

Assessing the Impact of Turkey's Quest for Status Since the 2000s on Foreign Policy Change: Transformational or Transactional?

Samiratou DIPAMA

Dr., Faculty of Juridical and Political Sciences, Thomas Sankara University, Ouagadougou
E-Mail : dipamamis@yahoo.fr
Orcid: 0000-0002-6599-5980

Emel PARLAR DAL

Professor, Department of International Relations, Marmara University, Istanbul
E-Mail : emelparlar@yahoo.com
Orcid: 0000-0001-6508-6069

ABSTRACT

This paper delves into an assessment of the impact of Turkey's quest for status since the 2000s on changes in its foreign policy. In other words, how has Turkey's search for status influenced its foreign policy stances since the 2000s? And can we consider the changes in Turkey's foreign policy change transformational or transactional in essence? In this vein, this paper will make essential contributions to the existing literature on Turkey's status-seeking strategies by using specific cases to link them to changes in Turkey's foreign policy and assessing the extent to which they are transactional or transformational. The examination of this topic is all the more important in light of internal developments in Turkey, such as democratic backsliding and economic crisis, as well external factors such as its tense relationships with the EU, its rapprochement with Russia and China, and its increasingly proactive profile in regional crises. This paper critically assesses the pattern of Turkey's foreign policy change from transformational and transactional perspectives.

Keywords: Turkish Foreign Policy, Status Politics, International politics, Foreign policy change

Research Article | Received: 29 January 2022, Last Revision: 27 November 2023, Accepted: 5 December 2023

Introduction

The first decade following the arrival in power of the Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) witnessed Turkey's continuous status-seeking efforts in foreign policy. As a result of Turkey's increasing material and behavioral power, its governing elite sought to enhance the country's status with the aim of making it more visible and proactive in global governance. The governing elite's perceptions and beliefs about Turkey's civilizational identity and role in world politics fueled their desire for increased international recognition; Turkey's quest for recognition of its rising power status thus began to play a central role in Turkish foreign policymaking during the first decade of the 2000s.

Status is usually defined in International Relations (IR) as shared beliefs about a state's ranking on valued attributes, possesses social, perceptual and positional features (Renshon 2017: 33). Rising powers' quest for enhanced status in global politics in parallel to their relative increase in material power and political influence has attracted the attention of academics in IR. Whereas some scholars claim that rising powers' search for greater status vis-a-vis the great powers is essentially cooperative in character (Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 63-95; Volgy et al. 2011) Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth (2014) underscore that reputation, prestige, and status are key engines of great power politics and underline that rising powers, in particular, search for the recognition of their gained status in the global system. Other studies attribute their pursuit of higher status in international politics to the perspective of their core ideology, values, culture, political system, or moral supremacy's sense (de Carvalho and Neumann 2014; Stephen 2014: 888-896).

In the Turkish case, one study concludes that the quest for social mobility and creativity, more than social competition, are the key drivers of Turkey's status-seeking policies (Parlar Dal 2019a: 586-602). Although there is quasi-agreement in academic and political circles that Turkey has been in search of enhanced status in international politics since the 2000s, the impact of this quest for status on developments in Turkey's foreign policy has not been sufficiently elaborated in the literature. In this regard, an alternative assessment of Turkish foreign policy change derived from status politics seems indispensable, since systemic, regional, domestic or agent-based factors are unlikely to explain the drivers and the mechanisms of foreign policy change from a comprehensive approach. Given this, the main aim of this article is to fill this void by delving into an analysis of how Turkey's quest for status since the 2000s influenced its foreign policy during this time. Further, can we consider the changes in its foreign policy as transformational or transactional in essence? In this vein, this paper will make important contributions to the existing literature on foreign policy change and status politics in general, as well as Turkish foreign policy in particular. It seeks to establish a link between the status-seeking strategies adopted by Turkey since 2000s and the nature and the scope of its foreign policy change. On the other hand, there is a very restricted number of studies in the literature on Turkish foreign policy dealing with status-related policies and their impact on foreign policymaking and change. This study acknowledges that transformational and transactional changes can occur simultaneously in states' foreign policy. This means that they can even coexist under a given period and affect foreign policy of a state at different levels. In addition, one form of foreign policy change can be more dominant than the other over a certain period. That said, the examination of this topic is all the more important in light of the internal shifts occurring in Turkey, such as increasing democratic backsliding and economic crisis, and external factors such as its tense relationships with the EU, its rapprochement with Russia, and its increasingly proactive profile in regional crises.

Against this backdrop, this paper will first provide an overview of the literature on the connection between status politics and foreign policy change with an examination of the impact of status-seeking on foreign policy change. It will then critically assess the direction of Turkey's foreign policy change from transformational and transactional foreign policy perspectives.

The Interplay between Status Politics and Foreign Policy Change

States' status-seeking policies have been explained by several theories in the literature, including social comparison theory (SCT) and social identity theory (SIT), both of which originate in studies of individual psychology. According to SCT, comparisons with others play a key role in individuals' judgment of their own worth and the building of their self-esteem (Paul, Larson and Wohlforth 2014: 17). By transposing this theory to the state level, it can be argued that, like individuals and groups, states become status seekers because they want to achieve favorable social status relative to their peers (Wohlforth 2014: 35). The second explanatory theory upon which this paper draws, SIT, investigates the ways through which social groups struggle to gain a positive and extraordinary identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979: 33-47). In the international system, states are persistently making efforts to obtain a positive status and to get this positive distinctive identity and grade by identifying themselves with a group with identical but slightly higher rankings than their own (Brown and Haeger 1999: 31-42). It stems from SIT that states use three key strategies to enhance their status on the international level: status competition, social creativity, and status mobility.

Status competition in this context entails the use of hard power strategies by lower-status states to achieve equal or higher status in comparison with the dominant group. In other terms, social competition drives the lower-status group member to make continuous efforts to achieve a material (military and/or economic) power capability equal or superior to that of the higher-status group and to engage in geopolitical competition (Parlar Dal 2019b). In this respect, some underline that status competition may be used as a strategy by rising powers having an equal or similar level of status in international organizations to find new fields of cooperation and to develop new diplomatic networks" (Parlar Dal 2019b). It can be observed between rising powers and established great powers and among rising powers themselves.

In the SIT framework, states that adopt the social creativity strategy acknowledge the legitimacy of the current power ranking in the international system and seek to be more effective than the ruling group in newly discovered areas (Lemaire 1974: 17-52) and on non-material criteria like cultural policies, public diplomacy, regional leadership, norm entrepreneurship, development, and humanitarian cooperation policies (Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 3). For instance, a study that explored how a selected number of nine G20 rising powers, by means of status-seeking policies, struggled to obtain a distinctive positive status in the sphere of development cooperation, concluded that social creativity strategies were mainly used to upgrade their status in the field of South-South Development Cooperation (SSDC) (Parlar Dal and Dipama 2019: 663-684).

In SIT, social mobility pertains to a state's internalization of the norms and policy practices of the higher-ranked group that are against its admission into the higher-status clubs (Knippenberd and Ellemers 1990: 137-169). The admission of status-seeking states to elite clubs largely depends on their ability to socialize with and internalize the normative standards and values of the dominant group. The internalization and imitation by the lower-ranking group of the values, norms and institutions of the higher-status group is a manifestation of the existence of social mobility in an elite club.

Contrary to social mobility, social creativity allows states to display the positive distinctiveness of their policies in some issue areas where they can enhance their international status recognition without adopting and internalizing the rules of the dominant group. This is favored by the existence of a powerful and charismatic leader championing these strategies and obtaining popular support. Unlike social competition, which is based on recourse to hard material power competition to achieve and enhance status recognition, social creativity does not contest the legitimacy of the existing international hierarchy and rather permits states to gain consideration in a distinct sub-ranking (Parlar Dal and Dipama 2019).

Although status-seeking policies are sometimes themselves foreign policy strategies and goals, the authors will focus on how a state's quest for enhanced status can affect partially or completely its foreign policy goals and stances. In this line, states' status-seeking policies lead to some changes in their foreign policy, which can refer to changes in the goals and means of foreign policy, changes in a country's policy toward one specific foreign policy issue or in only one sector, a simultaneous shift in many foreign policy issue areas, or a fundamental change implying either a dramatic rupture with past stances or the cumulative effect of fundamental changes.

Foreign policy change can also occur when states' relative position within the global system changes. States displaying a satisfaction with the status quo are less likely to initiate fundamental changes in their foreign policy (Volgy and Schwarz 1991). States with increasing status in international affairs and that are seeking recognition are likely to have revisionist positions vis-a-vis the status quo that will lead to changes in their foreign policy. By transposing the role theory thesis, according to which actors are likely to behave with reference to socially constructed norms and values (Biddle and Edwin 1966: 3-19), onto foreign policy analysis, Holsti (1970: 233-239) contends that decision-makers design their countries' foreign policies by taking into account their self-perceptions and the influence of the international system.

The three above-mentioned patterns of status-seeking strategies can contribute to both transformational and/or transactional changes in states' foreign policies under a given period. States practicing transactional foreign policy see international politics mostly as 'bilateral deals' between presidents or heads of governments at the expense of multilateralism with short-term projection (Hadar 2017; Henke 2017; Nye 2019: 70). On the contrary, transformational diplomacy, coined by Condoleezza Rice in 2006, relates to a strategic shift in a state's foreign policy orientations with clear long-term objectives and expectations and increased consistency among the policies (Hadar 2017). Some argue that the preference for bilateralism over multilateralism in transactional foreign policy is due to the complexity of multilateral interactions, which most often encompass long-term commitments and a complex range of actors with diverging interests (Bashirov and Yilmaz 2020: 166). Through transactional foreign policy, states have the possibility to escape from a norm-based foreign policy-making, which sometimes comes at the expense of national interests (Ikenberry 2017: 156-178; Stokes 2018: 133-150), and can easily invest in 'issue-specific transactions' (Bashirov and Yilmaz 2020: 167). Due to their focus on short-term and immediate gains, transactionalists generally do not sustain long-term allies because their established partnerships are evaluated on the basis on their immediate deliveries to the country and, as such, are likely to break down quickly given the absence of strong ideational and institutional foundations (Bashirov and Yilmaz 2020: 167).

Transactional foreign policy is generally not based on a grand strategy with clear-cut identification and formulation of the priorities, interests, and means (Dueck 2015: 14-15) and is generally marked with important inconsistencies across policies due to the lack of long-term planning (Bashirov and Yilmaz 2020: 167). The former United States (US) President Donald Trump had implemented an essentially transactional foreign policy throughout his presidential term, which was demonstrated by the fact that while it was expressly underlined in the 2017 National Strategic document that China and Russia were the top threats to the US, Trump never ceased praising Putin. He also played with the Russian standing in eastern Europe and Syria while aggressively challenging the politico-security partnership with the European allies (Bartlett 2019) and the normative foundations of the liberal order (Brands 2018).

In the same stance, Trump's trade war with China has been criticized for being another demonstration of his impulsive, day-to-day reaction without a clear-cut evaluation of the likely wider and long-term negative repercussions of the trade war on the US economy (Larres 2017; Saqib 2019; Bartlett 2019). Transactional foreign policy is also informed by domestic considerations and is mostly used by populist leaders who prioritize short-term (not sustainable) successes to mobilize popular support and consolidate their authoritarian political power (Bashirov and Yilmaz 2020: 167). A transformational foreign policy is purposive rather than pragmatic, visionary rather than reactive, with enduring benefits (Behm 2016). Unlike transactional leaders, transformational leaders mobilize power for change by appealing to their followers' higher ideals and moral values such as liberty, justice, and peace rather than their baser emotions of fear, greed, and hatred (Nye 2006: 163). In other words, they "reorganize for the long term in domestic policy or foreign policy, the structural framework of the national or international political system." (Vaisse 2007: 10).

Transformational change stems from a set of structural reversals generally occurring in the midst of crises and comprises a fundamental change in the feature of the bottom and front ideas, normative and cognitive reasoning (Hall 1993: 275-296), as well as incremental shift in power and change in the representation of values and interests (Pelling 2011: 84).

This paper argues that while status competition can lead to both transformational and transactional foreign policy change, social mobility predominantly leads to transformational foreign policy change and that social creativity strategy generally results in transactional foreign policy change. States involved in a quest for higher status in global politics can use status-competition strategies to increase their relative power vis-a-vis their peers. In this respect, the pursuit of status-competition strategies by states, especially rising powers, inevitably results in some transactional changes in their foreign policy stances, as these rising powers may use competitive strategies to gain short-term gains and favor bilateral deals without changing their overall foreign policy orientation. Likewise, the use of status-competition strategies can lead to transformational foreign policy changes whereby the state breaks up with its past posture and for instance uses strategies to challenge the power distribution within existing international organizations (IOs), which favor the traditional great powers, or to compete with other rising powers for more influence within particular IOs such as BRICS. These kinds of states, when engaged in status-competition strategies, are likely to ask for greater inclusiveness in key IOs and to expand their cohort of strategic economic and political partners. Thanks to their

growing material capabilities and political influence, rising powers can increase their power relative to the established great powers in status-quo IOs, while at the same time creating alternative multilateral institutions that allow them to challenge the rules and norms of the existing order and advocate for deep reforms in status-quo IOs. Yet, as pointed out by Parlar Dal (2019b), “not all rising powers can upgrade their status by the adoption of status-competition strategies” since their rising actorness depend on the positive impact they may create vis-à-vis the major powers and other actors of the current international system.

States’ pursuit of status-mobility strategies, such as lower-status states’ admission into the higher-status group in exchange for adopting and internalizing the norms and policy practices of the higher-status club, can also lead to transformational foreign policy stances. Here the permissibility of the admission conditions to a higher-ranking group is crucial in that states in search for membership in an IO can fundamentally change their foreign policies to meet the criteria of the elite club in order to be recognized by its powerful members (Ellemers et al.1990). For instance, the acceptance of Turkey’s candidacy application to the EU can be considered a status-mobility strategy that contributed to enhancing Turkey’s status in the international system and simultaneously resulted in deep changes in Turkey’s foreign policy priorities and objectives (Kaarbo 2017: 6-8).

Table 1. Interlinkage between status-seeking strategies and foreign policy change (transformational or transactional)

Status-Seeking Strategies	Foreign Policy Change
Social Mobility	Transformational Change
Social Competition	Transformational Change Transactional Change
Social Creativity	Transactional Change

Social creativity is a status-seeking strategy that generally results in transactional foreign policy change. In this case, the lower-status state seeking enhanced status focuses on a specific foreign policy area where it has a comparative advantage and can demonstrate its positive distinctiveness vis-a-vis the established powers to benefit from short-term advantages. For instance, Emel and Samiratou (2019) demonstrate how rising powers use the South-South development cooperation model to highlight their positive distinctiveness in their approach to development cooperation issues compared to the established great powers’ model of North-South development cooperation. Social creativity as a status-seeking strategy does not lead to fundamental changes in foreign policy, but rather leads to a redefinition of states’ foreign policy stances based on short-term economic gains.

Turkey’s Paths to Status: Leading to Transformational or Transactional Change in Foreign Policy?

This paper argues that between 2000 and 2010, Turkey witnessed a predominantly transformational foreign policy change driven by a status-mobility strategy. However, this period was also characterized by certain developments shaped by transnationalism. From 2010 to the

time of writing in 2022, the changes observed in Turkish foreign policy were driven by status-competition and status-creativity strategies. Whereas status-competition strategy pursued during this period contributed to both transformational and transactional changes, status creativity ended up overwhelmingly in transactional foreign policy change than transformational one.

The Period 2000-2010: A Dominant Transformational Foreign Policy Informed by Status Mobility Strategies

Between 2000 and 2010, Turkey's foreign policy stance underwent a transformational change informed by the EU's acceptance of the country's membership application in 1999 and the opening of accession negotiations on October 3, 2005. The opening of these negotiations was grounded in the impressive improvement of Turkey's political space, culminating in the arrival to power of the AKP. During its first and second tenures, the AKP pursued a proactive and ideal-based foreign policy at both the regional and ideational levels. During the first period of the AKP government (2002–2007), Turkey's Europeanization efforts continued in many spheres. In fact, the changes that occurred in Turkey's foreign policy dynamics during this time were rooted in the growing ambition of Turkish elites to enhance Turkey's status through its membership bid to belong to a higher-status group and by means of the country's positive image. Turkey's ambition to become an EU member can be considered a status-mobility strategy, since its acceptance to the prestigious EU club would contribute to enhancing its status in international politics.

As explained above, the pursuit of status-mobility strategies leads to fundamental changes in the goals and objectives of states' foreign policy. Thus, in the early 2000s Turkey's foreign policy underwent incremental changes in terms of its objectives and priorities, in which liberal norms and values played a central role. In this respect, from 2005 to 2010, Turkey undertook important liberal reforms, such as the abolishment of the death penalty and judicial reforms, to implement the EU Copenhagen criteria that would pave its way toward full membership in the EU.

This restructuring aimed at transforming Turkish foreign policy in terms of the country's new objectives and achievements was also complemented by a brand new civilizational and geopolitical foreign policy understanding. In fact, this new foreign policy identity attributed to Turkey by the AKP's governing elite also conformed well with a status-mobility strategy aiming to attribute Turkey a greater status on the world stage either by joining the EU as a high-ranking status club or by making Turkey a center of attraction in both its own region and to the other distant regions. In this context, in line with the AKP's governing elite's foreign policy doctrine Turkey made efforts to normalize its relations with neighboring countries through its 'zero-problem' policy (Davutoglu 2010; Akpınar 2013:740), particularly through the promotion of high-level political and strategic cooperation and the enhancement of economic and security cooperation (Davutoglu 2013:90).

This new neighborhood policy of Turkey was also positively welcomed by the European circles since it also fit the EU's core normative agenda. Turkey's status-mobility strategy aiming to upgrade Turkey's status via European integration was initially seen both inside and outside Turkey as the backbone of its traditional foreign policy. It is also strik-

ing to note that during the period 2000-2010 Turkey's European integration policy did not exclude at any time its multidimensional and assertive foreign policy orientation since these two policies were conceived by the political elite as complementary. In this context, while still advocating its European identity and making efforts to approximate EU norms and values, Turkey worked to normalize its relations with countries in its neighborhood and start relations with faraway regions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The rapid Europeanization process started in the country after 1999 planted the seeds of a transformational change that continued until the first decade of 2000s. Turkey's struggle to get non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the period between 2009 and 2010 is another demonstration of its willingness to get actively engaged in key multilateral organizations and to contribute to the improvement of the moral and normative standards of the UN. In other words, Turkey's search for admission in these higher status' clubs drove incremental changes in its foreign policy objectives and directions. During the same period, there were also some transactional moves in Turkey's foreign policy. For instance, Turkey's involvement in the NATO's 2001 operation in Afghanistan did not lead to a transformation in Turkish foreign policy because this move was considered a continuity rather than a rupture in Turkey's alliance relations. On the other hand, Turkey's opening to other geographies during 2000-2010 and its turn to the Middle East in particular did not give way to an effective transformational foreign policy since Turkey's quest for greater status drew on a status-competition strategy that created additional rivalries and tensions among its peers. With the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the country entered in an era of de-Europeanization which showed its first signs after 2007. There is no need to state that this process created negative implications on its foreign and security policy, democracy and economics. As a consequence, the transactional changes occurred in Turkish foreign policy during 2000-2010 have also gradually lost their positive impact on Turkish foreign policy agenda.

The Period from 2010 Onwards: Coexistence of Transformational and Transactional Foreign Policy Informed by Status Competition and Social Creativity Strategies

From 2010 onward, especially with the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, Turkey has been combining both status-competition and status-creativity strategies in its quest for enhanced status in global affairs. These strategies have equally led to both transformational and transactional changes in its foreign policy. Status mobility has been downplayed in Turkey's status-seeking policies, especially since the de facto freezing of its EU accession negotiations in 2010, since which none of the accession chapters have been opened.

Status Competition

On the one hand, Turkey's global ambitions started to increase, resulting in Turkish elites' growing use of status competition strategies to enhance Turkey's status relative to the established great powers, especially the EU, and to other rising powers by implementing proactive military and economic foreign policy instruments. These status-competition strategies have led to some transformational changes in Turkey's foreign policy, mainly because of the geopolitical implications of the Syrian crisis.

First, the Syrian crisis indeed led to a transformation in Turkish foreign policy because Turkey's military operations in Northern Syria signified a veritable rupture from its traditional "non-involvement in internal affairs" strategy. It was also viewed as a reflection of Turkey's free-rider position in international politics. One of the incremental changes triggered by the Syrian crisis has been the growing role that security plays in Turkey's foreign policy stance with external military power diffusion ambitions. This trend was demonstrated by the establishment of Turkey's first African military base in Somalia in 2017 to balance against both Western powers and Gulf states in the Horn of Africa (Cannon and Donelli 2021: 1-22) and by its pro-active engagement in the Libyan crisis as well as the use of Turkish-made armed unmanned drones in regional crises. These actions can be seen as the operationalization of status-competition strategies aiming to strengthen its status as a key international player in regional and global politics.

Second, the Eastern Mediterranean crisis is mainly due to ongoing geopolitical rivalry between Greece and Turkey. Both countries' status aspirations at the regional and international levels are interdependent and mutually constructed. Their quest for status in the international system has also been shaped by their strategic and geopolitical competition in the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. The recent re-escalation of Greece-Turkey tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean has been fueled by gas discoveries, with each side defending its right to explore for the discovered hydrocarbons. In this vein, Turkey "has doubled down on its energy exploration activities both in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which recently culminated in a major gas discovery" (Dalay 2021). Turkey's military operations in the Mediterranean is part of the transformational autonomous stance of its foreign policy, since these are backed by the 'Blue Homeland' ideology and Turkey has disregarded the eventual negative repercussions of its actions on its relations with European partners.

Third, Turkey's current decision to veto Finland and Sweden's NATO membership application can be considered another manifestation of its transformational foreign policy since the country wants to break with its past pro-western stance by advocating its vital interest's vis-a-vis the Western block. Turkey uses its veto power as bargaining power to obtain concessions from its NATO allies regarding specific controversial issues such as the delivery of the F-35 the end of some of its allies' support to the PKK-affiliated terrorist group YPG, as well as the lifting of the arm embargos imposed on Turkey by its Western partners since October 2019 (Mac Dougall and Samar 2022).

On the other hand, Turkey's quest for enhanced status through status-competition strategies also led to transactional changes, since bilateral deals instead are gaining prominence in its external moves. In the political sphere, Turkey has made efforts to increase the number of its diplomatic ties worldwide through the opening of diplomatic relations from Asia to Africa and Latin America (Website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs). These relations are important for Turkey as a means of gaining broader support from its peers in international institutions and to easily conclude bilateral deals in economic, security, and political spheres. This is exemplified by the fact that key businessmen are always part of the Turkish President's delegation during his official visits to partner countries, and important deals are easily negotiated in favor of Turkish business groups by the end of the presidential visits (Şahin 2021).

Likewise, transactional foreign policy informed by status competition has also led to some inconsistencies between Turkey's foreign policy attitudes and to a case-by-case foreign policy approach without clear-cut long-term strategies since 2011. This view is firstly substantiated in the case of Turkey's relations with the Gulf countries, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the Middle East, from the onset of the Arab spring till recently Turkey's relations with these Gulf Arab countries were tense, and their diplomatic relations deteriorated over division on the Muslim Brotherhood issue, with Turkey and Qatar being the main regional supporters of the group while Saudi Arabia and the UAE oppose these revolutionary forces as a threat to the established order in the Arab world and to their legitimacy (Kardaş 2021). These divisions have been deepened with the embargo put on Qatar in 2017 by the so-called Quartet (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt), following the former's refusal to positively respond to the latter's demands of cutting ties with Iran and Turkey and stopping its support to the Muslim Brotherhood combined with the failed 2016 *coup d'état* in Turkey. These developments led to Turkey's rapprochement with Qatar and to its further distancing from Saudi Arabia and UAE, as well as an increasing struggle for regional leadership between the two blocks in the Middle East and Islamic world (Kardaş 2021).

This suddenly started to change when the embargo on Qatar was lifted in late 2020, leading to a normalization of Qatar's relations with the Gulf club and thus increasing the costs for Turkey to continue these unfriendly relations with Saudi Arabia and UAE (Cinkara 2022). These events, combined with Turkey's huge need for liquidity to fuel its growing economy and broad status competition strategies in times of escalating financial crisis,¹ have been one of the main drivers behind Ankara's engagement in a normalization process with Saudi Arabia and UAE since late 2021. This process has been marked by the recent visits by President Erdogan to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in April and February 2022, respectively, which ended with the signature of several cooperation agreements in many areas including environment, trade, technology, and energy as well as on direct investment and stock exchanges with the UAE (Daily Sabah 2022a). In the same line, the fact that Turkey's recent decision in April 2022 to transfer the case of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist assassinated at the Kingdom's Istanbul consulate in October 2018, to the Saudi authorities (Daily Sabah 2022b), was taken a few weeks before President Erdogan's official visit to the late King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı News 2022) further substantiates the transactional feature of this sudden move.

Moreover, there is no doubt that Turkey also competes with the European partners in Africa and has criticized French intervention in the Sahel as essentially counterproductive and a neocolonial *France-Afrique* instrument (Ramani 2021). Turkey is one of the potential partners in the current trend of strategic partners' diversification occurring in many African countries since Turkish-made military equipment are growingly been sold to African countries facing security issues (Armstrong 2021). Turkey is strengthening bilateral ties with economic giants in Africa such as Algeria, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa as part of its transactional foreign policy and Turkish infrastructure companies are increasingly been awarded contracts

¹ Abu Dhabi also announced a \$10 billion fund for investments in Turkey during the visit.

for the implementation of huge infrastructural projects in Africa.² However, Turkey's harsh criticisms of its European partners' external policies stand in sharp contrast with its persistent determination to be granted EU membership sooner or later as found in several discourses.

Lastly, in the context of the current Ukrainian crisis, Turkey has taken a position different from that of its NATO allies that allows the country to maintain friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine (Türkdoğan 2023). Indeed, Turkey undoubtedly condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has been clarified by its affirmative votes to the UNGA's three resolutions, but at the same time, the country refuses to follow its NATO allies by imposing sanctions on Russia partly because of its need to keep friendly relations from Russia, the latter being an important partner in the energy and tourism sectors. Turkish Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on March 1, 2022, made clear Turkey's intentions not to impose sanctions against Russia on the following grounds: "We are not in the opinion of imposing sanctions against Russia. We have commercial ties such as natural gas, tourism, and agriculture. We do not want to make a harmful move for our country" (Hürriyet Daily News 2022).

Social Creativity

Turkey also makes use of social-creativity strategies, especially in the field of development cooperation, to indicate its distinctiveness from both the established great powers and its peers. In this regard, Turkey has advanced the argument that its development cooperation policies are different from both those of established Western powers and other rising powers by developing a Turkish model of development cooperation, the so-called Ankara Consensus (Donelli 2018: 57-76). The Ankara Consensus is considered an alternative to both the Chinese-led Beijing model of development and the U.S.-led Washington model. To illustrate this positive distinctiveness, Turkey uses several discourses drawn from its history and culture.

In the context of its aid policies toward the African continent, Turkey argues that its approach to the African continent and other countries in the developing world is based on mutual respect, brotherhood, and win-win logic to underline its positive distinctiveness from the Western powers and other rising powers engaging with the developing world. Turkey also praises its demand-oriented development cooperation policies with the argument that its interventions are generally done upon request from the recipient countries, which enhance its partners' ownership over development projects, as well as the need-based feature of its aid policies.

Yet this demand-oriented feature can be counterproductive since it generally does not come from the citizens of the recipient countries but are most often formulated by their political authorities during official visits paid by Turkish authorities to African countries. In this context, the government-centered feature of Turkey's aid policies poses the potential risk that the priorities formulated by the government may not reflect the real needs of the local populations but will only serve to fuel their egoistic and non-democratic political agenda. This point is corroborated by some scholars who highlight that "personal relations between President

2 Kigali Arena in Rwanda, east Africa's biggest stadium as well the Olympic swimming pool and the world-class stadium in Senegal have been built by Turkish construction firms.

Erdogan and high-level officials of the recipient countries can determine which projects are chosen to be supported since on many occasions new development projects were spontaneously approved by the president during his trips abroad without consultation with the advisory body.” (Maza 2014).

Turkey’s involvement in the Somali crisis in 2011 coincided with the visit of then Prime Minister Erdogan to the risky and conflict-ridden zone—particularly in a context where all international actors had fled the country for security reasons—further enhanced Turkey’s uniqueness as a global humanitarian actor. To further demonstrate this uniqueness in the fields of development cooperation and humanitarian actorness, Turkey succeeded in surpassing the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) 0.7% Gross National Product (GNI) ratio and was ranked as the second country with the highest ratio of Official Development Assistance (ODA)/GNI in 2020, just behind Sweden. As a result of its performance, Turkey aims to confirm that despite not being ranked among the countries with the highest GNI per capita in the world, it nevertheless disburses a substantial amount of ODA to countries in need.

These social-creativity strategies reinforce the transactional character of Turkey’s foreign policy because they aim to improve the image of Turkey in partner countries and to show the specificity of its foreign policy which is said to put the human beings at the center of its approach to the partner countries. By granting Turkey a ‘good’ image in partner countries through the construction of discourses highlighting the distinctive positive approach of Turkey, especially in the field of development cooperation, social-creativity strategies contribute to the flourishing of bilateral economic, political, and/or security deals between Turkey and its partner countries. In other words, they are likely to provide a comparative advantage to Turkey vis-a-vis other external partners that are engaged in the same partner countries, especially in the granting of huge project contracts to Turkish companies. In this vein, some scholars underline those non-economic instruments such as development and humanitarian aid have been predominantly used to ease the achievement of Turkey’s economic goals in sub-Saharan Africa (Parlar Dal and Dipama 2020: 252-253). To illustrate this point, some observers contended that Turkey’s well-praised humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 2011 has resulted in the priority given to Turkish companies by the Somali government for the implementation of important infrastructure projects, including the renovation and management of Mogadishu’s airport and seaport in 2013 (Achilles et al. 2015:20; The Somali Investor 2016).

Conclusion

This paper provides new insights into the existing literature on status and foreign policy by examining how Turkey’s appetite for enhanced status in international politics since the 2000s has resulted in changes in its foreign policy stances.

It argues that the execution of social-mobility strategies, in which a lower-status state seeks membership in a higher-status club in exchange for adopting and internalizing the higher-status group’s norms and values, results in incremental and transformational changes in the foreign policy stances of the lower-status state. In contrast, social competition, in which states seeking higher status compete for material power with either a higher-status group of

countries or with countries of equal status, leads to both transformational and transactional changes in the goals and objectives of that state. Likewise, the use of social-creativity strategies, by demonstrating the positive distinctiveness of the lower-status state in one policy area without contesting the legitimacy of the current international power hierarchy, paves the way to transactional foreign policy change since the overall foreign policy's goals and orientations of the lower-status state remain unchanged, although some changes may be observed in one specific issue area.

In the case of Turkey, this paper contends that from 2002 to 2010, Turkey pursued predominantly a social mobility strategy to enhance its status, and that this led to a greater extent transformational change in its foreign policy orientation. The period 2002-2010 also witnessed some transactional changes in Turkish foreign policy. In this respect, the acceptance of Turkey's candidacy application to the EU combined with the opening of accession negotiations in 2005 led to a complete restructuring of Turkey's foreign policy orientation. This is evident in the important democratic and liberal reforms undertaken by Turkey, its efforts to normalize its relations with its neighbors, and to enhance its role-model status in the tumultuous Middle Eastern region by engaging in mediation activities to help solve conflicts related to the Arab spring. This marked a complete shift in Turkey's foreign policy orientation—away from the Republican era's passive stance and from the immediate post-Cold War's politico-military foreign policy visions—and toward an increasing emphasis on norms and values with Turkey positioning itself as a role model, Muslim-majority country that can export Western norms to the countries in its neighborhood. Under this period however, some transactional stances were observed in Turkey's foreign policy as demonstrated by the fact that Turkey's participation to NATO's military operation in Afghanistan in 2001 was purely transactional without any impact on the country's ideational foundations.

Even though Turkey's efforts to use social mobility as a status-boosting strategy overwhelmingly led to transformational changes in its overall foreign policy orientations from 2002 to 2010, this trend started to change from 2010 onward amid increasing regional and global challenges magnified by the outbreak of the Syrian crisis and worsening tensions with its Western partners, especially following the July 2016 failed *coup d'état*.

Thus, this paper contends that from 2010 onward, Turkey has been making use of social-competition and social-creativity strategies more intensively than social mobility to enhance its status in global politics and that the pursuit of these strategies has predominantly led to transactional changes rather than transformational change in its foreign policy, although status-competition strategies have sometimes resulted in transformational changes such as the 'Blue Homeland' slogan accompanying Turkey's maritime operations in the Mediterranean, the development of its defense industry, and the external projection of its military power as part of the 'Great Turkey' project. The transactional changes can also be exemplified by the increase in the number of bilateral deals with extra-regional countries, the rising geopolitical competition among its peers, and the inconsistencies in its foreign policy behaviors towards its Western allies and other regional actors like the Gulf countries. For instance, the normalization process in Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE that started in late 2021 suddenly came in sharp contrast to the tense relations they held for almost 10 years is partly justified by

the normalization of these two Gulf countries' relations with Turkey's ally Qatar but also by Turkey's need to secure liquidity from these rich Gulf countries to nourish its status-competition strategies in the context of the dire financial crisis in Turkey.

In the context of status competition, Turkey has been competing with both established and rising powers for more power in global politics. In this respect, Turkey has started to widen its cohort of external partners, especially in the developing world, to secure their support for Turkey in international institutions and to facilitate bilateral economic, political, and security deals. Turkey has also developed its defense industry not only to fight against terrorist groups threatening its national security but also to enhance its material power on the global stage while at the same time securing defense deals with third countries. In addition to the status competition, Turkey has also used social creativity as an instrument to boost its international status, which is evident in development cooperation and securing bilateral economic deals with third countries.

References

- Achilles, Kathryn et al. 2015. Turkish Aid Agencies in Somalia: Risks and Opportunities for Building Peace. *Saferworld and Istanbul Policy Center*.
- Akpınar, Pınar. 2013. Turkey's Peacebuilding in Somalia: The Limits of Humanitarian Diplomacy. *Turkish Studies* 14, 4: 735–757.
- Armstrong, Hannah. 2021. Turkey in the Sahel. *International Crisis Group*.
- Bartlett, Bruce. 2019. Trump's Disastrous China Trade War Could Make a Recession Unavoidable. *USA Today*, 22 August.
- Bashirov, Galib and Ihsan Yılmaz. 2020. The Rise of Transactionalism in International Relations: Evidence from Turkey's Relations with the European Union. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 74, 2: 165-184.
- Behm, Allan. 2016. It's Time for a Transformational Foreign Policy. *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 8 September.
- Biddle, J. Bruce and Edwin J. Thomas. 1966. *Role Theory: Concepts and Research*. New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Brands, Hal. 2018. *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*. Washington, Brookings Institution Press.
- Brown, Rupert and Gabi Haeger. 1999. Compared to What?: Comparison Choice in an International Context. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 29, 1: 31–42.
- Cannon, J. Brendon and Federico Donelli. 2021. Power Projection of Middle East States in the Horn of Africa: Linking Security Burdens with Capabilities. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 100, 3: 1–22.
- Cinkara, Gokhan. 2022. Interpreting Turkey's Current Diplomatic Rapprochement Toward the Gulf. *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, 22 March.
- Daily Sabah*. 2022a. Erdoğan Visits UAE to Strengthen Economic, Political Ties. 14 February.
- Daily Sabah*. 2022b. Turkish Court Confirms Transfer of Khashoggi Case to Saudi Arabia. 7 April.
- Dalay, Galip. 2021. *Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock*. Brookings Report, 28 January.
- Davutoglu, Ahmet. 2010a. Turkey's Zero-problems Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy*, 20 May.

- Davutoglu, Ahmet. 2013. Turkey's Mediation: Critical Reflections from the Field. *Middle East Policy*, 20, 1: 83–90.
- De Carvalho, Benjamin and Iver B. Neumann. 2014. *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing*. Abingdon, Routledge.
- Donelli, Federico. 2018. The Ankara Consensus: The Significance of Turkey's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Global Change, Peace & Security* 30, 2: 57–76.
- Dueck, Colin. 2015. *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Ellemers, Naomi et al. 1990. The Influence of Permeability of Group Boundaries and Stability of Group Status on Strategies of Individual Mobility and Social Change. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 29, 3:233–246.
- Hadar, Leon. 2017. The Limits of Trump's Transactional Foreign Policy. *The National Interest*, 2 January.
- Hall, A. Peter. 1993. Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policy-making in Britain. *Comparative Politics* 25, 3: 275–296.
- Henke, Marina. 2017. Trump's Transactional Diplomacy: A Primer. *Political Violence at a Glance*, 8 February.
- Holsti, Kalevi.1970. National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy. *International Studies Quarterly* 14, 3: 233–309.
- Hürriyet Daily News. 2022. No Plans to Impose Sanctions against Russia: Spokesperson. 2 March.
- Hürriyet Daily News. 2021. Turkey Determined to Join EU Despite Obstacles: Erdoğan. 9 May.
- Ikenberry, John. 2017. The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive. *Foreign Affairs* 96, 3: 156–178.
- Kaarbo, Juliet. 2017. World Leaders' Personalities and Foreign Policies. *Newsletter – International History of Politics Section of the American Political Science Association* 3, 1: 6–8.
- Kardaş, Şaban. 2021. Turkey's Relations with the Gulf Countries: Trends and Drivers. *Ovipot Hypotheses*, 9 November.
- Larres, Klaus. 2017. Donald Trump and America's Grand Strategy: US Foreign Policy Toward Europe, Russia, and China. *Global Policy*.
- Knippenberg, Ad Van and Naomi Ellemers. 1990. Social Identity and Intergroup Differentiation Processes. *European Review of Social Psychology* 1, 1: 137–169.
- Larson, W. Deborah and Alexei Shevchenko. 2010. Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy. *International Security* 34, 4: 63–95.
- Lemaire, Gerard. 1974. Social Differentiation and Social Originality. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 4, 1: 17–52.
- Mac Dougall, David and Kamuran Samar. 2022. Why Does Turkey Want to Block Finland and Sweden from NATO?. *Euronews Comments*, 17 May.
- Maza, Cristina. Turkey: Impressive Aid Record Mired in Bad Practices. *UnitedExplanations*, <http://unitedexplanations.org/english/2014/12/01/8541/> (Accessed June 2, 2022).
- Metz, Steven. 2019. Trump is Hastening the End of America's Grand Strategy, With Nothing to Replace It. *World Politics Review*, 11 January.
- Neumann, B. Iver. 2014. Status is Cultural: Durkheimian Poles and Weberian Russians Seek Great-power Status. In *Status in World Politicse*, ed. Paul, T. V., Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 85–114.

- Nye, S. Joseph. 2006. Transformational Leadership and American Foreign Policy: A Preliminary Analysis. *Harvard University Center for Public Leadership Working Paper Series*, 6 November.
- Nye, S. Joseph. 2019. The Rise and Fall of American Hegemony from Wilson to Trump. *International Affairs* 95, 1: 63-80.
- Parlar Dal, Emel. 2019a. Status-seeking Policies of Middle Powers in Status Clubs: The Case of Turkey in the G20. *Contemporary Politics* 25, 4: 586–602.
- Parlar Dal, Emel. 2019b. Status Competition and Rising Powers in Global Governance: An Introduction. *Contemporary Politics*, 25, 5: 499–511.
- Parlar Dal, Emel and Samiratou Dipama. 2019. G20 Rising Powers' Status-seeking through Social Creativity: The Case of South-South Development Cooperation. *South African Journal of International Affairs* 26, 4: 663–684.
- Parlar Dal, Emel and Samiratou Dipama. 2020. Assessing the Turkish Trading State in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *Turkey's Political Economy in the 21st Century*, ed. Emel Parlar Dal. London, Palgrave Macmillan: 239-270.
- Paul, V. Thomas et al. 2014. *Status in World Politics*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Pelling, Mark. 2011. *Adaptation to Climate Change: From Resilience to Transformation*. Oxford, Routledge.
- Ramani, Samuel. 2021. Turkey's Sahel Strategy. *Middle East Institute*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-sahel-strategy> (Accessed June 10, 2022).
- Renshon, Jonathan. 2017. *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Saqib, Ahmed. 2019. Predicting the Next U.S. Recession. *Reuters*, 14 August.
- Şahin, Tuba. 2021. Turkish Business People Pin High Hopes on President Erdoğan's Africa Tour. *Anadolu Agency*, 16 October.
- Stephen, Matthew D. 2014. States, Norms and Power: Emerging Powers and Global Order. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 42, 3: 888–896.
- Stokes, Doug. 2018. Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order. *International Affairs*, 94, 1: 133–150.
- Tajfel, Henri and John C. Turner. 1979. An Integrative Theory of Inter-group Conflict. In *The Social Psychology of Inter-group Relations*, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel. Monterey, Brooks/Cole: 33–47.
- Türkdoğan, S. Sena. 2023. Walking a Tightrope: Turkey between the EU and Russia in the Crimea Crisis. *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 20, 79: 67- 85.
- Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Türkiye's Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy: A Synopsis. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa>
- Turner, C. John et al. 1979. Social Comparison and Group Interest in In-group Favoritism. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 9, 2: 187–204.
- The Somali Investor. 2016. Inside the New Aden Adde Airport Terminal. 7 April.
- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı-TCCB. 2022. My Visit to Saudi Arabia Reflects Our Joint Will to Start a New Era of Cooperation as the Two Brotherly Countries. April 28.
- Vaisse, Justin. 2007. Transformational Diplomacy. *Chaillot papers* No103, June.
- Volgy, J. Thomas et al. 2011. *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics: Global and Regional Perspectives*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Volgy, J. Thomas and John E. Schwarz 1991. Does Politics Stop at the Water's Edge? Domestic Political Factors and Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Cases of Great Britain, France, and West Germany. *The Journal of Politics* 53: 615–643.

Acknowledgments

The authors extend their heartfelt gratitude to all the reviewers and the editor(s) of Uluslararası İlişkiler for their valuable comments and dedicated efforts in developing this article.

Funding

This research's funding is provided by ERASMUS2027-EU-SUSGOV Project N° 101048178 ERASMUS-JMO-2021-COE.