associated with the people.¹³ Resultantly, the Ottoman Sultanate met its demise. Moreover, nationalism was introduced to Turkish individuals along with the notion of recognising the sovereignty of other states; as a result, the imperial ambitions of the Ottoman Empire were sidestepped, and strides for a progressive Turkey were undertaken.¹⁴ However, after Atatürk's death, the ruling parties increasingly disputed the interpretations of this ideology, and Islamic principles were enforced recurrently. As the power of safeguarding secularism was passed on to the Turkish military, the state faced successful coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997 and a failed attempt in 2016.¹⁵ The irony was that the coups undertaken to secure Turkey led to a deteriorating economy, directly impacted economic activities, which had negative implications for the GDP.

Against the backdrop of the declining economy, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emerged alongside his Justice and Development Party in 2003. He had a reformist vision of bringing back the lost glory of Turkey. Erdoğan associated development with regional hegemony and reinvigorated the lost Ottoman prestige. Hence, unlike Atatürk, Erdoğan aspired to gain strategic autonomy for Turkey through the ideology of Neo-Ottomanism,¹⁶ an aspiration of re-establishing lost Ottoman glory by increasing its area of influence. This term can conveniently be used to

¹² "Treaty of Lausanne," Britannica.

¹³ Tamseel Aqdas, "From secularism to political Islam, Turkish neo-Ottomanism," *Foreign Policy News*, September 22, 2020, <https://foreignpolicynews.org/2020/09/22/from-secularism-to-political-islam-turkish-neo-ottomanism/>.

¹⁴ Tamseel Aqdas, "From secularism to political Islam, Turkish neo-Ottomanism.

¹⁵ Tamseel Aqdas, "From secularism to political Islam, Turkish neo-Ottomanism.

¹⁶ Tamseel Aqdas, "From secularism to political Islam, Turkish neo-Ottomanism.

describe the shifts in Turkey's foreign policy under Erdoğan's leadership. However, the idea of revival of Ottoman influence has been discussed and debated by Young Ottomans, Pan Islamists and Turkish nationalists even before Erdoğan came into power, but Erdoğan became a face of neo-Ottomanism in the practical political arena.¹⁷

Strategic Autonomy and Neo-Ottomanism

Turkish foreign policy has undergone change under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). However, the change was slow and gradual. The concept of interdependence characterized his first tenure. In this initial phase, the state's regional interaction was followed by the economic factors of free trade agreements and visa-free access for Middle Eastern countries.¹⁸ There was a heavy emphasis on soft power and human rights. Thereby, Turkey acted as a mediator in the Israel and Syria conflicts.¹⁹ Further, in 2005, Erdoğan's government even initiated negotiations for Turkey's accession to the European Union (EU).²⁰ The visible shift of policy was demonstrated in the second decade of Erdoğan's government. The conception of interdependence was substituted with the notion of strategic autonomy. Under the realm of strategic autonomy, factors like military intervention and coercive diplomacy were introduced.²¹ This was demonstrated by Turkey's military involvement in the Syrian civil war, inducing a stalemate in its relations with Israel and halting its bilateral ties with Egypt. Furthermore, Erdoğan directly confronted Western states and their global order on various accounts, such as energy exploration rights in the Mediterranean Sea against the EU. A clash on regional security with the US and its NATO allies was also witnessed.

¹⁷ Tamseel Aqdas, "From secularism to political Islam, Turkish neo-Ottomanism.

¹⁸Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence?" *International Affairs*,. July 5, 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/97/4/1085/6314232>.

¹⁹ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

²⁰ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

²¹ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

The shift in Turkish foreign policy and the quest for strategic autonomy resulted from various factors. With the rise of China and BRICS states, power is gradually shifting away from the West, which projects the ultimate downfall of the US led world order.²² China's rise also allowed like-minded states aspiring to rise in a multilateral world order, such as Vladimir Putin's Russia, to work side by side. Moreover, a rise in authoritarian right-wing populism was witnessed, such as Narendra Modi in India and Viktor Orbán in Hungary. These leaders induced nationalism and monopolised power, reducing influence of external powers in domestic affairs.

As for Turkey, it benefited from the declining influence of the US and the rise of regional powers to strive for regional autonomy by reviving neo-Ottomanism.²³ Additionally, Erdoğan belonged to the category of populist leaders, and the wave of authoritarianism in states like Hungary and India allowed him to take strides in that direction. Additionally, security concerns have always played a vital role in shaping Turkey's foreign policy. The state has encountered various security challenges over the years, which include non-state actors, regional instability and border tensions. Hence, it is argued that the security aspect of Turkish foreign policy is multifaceted by encompassing an entire range of issues. The non-state actors like Islamic State (ISIS), Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and border skirmishes in Syria and Iraq, resulting in a refugee crisis and potential infiltration of terrorism. Accordingly, Turkey needs to adopt a proactive approach toward counterterrorism and protecting its national security.

Turkey associates itself with the Global South based on its foreign policy vision. Hence, Erdoğan has a vision of joining like-minded

²²Hakan Yapar, "From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond: Understanding Turkey's Drift towards Greater Strategic Autonomy," Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, last modified April 12, 2022, https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2021/DIEEEE040_2021_HAKYAP_Turquia_ENG.pdf.

²³Hakan Yapar, "From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond."

powers, the Russia-China axis and the Global South against Western influence. Since the partnership between Turkey and Russia also has historical roots, the states had conflictual interactions during the Cold War amid Turkey's alliance with NATO against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, by the 1980s, Turkey and the Soviet Union developed improved relations, and their trade went from US\$476 million to US\$1.8 billion.²⁴ Their partnership further accelerated in the 1990s, when Russia's energy resources and Turkey's hold over consumer goods were deemed complimentary. The resulting partnership was known as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) project of 1992.²⁵ This partnership expanded to include trade, investment, energy, tourism, and human interaction. Before the 2008 financial crisis, there were extensive trade relations between the states, and the number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey had increased to 2.8 million.²⁶ Nevertheless, the relations between the states were largely bilateral and weakly institutionalized. For example, the BSCE project was deemed a regional multilateral cooperation organization, and domestic issues of political significance were side-lined.²⁷ The efforts for strategic autonomy started after 2011. Consequently, the relations between the states were no longer limited to economic interdependence. Instead, matters like political identity and collective security were highlighted. Moreover, the domestic political transition into a presidential authoritarian government in 2018 increased political understanding between Turkey and Russia. Erdoğan and Putin successfully projected nationalism and anti-West narratives to pursue their interest in a multipolar international order.²⁸

The situation changed drastically after the failure of The CIA-backed coup in 2016. Turkey projected security concerns from the West

²⁴Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence?" *International Affairs*. July 5, 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/97/4/1085/6314232>.

²⁵ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

²⁶ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

²⁷ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

²⁸ Hakan Yapar, "From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond."

especially US. Accordingly, Turkey looked for alternatives and invested US\$2.5 billion in the Russian S-400 missiles. This purchase was met with criticism from NATO, but Turkey and Russia took the opportunity of escalating security concerns of Syrian conflict to build defence cooperation. The bilateral ties strengthened over the years, with trade exceeding US\$27.6 billion in 2020 and the number of Russian tourists in Turkey increasing to 7 million in 2019.²⁹ These economic realities supported strategic autonomy and Turkey boldly started venturing into new avenues for defence. Years old military reliance on the US cooperation always limited Turkey's autonomy. Hence, a strong military alliance with Russia made Turkey independent of the US, and in a position to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

Similarly, on the Chinese front, Turkey has forged closer ties. The Grand National Assembly of Turkey has effectively passed 13 laws on the Chinese domains of energy, trade, health, technology, and logistics. Further, President Erdoğan projected hopes for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).³⁰ In the 2017 BRI Forum, Erdoğan expressed that this project will induce a new era of regional stability through political and economic investments. In 2002, the trade between China and Turkey was only US\$1.64 billion. However, with the rise of strategic autonomy, it increased to US\$22 billion in 2020.³¹ The trade expansion was accompanied by infrastructural developments and railway construction in Turkey, such as the Ankara–Istanbul high-speed railway. Moreover, in 2019, Erdoğan announced the 'Asia Anew' initiative, which aimed to generate political and economic opportunities in the emerging multipolar world order, and asserted Turkey's plan for regional dominance.³²

²⁹ Hakan Yapar, "From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond."

³⁰ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

³¹ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

³² Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

Turkey's Shift from the EU and the Transatlantic Alliance

Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy included pivoting away from the West with respect to political values and identity. In the post-Cold War era, Turkish foreign policy was largely directed by the US led world order. Nevertheless, the influence of the West in Turkish directives steadily decreased during Erdoğan's tenure, particularly in Turkey-EU relations. The Republic of Turkey signed the EU Customs Union Agreement in 1996, and consequently, the EU became Turkey's largest trading and investment partner.³³ The EU accounted for 45% of Turkey's foreign trade and 67% of its Foreign Direct Investments. However, despite these circumstances, Turkey could not achieve full integration into the EU based on geopolitical disputes, Turkey's size, level of economic development, and the collective identity of Europe.³⁴ Moreover, the rise in conservative democracies across Europe further impacted the full integration of Turkey into the EU. The conservatives directly challenged Turkish identity and labeled it non-European based on religious and cultural values. Turkey was viewed as a buffer state for Europe to prevent the rapid migration of refugees as opposed to a partner for the EU.³⁵ This view was especially projected by Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Nicolas Sarkozy. However, the rise of non-Western powers provided substitute partners for Turkey's foreign policy discourse. Although bilateral cooperation in economics, trade, and energy continues, the influence of the EU on Turkish politics declined.³⁶

It is critical to acknowledge that disassociation with the Western alliances may lead to economic losses for Turkey. For instance, the EU-Turkey Customs Union resulted in an improved Turkish industrial sector. Commercial ties were expanded, and the Turkish automobile industry grew. In 2020, Turkey's trade with the EU was worth US\$143 billion.³⁷

³³ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

³⁴ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

³⁵ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

³⁶ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

³⁷ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

Although Turkey-EU relations are deemed significant, the terms of their partnership are not sustainable from a geopolitical perspective, which makes Turkey's EU membership unlikely.³⁸ The Republic of Turkey does not proclaim a role in the trade policy decision-making of the EU, yet the state has to abide by the European Commission's decisions.³⁹ However, Turkey's gradual shift to Russia and China may eventually sideline the EU factor in the decision-making affairs of the country.

Regional Influence

In the first decade of his rule, Erdoğan induced cooperation with Syria at political, economic, security, and technical levels. In this manner, the states established trade relations along with investments. However, Turkey adopted different approach to account for the shifts in the international order in the strive for strategic autonomy. The emergence of the Kurdish factor redefined Turkey's approach to Syria since it directly challenged the sovereignty and regional autonomy of the state.⁴⁰ Turkey launched a military operation in Syria to fight the Syrian Kurdish Front and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) elements. This was followed by a military intervention in Northern Iraq to contain the Kurdish government and the plight of Kurds on Turkish territories.⁴¹

In the context of Libya, in 2019, Turkey convinced the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) to sign a maritime memorandum.⁴² As a result, the 16 nautical mile corridor between southwest Turkey and northeast Libya was deemed an exclusive

³⁸ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

³⁹ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order."

⁴⁰ Shaimaa Magued, "Turkey's Role in Syria: A Prototype of its Regional Policy in the Middle East," *E-International Relations*, September 21, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/09/21/turkeys-role-in-syria-a-prototype-of-its-regional-policy-in-the-middle-east/>.

⁴¹ Shaimaa Magued, "Turkey's Role in Syria."

⁴² "Libya complains of arms cargo from Turkey, joint investigation launched," *Reuters*, December 22, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-turkey-idUSKCN1IOLG3>.

economic zone (EEZ), and Greece's rights over the territory were effectively side-lined.⁴³ In return, Turkey offered the GNA defence against the eastern armed coalition led by Khalifa Haftar in the Libyan Civil War.⁴⁴ The assistance included training personnel, unmanned ariel vehicles, and support from the Turkish Navy. However, it can be argued that Erdoğan took these measures to gain political influence in Libya and access to its North-eastern Mediterranean coast. That is how Turkey will be able to increase access to the oil and gas reserves of the Mediterranean.⁴⁵ The increased revenue shall make strategic autonomy easier.

With the coming termination of the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey can explore and utilize the natural gas reserves of the Black Sea.⁴⁶ According to President Erdoğan, Turkey has explored 320 billion cubic meters of natural gas, and aspires to launch production by 2023.⁴⁷ Consequently, Turkey can decrease its dependence on energy reserve imports from Iran, Iraq, and Russia and dominate one of the largest economies in the Middle East. This will further increase Turkish influence across the region.

Muslim World

As part of the quest for strategic autonomy, Turkey has presented itself as the liberator of the Muslim world. To pursue this notion, Erdoğan has developed an antipathetic stance on Israel and India by highlighting their human rights violations against Palestinians and Kashmiris. Upon delivering his speech after the conversion of Hagia Sophia, Erdoğan claimed that the next required liberation was of Al-Aqsa mosque, located in Israel, the third holiest Islamic site.⁴⁸ This statement was in response

⁴³ "Libya complains of arms cargo from Turkey, joint investigation launched"

⁴⁴ "Libya complains of arms cargo from Turkey, joint investigation launched"

⁴⁵ "Libya complains of arms cargo from Turkey, joint investigation launched"

⁴⁶ Klaus Wolfer, "The Black Sea and Turkey in focus," *Gis Report Online*, last modified April 20, 2022, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/black-sea/>.

⁴⁷ Klaus Wolfer, "The Black Sea and Turkey in focus."

⁴⁸ "Israel and Turkey hail new era in relations, but divisions remain," *Al Jazeera*,

to the emerging peace deals between Israel and the Arab world. In the wake of the silence of Arab states on Israeli atrocities, Erdoğan took it upon the Turkish state to build narratives in favour of the Palestinians.⁴⁹

Turkey and Israel have recently launched a new era of their relationship. After prolonged diplomatic turmoil, Isaac Herzog, the President of Israel, visited Turkey.⁵⁰ This was the first visit of an Israeli President since 2007. Erdoğan claimed that this visit was a turning point in the Turkey-Israel relationship as steps for energy cooperation between the states were undertaken. However, Erdoğan has demonstrated an unchanging stance on Palestinian rights despite these developments. Explaining this stance, Erdoğan stated that it is critical to reduce regional tensions and project a two-state solution vision.⁵¹ In his meeting with his Israeli counterpart, Erdoğan expressed Jerusalem's importance in the history of Islam as well as the religious identity associated with the Al-Aqsa mosque.⁵²

Moving forward, in the context of India, Erdoğan highlighted atrocities in Kashmir in a high-level United Nations General Assembly session. He further acknowledged that the Kashmir issue is a major cause of instability in South Asia and that it is critical to resolve it through dialogue and the United Nations Security Council Resolutions.⁵³ Additionally, Erdoğan spoke in favour of the Pakistani stance on Kashmir since Pakistan is pushing for the right of self-determination for

March 9, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/9/israel-turkey-relations-herzog-visit-erdogan>.

⁴⁹ Israel and Turkey hail new era in relations, but divisions remain."

⁵⁰ Duncan Randall, "Turkey and Israel: A Relationship Unlikely to be Fully Rekindled," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. March 3, 2022, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/03/turkey-and-israel-a-relationship-unlikely-to-be-fully-rekindled/>.

⁵¹ Duncan Randall, "Turkey and Israel."

⁵² Duncan Randall, "Turkey and Israel."

⁵³ Amalendu Misra, "Is the India-Turkey Relationship Headed to Ruin?" *The National Interest*, October 1, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/india-turkey-relationship-headed-ruin-194660>.

Kashmiris.⁵⁴ Hence, by supporting the rights of Kashmiris and Pakistan's stance, Erdoğan was viewed as a liberator for the Ummah.

Challenges to Strategic Autonomy

Despite various steps undertaken by Turkey to attain strategic autonomy, it is critical to acknowledge the hurdles on this path. Turkey's global rise directly threatens the liberal world order, the dominance of the US, and Saudi Arabia's influence over the Middle East/Muslim world. It is argued that the US supported the 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan's government, which reflects the US' concerns about the current neo-Ottomanism employed by Turkey. Turkey's regional dominance directly threatens the dominance of the US in the Middle East. US also considers Turkey as an obstacle in eliminating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Turkey's intervention in Northern Syria directly impacted the Kurds, who were allied with the US to defeat ISIS.

Turkey's stance on Israel and profound strategic relations with Russia and China, will compel the US to take measures to prevent Turkey's rise. For instance, the US imposed sanctions on Turkey after purchasing the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system. According to the US, this system was incompatible with that of NATO technology and hence, threatened the Euro-Atlantic alliance. In reality, the US deemed Turkey-Russian relations a threat to the liberal world order, indicating a potential rise to multipolar world order. Despite these setbacks, Turkey has stayed firm in its quest for strategic autonomy and combating the liberal world order. Yet Turkey's recent shift in domestic politics and receding economy might serve as a potential menace to these aspirations.

Domestic politics has played a critical role in shaping Turkey's foreign policy. Under the rule of Erdogan, Turkey was subject to various shifts in the domestic political landscape that had direct implications for external policies. Hence, the receding support for President Erdogan and

⁵⁴ Amalendu Misra, "Is the India-Turkey Relationship Headed to Ruin?"

his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has yielded similar results. This decline has been a product of a declining economy, corruption allegations, and undemocratic practices.⁵⁵ In retaliation, Erdogan has shifted towards increasingly aggressive foreign policy measures to increase nationalist sentiments and re-establish his strong political base. Military interventions in Syria and Libya are a result of that. Nevertheless, these aspirations can further strain Turkey's relations with the West, limiting its access to the international financial market and entangling the state in protracted military engagement, which can be alarming for an already economically challenged state.

Turkey's economic condition serves as a significant factor influencing its foreign policy. Turkey has been subject to various economic challenges like high inflation, unemployment, weakening currency, implications of earthquakes, and increasing public debt. These factors have directly constrained the state's ability to fund its ambitious policy of strategic autonomy. Addressing these economic challenges requires Turkey to establish good trade relations with the European Union, maintain foreign direct investment, and an effective balance of payments. This implies that despite Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy and close ties with Russia and China, the state cannot alienate the Western powers either.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Turkey's rise and quest for strategic autonomy directly threatens the liberal world order. Turkish foreign policy has embarked upon modifications over the years. Although, after the Cold War, Turkey's NATO membership and aspiration for EU membership demonstrated

⁵⁵Birsan Altayli and Humeyra, "Pollsters See Support for Erdogan's AKP Largely Unscathed Despite Quake," *Reuters*, March 3, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/pollsters-see-support-erdogans-akp-largely-unscathed-despite-quake-2023-03-03/>.

⁵⁶ Birsen Altayli and Humeyra, "Pollsters See Support for Erdogan's AKP Largely Unscathed Despite Quake."

signs of Western influence. Currently, Turkey appears to be striving toward a multipolar world order, which is emerging with the rise of China, Russia, and nationalist leaders across the globe. Accordingly, with these shifts and the potential termination of the Treaty of Lausanne in 2023, Turkey has expressed its desire for regional dominance and strategic autonomy.⁵⁷ To this end, Turkey took steps to cooperate with Russia, China and the Global South, as well as pivot away from the EU and the transatlantic alliance. Moreover, Turkey extended its influence over Syria, Libya, and the Black Sea, in addition to aspiring to be the Muslim world's leader. Nevertheless, the path towards strategic autonomy is challenged by the US' influence in the contemporary world order, and Turkey has met with sanctions due to its recent endeavours.⁵⁸ Turkey should aspire to pursue strategic autonomy through diplomacy and pragmatism while maintaining strong economic ties with the West. Without a stable economy, the state cannot support its foreign policy ambitions. Despite all these challenges Erdoğan still remains headstrong regarding Turkey's rise and reviving its lost glory of the Ottoman era.

⁵⁷ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence?" *International Affairs*, July 5, 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/97/4/1085/6314232>.

⁵⁸ Mustafa Kutlay, Ziya Öniş, "Turkish foreign policy.