

Power Transitions and Middle Power Agency: Türkiye's Mediation Diplomacy

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Abstract

Power in the international system is becoming more diffuse. Amid intensifying great-power rivalry and the erosion of the rules and norms that underpinned much of the post-World War II global order, several countries in the Global South have become more active players on the world stage. This has extended to the realm of conflict mediation. This article explores the macro-level structural factors that may shape changes in these countries' mediation behavior. It does so by drawing on Power Transition Theory (PTT) as a heuristic lens to assess the structural incentive environment for mediation. The two-level incentive framework developed here attempts to link the velocity of global and regional systemic changes to shifts in middle powers' mediation behavior. It posits that incentives to mediate are weakest when hierarchies are stable globally and regionally and grow as change accelerates at either level. A quantitative operationalization of structural change and a qualitative review of Türkiye's mediation engagement suggest that systemic turbulence may create conditions more conducive to mediation, but is not, on its own, sufficient to explain variation in mediation behavior. PTT's structural logic helps examine how systemic shifts may reshape the risks, opportunities, and incentives for middle-power mediation.

Keywords: Middle powers, conflict mediation, Turkish foreign policy, conflict resolution, power transition theory

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Introduction

A more complex global order is in the making. In this new configuration, power is more diffused, rules and norms are more contested, and power politics more often shape outcomes. At the same time, this transition has precipitated the emergence of new nodes of power across both regions and policy domains (Acharya 2017). A key driver of this process is China's rise and the growing great power rivalry between Beijing and Washington. As global change accelerates, regional orders are shifting amid two interrelated dynamics. First, active conflicts have proliferated, from Iran to Ukraine and from South Asia to the Horn of Africa. Second, traditional Western powers are perceived to be retrenching from parts of the global stage. At this time of profound systemic changes at the global and regional levels, several Global South

middle powers¹ such as Türkiye, Brazil, Malaysia, Qatar, Oman, and Indonesia, have adopted more proactive and ambitious foreign policies (Parlar Dal 2019; Elkahlout and Hedaya 2024). Their growing role in global affairs has extended to third-party conflict mediation.

Türkiye – the focus of the empirical section of this article – has sought to position itself as a mediator in the Russia-Ukraine war and other conflicts. So has Indonesia, which proposed playing a role in that war as part of G20-backed shuttle diplomacy (Khoirunnisa and Jubaidi 2024). Jakarta also played various roles in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in Lebanon, primarily through the United Nations (UN) (Setiawati 2024; Sugiyanto et al. 2024). Malaysia assumed a facilitation role in the protracted Southern Thailand peace dialogue from 2013 onwards and was involved in the process between the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) (Thalang 2017). Elsewhere, Brazil – besides its diplomatic initiatives in Latin America – co-drafted (with Türkiye) the 2010 Tehran Declaration on Iran’s nuclear program and proposed to play a role in the Russia-Ukraine war (Amorim 2010; Santos and Cravo 2014; Marcondes and de Almeida Silva 2023).

Gulf mediators – particularly Qatar and Oman, and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – have similarly ramped up their efforts in this space. Oman has played a backchannel role between the United States (US) and Iran and, in 2025, hosted the two sides for talks. Oman also hosted Yemeni truce negotiations and helped broker other deals between the Yemeni government and the Houthis over the last few years – among other initiatives (Chaziza and Lutmar 2025). Qatar has emerged as a key player in mediation and made international headlines with the intermediary role it assumed between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza war that reignited in October 2023. Qatar managed to mediate ceasefire pauses, hostage releases, and an eventual comprehensive ceasefire sealed in October 2025 (Elkahlout and Hedaya 2024; Minai 2026; Akpınar and Öztürk 2026).

The forms and approaches of engagement by Global South mediators span a wide spectrum. These range from participation in multilateral missions to informal, at times intelligence-led shuttle diplomacy, and from muscular-diplomatic mixes to humanitarian, developmental, and defense cooperation interventions combined with mediation diplomacy. I define “mediation diplomacy” as extending beyond the narrow confines of formal mediation to include a wider spectrum of diplomatic practices aimed at managing, mitigating or transforming conflicts. This broader definition, I argue, better captures the breadth of activities Global South mediators, including Türkiye, engage in. Mediation diplomacy thus also encompasses facilitation, hosting of talks, shuttle diplomacy, mediation offers, engagement in or through

1 I acknowledge that the terms Global South and middle powers are contested. For parsimony I avoid a detailed discussion of these terms and use “Global South middle powers” interchangeably with “non-Western middle powers” and “emerging middle powers” to describe states such as Türkiye. I acknowledge that this is not a neat nor uncontested classification. These terms are used in this article to distinguish countries from the traditional Western middle powers (such as Canada, Australia) to whom the label was initially applied mostly in the post-Cold War period. This categorization serves to highlight the distinct position and diplomatic practices of states outside the Western core that have increasingly engaged in mediation diplomacy practices over the course of the last decade or two (see Jordaan 2003; Jordaan 2017; Robertson and Carr 2023).

multilateral fora and conflict management interventions (e.g. humanitarian or confidence-building). This hybridity – both within and across cases – makes it difficult to place middle-power mediation initiatives in a single neat category. Furthermore, many Global South middle powers prefer bilateral or ad hoc minilateral formats (sometimes embedded within regional platforms) to working through multilateral organizations (Peter and Rice 2022; Panda and Park 2024).

The growing role of Global South mediators in armed conflicts has sparked new policy and scholarly debates. Scholars have examined the rising demand for these mediators in connection to shifts in geopolitics and more diversity in peacemaking perspectives (Ribeiro and Sanghrajka 2025), what new approaches rising powers from the Global South advance and their implications for peacebuilding (de Coning and Call 2017; Peter and Rice 2022), and how these countries may challenge or re-shape established liberal peacemaking approaches (Costantini and Hanau Santini 2022).

The present study is situated within scholarship on the supply-side determinants of Global South mediation behavior. More specifically, it contributes to a relatively underdeveloped area of scholarly work on macro-level factors shaping the behavior and choices of middle power states with ambitions in conflict mediation. A substantial body of research in conflict mediation has focused on micro-level factors such as process design, the conduct of mediation proceedings, domestic political conditions, party cohesion and consent, bargaining formats, and the timing and sequencing of negotiations (Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille 1991; Bercovitch and Jackson 2001; Bercovitch and Gartner 2006; Beardsley 2010). However, a more limited body of research that this article draws on demonstrates that mediation behavior and outcomes are also influenced by the broader systemic environment in which they occur. Zartman and Touval (1985) argued that mediation is not a neutral act but is embedded in power politics and a function of the leverage states seek to generate. Bercovitch and Schneider (2000) build on this by examining the structural determinants of mediator selection, finding, through quantitative analysis of international conflict data from 1950 to 1990, that hegemonic status – particularly that of the US – is a significant structural force determining which actors receive mediation mandates and how frequently mediation occurs. Quinn et al. (2006) similarly show that power asymmetries among crisis actors interact with mediator strategy and influence whether disputes end in agreement.

Several other scholars have also examined the role of macro-level factors in shaping the mediator roles of emerging middle powers. Peter and Rice (2022) argue – among other factors – that shifting power configurations determine the space occupied by non-Western mediators. Beriker (2016) assesses how structural forces create both opportunities and constraints for middle power mediation behavior, with a particular focus on Türkiye, while Beriker (2017), building on Touval (2003), conceptualizes middle power mediation as a deliberate foreign policy choice that enables states to generate political leverage through best alternatives to a negotiated agreement, issue linkages, and diverse actor networks. Hellmüller (2022) sheds light on how macro-level factors (in combination with micro-level factors) may affect UN

mediation. Other studies in this strand suggest that mediation choices and outcomes can be shaped by various structural factors, including the composition of mediator coalitions (Böhmelt 2011), the support or bias of major powers (Favretto 2009), the legitimacy of regional actors (Duursma 2020), and whether complementary institutional support, such as UN peacekeeping, is present or not (Clayton and Dorussen 2022).

The present study builds on this literature on macro-level factors influencing conflict mediation behavior. This paper does so by employing Power Transition Theory as a heuristic lens. It examines how the pace of change at the regional and global levels may incentivize or constrain the involvement of Global South middle powers in this policy space.

Power Transitions and Middle Power Mediation

Power Transition Theory (PTT), first articulated by A. F. K. Organski in 1958 and subsequently developed in various ways, helps analyze how systemic shifts may shape the constraints and incentives for Global South mediators. PTT conceptualizes the international system as hierarchical. Its central premise is that instability and great power war are most likely when a rising, dissatisfied power approaches power parity with the dominant state.² Peace, in this conception, is most likely when hierarchy in the order is clear and major powers are satisfied with the order established by the dominant state. While classical PTT acknowledges the presence of middle and small powers in the international system, it does not examine how power transitions at the top may affect the behavior of lower-ranking states. The main question explored here, then, is: How may structural parity shifts at the top of hierarchies change incentive and risk structures further down?

Since PTT's first conception, the theory has been extended, critiqued, modified, and subjected to rigorous empirical testing (Kim 1991; DiCicco and Levy 1999; Abdollahian and Kang 2008; Lebow and Valentino 2009; Koch 2021). Perhaps the most significant structural development of the theory came from Douglas Lemke in the early 2000s when he introduced the Multiple Hierarchy Model (MHM) (Lemke 2002). Lemke (2002) argued that PTT's logic should not be confined to the global hierarchy but also applied to regional subsystems, each with its own dominant power, regional status quo, and potential dissatisfied challengers. This theoretical extension has since been tested empirically across several regions and issues with largely confirmatory results (see Danilovic and Clare 2007; Kim and Kang 2010; Güneylioglu 2017).

For the present analysis, the value of PTT's logic lies less in its predictive function than in its structural insight that moments of increasing power parity unsettle patterns of order, status, and influence. In this sense, I argue that PTT's structural logic (and its later extension to

2 In their foundational empirical work statistically testing power transition theory, Organski and Kugler (1980) operationalized power using GNP and predicted that transitions occur when a challenger reaches approximately 80 per cent of the dominant state's capability. Additional refinements of PTT have included variables such as regime type, alliance systems and economic interdependence.

the regional level) offers a useful heuristic lens to assess macro-level structural factors shaping Global South middle powers' roles in conflict mediation. PTT is deployed here not as a formal explanatory model of mediation behavior, but as a structural heuristic for identifying how changes in global and regional hierarchies may alter the incentives for Global South mediators.

Bringing PTT into conversation with scholarship on middle power agency offers a valuable bridge. Middle power scholarship has been developed largely in the context of a settled US-led liberal order and applied initially to Global North middle power states such as Canada, Australia, and Scandinavian states. In these conceptions, middle powers were regarded as bridge-builders, consensus-seekers, backers of multilateral frameworks, and “good international citizens” (Jordaan 2003; Cooper 2013). Conflict mediation by these states was regarded as a form of “niche diplomacy,” a stabilizing practice usually carried out with (explicit or implicit) backing from the US or within multilateral (or other institutional) frameworks, including economic structures (Bercovitch and Schneider 2000).

More recent work on emerging middle powers, predominantly from the Global South, fundamentally challenges established middle-power frameworks. This – among other factors – led some scholars to argue that the middle power designation itself has become obsolete (Robertson and Carr 2023). The literature distinguishes between emerging and traditional middle powers, with the former group differing from the latter in adopting more proactive foreign policy orientations (Jordaan 2003; Jordaan 2017). Recent scholarship looking at empirical examples across the globe conceptualizes Global South middle powers not just as followers of great powers or as stabilizers of the existing order, but rather as actors seeking greater autonomy, room for maneuver, recognition, and status in an increasingly fragmented and contested international order (Parlar Dal 2019; Süssler and Alden 2025).

Middle powers usually lack the leverage and material resources to substantially alter conflict trajectories through coercive means (though at times they also do not shy away from military muscle-flexing). Under such conditions of limited leverage, middle powers attempt to turn constraint into strength by investing in creative diplomacy and diversifying the tools in their foreign policy arsenals. Mediation emerges as an important component of their foreign policy toolbox (Beriker 2017). Under conditions of fragmentation and unsettled orders, mediation becomes a “relatively lower cost diplomatic tool” (Süssler and Alden 2025: S35) through which middle powers pursue their interests. In that sense, Global South mediation is not divorced from interests: it is a purposive foreign policy choice through which these states simultaneously seek stability, recognition, and status in shifting orders.

Contours of a Theoretical Framework

Global and regional structural shifts alter the mediation incentives for middle powers. I use PTT's structural logic to theorize how. In the 2X2 framework presented in Table 1, slower and faster systemic change are used as broad qualitative categories to elucidate under which structural configurations mediation may become more or less likely. Slower change refers

to periods in which the global or regional orders remain broadly intact: relative power distributions are clear, alliance and alignment patterns remain stable, institutions are coherent, and conflicts or external shocks do not substantially affect the wider order. Faster change refers to periods when power shifts accelerate, great power or regional rivalry intensifies, alignments turn more contested, institutions break down or lose relevance, and conflicts or crises carry broader knock-on effects.

Based on this framework, four broad configurations emerge: First, under conditions of slower global and regional change, incentives for middle power mediation are weakest. In this condition, the regions in which middle powers are embedded are stable, global hierarchies are more predictable, and alliance structures are clearer. Under these conditions, middle powers face less pressure to pursue activist diplomacy. Second, when regional change is faster but global change remains slower, mediation becomes more likely as a means of containing instability in the immediate neighborhood. Third, when global change is faster, but the regional orders are more stable, mediation can serve as a form of hedging. Here, middle powers seek to preserve regional stability and protect their positions amid growing global systemic uncertainty. Finally, when both global and regional change are faster, the incentive to mediate is highest. Simultaneous turbulence creates both a stronger need and more opportunities for middle powers to manage crises and to seek recognition and expand their diplomatic footprints (see Table 1).

Table 1. Middle Power Mediation Incentive Framework

	Slow(er) Regional Change	Fast(er) Regional Change
Slow(er) Global Change	(1) Stable Global; Stable Regional Order <i>Low incentive</i> Stable, predictable hierarchies at the regional and global levels reduce incentives for Global South middle powers to engage in mediation diplomacy. Mostly low-key, order-supporting mediation through institutions	(2) Stable Global; Turbulent Regional Order <i>Moderate-high incentive</i> Mediation utilized to reduce regional uncertainties and reinforce visibility/legitimacy within stable global order. Mediation focused on regional stabilization
Fast(er) Global Change	(3) Turbulent Global; Stable Regional Order <i>Moderate-high incentive</i> Mediation geared toward locking in regional interests, hedging against global volatility and seeking opportunities elsewhere while regional order is stable. Mediation focused on hedging for opportunity globally and order-supporting regionally	(4) Turbulent Global; Turbulent Regional Order <i>High incentive</i> Dual turbulence increases both risks and opportunities. Middle powers pursue mediation both to guard against systemic volatility and to seek opportunities to expand influence. Highest propensity, visible order-supporting and status-seeking mediation

This raises the question of what may drive this logic and why shifts at both the global and regional levels may translate into mediation incentives for middle powers. At the global level, I argue that PTT's logic implies that the parity zone between a dominant state and a major power is not only a war threshold but also an uncertainty signal for secondary states lower in the hierarchy. As a rising challenger approaches the dominant state in capability (0.8 PTT threshold), the costs and benefits of existing alignments become less predictable for all states in the hierarchy. For middle power states, this creates four simultaneous global structural pressures: i) The patronage and security guarantees (if any) of the dominant state become less credible; ii) Great-power rivalry preoccupies/distracts established powers, increasing demand for alternative mediators; iii) The rising challenger begins to offer alternative opportunities that may help middle power states in advancing their interests and act more autonomously; and iv) The probability of a great power war onset at the top creates overall systemic uncertainty, engendering more hedging and balancing behavior among middle power states. For middle powers, rapid global change therefore raises both the costs of inaction and the potential rewards of proactive diplomatic engagement.

It is important to bring PTT's satisfaction variable into this discussion. While the argument requires further refinement, I contend that middle powers satisfied with the prevailing order are more likely to use mediation in ways that reinforce it. Less satisfied middle powers, by contrast, may use mediation to seek greater autonomy, status, and diplomatic space, hoping to tilt orders in their preferred direction. Yet because middle powers have limited leverage at the global level to enact change, the satisfaction variable may matter more regionally and remain largely epiphenomenal globally. This, however, would require further theorizing and operationalization, which falls outside the scope of this article.

The Case of Türkiye

Türkiye is an interesting within-case study for exploring the applicability of the framework developed in this article. It sits across several regional subsystems while also exercising global agency as a member of NATO and other multilateral frameworks. Over the last decade or so, Ankara has increasingly pursued a more proactive and autonomous foreign policy (Kutlay and Öniş 2021; Aslan 2024; Aydın-Düzgit, Kutlay, and Keyman 2026). Mediation diplomacy has been integral to Türkiye's evolving foreign policy. Ankara's efforts over the last two decades have spanned diverse regions and conflict zones, from the Balkans and South Caucasus to South Asia, and from Ukraine and Iran to more distant geographies in the Horn of Africa and East Asia. A closer look at these efforts can help in assessing the drivers of Turkish behavior in this policy space, including the structural conditions that may shape its incentives and constraints.

Türkiye's Mediator Role

Until the end of the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy was highly introspective, focused on carefully balancing between the US and the Soviet Union (Altunışık 2023). In the 1980s, Türkiye's only notable attempt at mediation was during the eight-year war between Iran

and Iraq. This laid the foundations for its subsequent mediation activism in the Middle East (Altunışık and Çuhadar 2010). Those efforts have been driven largely by concerns over spillovers such as refugee flows, border security, and ethnic tensions. The end of the Cold War created new opportunities, leading Ankara to adopt a more proactive foreign policy. Ankara initially assumed greater peacekeeping roles via UN and NATO operations (e.g., in Somalia and the Balkans) (United Nations 2022). The coalition government of then-Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz (1997-1999) began to develop a more multifaceted foreign policy outlook, with development aid and peacebuilding gaining prominence alongside Ankara's European Union (EU) membership aspirations (Sofos 2023).

A more explicitly activist mediation posture took shape after 2002 with the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government led by Türkiye's current President (and then Prime Minister) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In subsequent years, Türkiye facilitated indirect talks between Israel and Syria (in 2004 and 2008), supported de-escalation between Syria and Iraq (2008-2009), and undertook intra-Iraqi mediation to bring Sunni leaders into the 2005 elections (see Demirkıran and Demir 2023), with the stated goal to contribute to government stabilization following the 2003 US invasion. Ankara also facilitated talks between Hamas and Fatah after 2007 alongside Egyptian-led efforts on this front (Qarmout 2024).

Initially on its own and later with Brazil, Türkiye tried to mediate in the Iran nuclear file (2008-2010), culminating in the May 2010 joint declaration under which Iran agreed to deposit 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium in Türkiye in exchange for fuel. That effort later came to naught (Gürzel 2012; International Crisis Group 2012). Türkiye was also diplomatically engaged in the South Caucasus in the 2000s, particularly through its support for regional stability, territorial integrity, and energy connectivity through Azerbaijan and Georgia (especially the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline). This broader approach shaped Ankara's position and diplomatic engagement toward disputes involving Adjara, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh (see Aydın 2023).

From around 2009, Ankara began institutionalizing its mediation practice and became more active across new geographies. Then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu advanced an ambitious "zero problems with neighbors" vision (Oktav 2011) that blended humanitarian diplomacy with conflict management and sought to leverage Türkiye's cross-regional ties. Two Western Balkans trilateral tracks, one between Serbia and Bosnia and another between Croatia and Bosnia, led by Ankara, aimed at confidence-building and reconciliation. In these, Ankara reinforced its diplomatic activism by deploying development instruments and collaboration on some joint infrastructure projects such as the Sarajevo-Belgrade highway (OSW 2022). In Southeast Asia, Türkiye also supported the Bangsamoro peace process in the Philippines. The Humanitarian Relief Foundation (*İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı*, IHH), a Turkish NGO, initially leveraged its longstanding community ties as an entry point into the conflict (IHH 2014). Türkiye later officially joined the Third-Party Monitoring Team (2013) and, after a 2014 agreement, chaired the Independent Decommissioning Body

overseeing disarmament. In parallel, Ankara took a lead role in mediation diplomacy within multilateral organizations, co-chairing the UN Group of Friends of Mediation with Finland from 2010 onward as well as assuming various roles within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

During the Arab uprisings between 2010 and 2013, Ankara stepped up its mediation efforts across the Middle East. Initially, it sought to facilitate dialogue between governments and opposition groups in countries like Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen (Akpınar 2015; Demirkıran and Demir 2023). In time, however, Türkiye was increasingly perceived as too aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, thereby weakening its image as a neutral and credible mediator across much of the region. Its simultaneous military and diplomatic engagements in Syria and Libya blurred the lines between mediation, power projection, and brokerage at times.

The period between 2015 and 2021 saw a lull in Ankara's mediation diplomacy. In this period, Ankara focused more on addressing security concerns related to the Syrian war and domestic strains following the failed coup attempt in 2016. Ankara became more active again in the mediation space from 2021 onwards, when it began taking diplomatic steps to ease its regional isolation by pursuing normalization with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Greece, and Israel. Türkiye's role as an intermediary made international headlines in the Russia-Ukraine war. Working with the UN, Ankara helped broker the July 2022 Black Sea Grain Initiative and hosted a Joint Coordination Center in Istanbul to monitor its implementation (International Crisis Group 2022). Ankara also leveraged its channels to both Kyiv and Moscow to facilitate several prisoner exchanges and hosted the sides in Istanbul for multiple rounds of talks (Wódka 2023).

Türkiye also mediated in the Horn of Africa, where its longstanding ties to Somalia, which began with humanitarian diplomacy in 2011 and have since expanded to other fields, have given it leverage that has been helpful in its mediation engagements (Aguiar 2024). Ankara hosted talks between Somalia and Somaliland from 2013 onward, though these later stalled amid Somaliland's growing doubts about Turkish neutrality as relations between Türkiye and Somalia became more strategic. In 2024, Türkiye also mediated between Somalia and Ethiopia. Türkiye hosted rounds of talks that culminated in the Ankara Declaration, but implementation remained limited. Ankara's mediation portfolio in recent years has also extended to Gaza, where it used its ties to Hamas to support ceasefire diplomacy as well as to diplomatic initiatives between Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2025 (Gider 2026). Türkiye also engaged in intense diplomacy between Iran and the US to avert war in 2025 and reach an off-ramp after the onset of war in the Middle East in early 2026 (Sewell and Fraser 2026).

Operationalizing Systemic Change

In this section, I develop a quantitative systemic change metric based on parity to more systematically probe the 2X2 framework. At the global level, I compute the upward or downward change in parity between the US and China. At the regional level, I focus on the Middle East and examine annual changes in parity among leading rivals. To measure dyadic

parity, I use a simplified version of the Geometric Indicator of National Capability index (hereafter SGINC), which computes the geometric mean of each state's share of GDP and military expenditure³ within designated reference groups (see Kadera and Sorokin 2004). The core assumption here, following PTT logic, is that the closer two leading states are in capability (higher parity), the more unsettled the system becomes, which, in turn, shapes how middle powers respond.

For any state i at year t , SGINC is the geometric mean of that state's GDP and military expenditure share within each reference group R :

$$SGINC_{it}^R = \sqrt{s_{GDP,it}^R \times s_{MIL,it}^R}$$

where:

$$s_{GDP,it}^R = \frac{GDP_{it}}{\sum_{k \in R} GDP_{kt}}$$

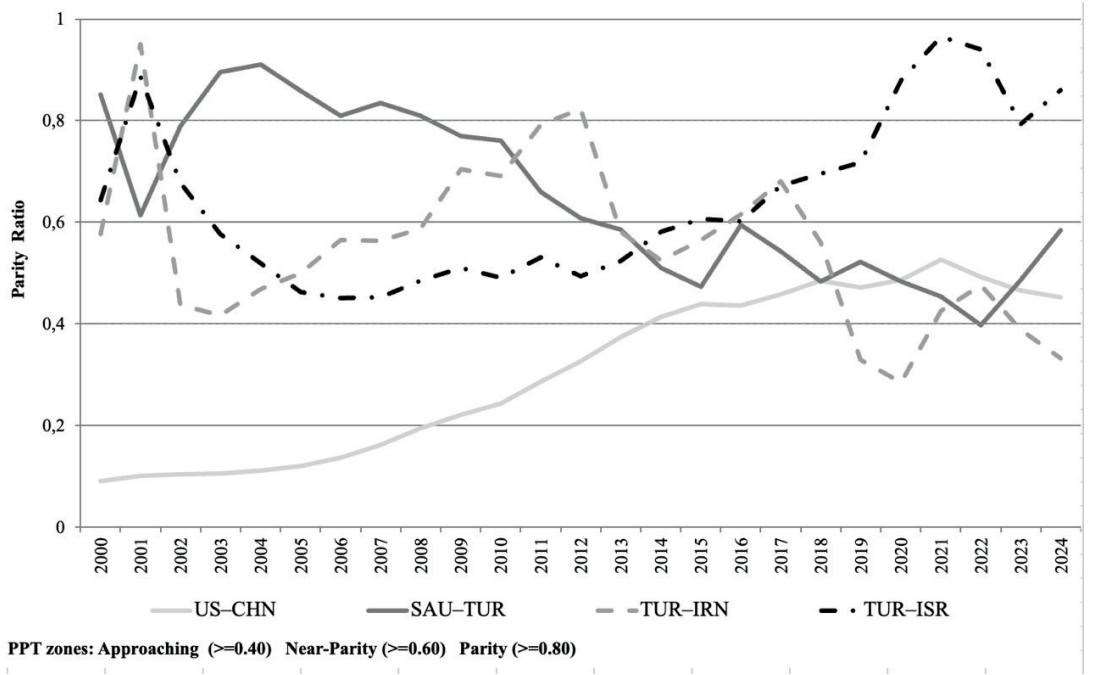
is calculated for nominal GDP (current USD) and $s_{MIL,it}^R$ is calculated analogously for military expenditure.

Following Organski and Kugler (1980), dyadic parity between two states i and j is calculated as the ratio of the smaller to the larger SGINC score:

$$Parity_{ijt} = \frac{\min(SGINC_{it}^R, SGINC_{jt}^R)}{\max(SGINC_{it}^R, SGINC_{jt}^R)}$$

A value of 1 indicates matching capability, and a value approaching 0 indicates preponderance or diverging capability. As shown in Figure 1 below, for the global level, I calculate a fixed US-China dyadic SGINC parity, year by year. For the regional level, I first compute the full SGINC scores for 24 Middle East states (Arab League members + Türkiye + Israel). Saudi Arabia and Türkiye consistently rank first and second, respectively, every year. They are the leading regional dyad. Next, consistent with PTT's logic, I calculate parity scores for this leading regional dyad {SAU-TUR} and add two of Türkiye's regional rivals with whom Ankara has been competing for influence in the region: Israel and Iran. The rationale is that, at the regional level, sub-rivalries beyond the leading dyad may also matter. PTT literature identifies ≥ 0.8 as the parity or danger zone where war onset becomes more likely. I classify the ≥ 0.4 zone as "approaching" parity and the ≥ 0.60 zone as "near parity". The 0.6 threshold is used here only as a descriptive sub-threshold within the broader medium-change category. In the period classification below, parity scores below 0.4 are treated as corresponding to slow change, scores from 0.4 to below 0.8 as medium change and scores at or above 0.8 as fast change. Results are demonstrated in Figure 1.

3 GDP data source: World Bank WDI (NY.GDP.MKTP.CD); military expenditure data source: SIPRI via World Bank (MS.MIL.XPND.CD), both in current USD, 2000-2024 (World Bank 2025a; World Bank 2025b). Replication data for this article can be accessed here: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/GRE48Q>

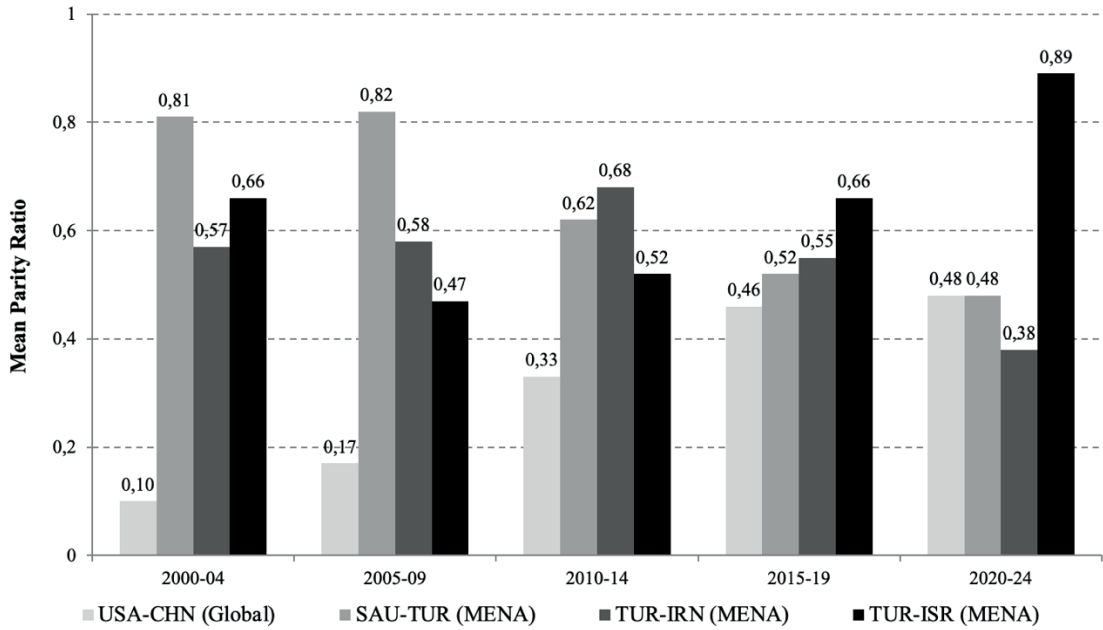
Figure 1. Parity Trajectory at Global and Regional (Middle East) Levels, 2000-2024

The 25 years (2000-2024) under examination are then divided into equal 5-year time windows to assess shifts in parity levels. For the global level, I take the simple mean of the US and China's parity scores over each year in the 5-year window.

$$\mu_G = \frac{1}{5} \sum_{t=Y}^{Y+4} p_{US,CHN,t}$$

For the regional level, the same window mean is computed separately for each of the three dyads. I chose to portray these separately as lumping them together into a single mean obscured the variation in structural pressures generated by each dyadic pair (see Figure 2).

$$\mu_{R,d} = \frac{1}{5} \sum_{t=Y}^{Y+4} p_{d,t}, \quad d \in \{SAU/TUR, TUR/IRN, TUR/ISR\}$$

Figure 2. Global and Regional (Middle East) Dyadic 5-Year Mean Parity Scores (2000-2024)

PPT zones: Approaching (≥ 0.40) Near-Parity: (≥ 0.60) Parity: (≥ 0.80)

Table 2 below shows 2X2 framework classifications for every 5 years. The global axis is operationalized as the mean of parity levels between the US and China across five-year windows. At the regional level, I compute the 5-year mean parity for each dyad and take the maximum mean across the three dyads as the regional axis value (highlighted in black in Table 2). I do so on the premise that substantial convergence/parity on a single dyad is a sufficient condition for generating regional systemic pressures that induce changes in middle power behavior. Based on the threshold logic mentioned above, it makes sense to add a third, medium layer to my 2X2 framework. I classify parity scores at or above 0.8 as fast change, between 0.4 and 0.8 as medium change, and below 0.4 as slow change (see Table 2).

Table 2. Global and Regional (Middle East) Parity Means and Structural Shift Classifications (2000-2024)

Years/ μ	US-CHN	Global Change	SAU-TUR	TUR-IRN	TUR-ISR	Max dyad	Regional Change
2000-2004	0.103	Slow	0.812	0.570	0.661	0.812	Fast
2005-2009	0.167	Slow	0.816	0.584	0.472	0.816	Fast
2010-2014	0.329	Slow (rising)	0.625	0.683	0.524	0.683	Medium
2015-2019	0.458	Medium	0.523	0.550	0.658	0.658	Medium
2020-2024	0.485	Medium	0.481	0.382	0.888	0.888	Fast

This operationalization uses parity levels at the global and regional scales as a proxy for structural pressure in each order. Higher parity ratios indicate dyads in which the capability gap narrows. In turn, the incentive environment for all actors in that hierarchy shifts. Under such conditions, middle powers face stronger incentives to recalibrate their foreign policies to manage heightened uncertainty and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Let me now turn to discussing whether the qualitative review of Türkiye's mediation diplomacy engagement squares with the framework's expectation.

Squaring the Circle: Systemic Change and Turkish Mediation Diplomacy

Mapping the qualitative review of the Turkish mediation case onto the 2X2 framework suggests three main findings. First, Türkiye's mediation diplomacy appears to have been particularly responsive to regional change. This is evident in the 2000-2014 period, when global change was relatively slow, while structural shifts in the Middle East were more pronounced. Ankara's mediation diplomacy was Middle East-focused in this period, including its role in Israel-Syria indirect talks, Syria-Iraq de-escalation, intra-Iraqi facilitation, Hamas-Fatah dialogue, and the Iran nuclear file. This indicates that, for middle powers like Türkiye, mediation diplomacy may be more responsive to regional structural shifts. Turkish mediation around the Arab uprisings of 2010-2011 further reinforces this point. Parity at the global level remained below the 0.4 threshold. However, it rose significantly during the 2010-2014 period, as growth slowed in the US but remained comparatively strong in China, narrowing the relative capability gap. That notable shift-in-the-making may have played a complementary role in shaping Ankara's reading of the emerging order as one in which middle powers would have greater room to maneuver, including in the mediation space.

Second, structural change alone does not appear to be a sufficient explanatory variable. The 2015-2019 period is particularly revealing in this regard. This was a period when parity-driven structural markers were above the 0.4 threshold globally and the 0.6 threshold regionally. The structural environment appeared conducive to mediation. Furthermore, conflict-count data by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) analyzed suggest that both global and regional conflicts increased markedly during this period compared to the previous three periods (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Davies et al. 2025; Pettersson 2025). Globally, the count rose from an average of 36 in the three five-year periods between 2000-2014 to 54 in 2015-2019; and regionally (Middle East), from an average of 6 to 13.8 in the same timeframe. That Turkish mediation did not track structural shifts and the nominal increase in armed conflicts in this period is likely attributable to several factors: The Syrian civil war at Türkiye's doorstep escalated into a major arena of geopolitical contestation, more substantially drawing in Russia, Iran, and the US. Syria appears to have taken up a big chunk of Türkiye's diplomatic bandwidth in these five years. Second, domestically, Ankara also had to prioritize the fallout from the 2016 coup attempt and a renewed escalation between the Turkish military and the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This period also saw the deadliest terrorist attacks in Turkish Republic's history, carried out by Islamic State (ISIS) militants. At the same time, Ankara's growing regional isolation, together with the perception

that it was too closely aligned with Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated actors in the Middle East, likely narrowed the space available for it to act as a broker. These factors appear to have suppressed the structural conditions conducive to mediation diplomacy activism.

Third, while the framework posits that moments of combined regional and global turbulence should be more conducive to visible mediation activism, the evidence here is only partly confirmatory. The clearest increase in Türkiye's mediation engagement comes in the most recent period, starting in 2021, when Ankara pursued normalization with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Greece, and Israel, while also becoming more active in the Russia-Ukraine war, Somalia-Ethiopia talks, Gaza ceasefire diplomacy, Afghanistan-Pakistan mediation, and Iran-US diplomacy. However, the "fast-fast" configuration is not observed in the systemic operationalization developed above. The 2020-2024 period exhibits medium global change and fast regional change. It, therefore, remains unclear whether the surge in mediation was driven by the global systemic configuration, the regional one, a combination of the two, or by other intervening factors. A further caveat is that regional change is measured here specifically for the Middle East. This helps capture changes in Türkiye's immediate regional environment. Still, it cannot, on its own, explain Ankara's mediation activism in other theatres, such as the Black Sea, the Horn of Africa, or South Asia. Further refinements could address this by adding other regional sub-systems and alternative measures of systemic change to assess whether fast-fast configurations correspond to marked increases in mediation diplomacy.

Furthermore, the surge in the last period coincided with Ankara's post-2021 foreign policy recalibration and repositioning, whereby it normalized ties with former adversaries after a period of regional isolation. Structural factors likely played a role in this recalibration. Growing regional and global turbulence may have increased the costs of isolation, weakened the predictability of existing alignments, and created new openings for diplomatic engagement, with mediation diplomacy emerging as a vehicle in Ankara's broader foreign policy recalibration to seek more autonomy and build flexible alliances.

The analysis suggests that there may be a causal pathway linking global and regional systemic change to patterns of Turkish mediation diplomacy. This may work by reshaping the opportunity and risk structures within which middle powers operate. The Turkish case indicates that systemic change may create a more conducive habitat for middle power mediation, but, on its own, does not explain variation in mediation diplomacy. Structural change may generate the broader context of possibility, but whether that context is translated into mediation activism depends on other intervening factors. In this sense, systemic change is better conceptualized as a permissive factor that expands incentives and opportunities for mediation. Whether a middle power state acts on those likely depends on other factors such as domestic political constraints, elite choices, alliance credibility, and regional positioning. The 2015-2019 period demonstrates how such factors can suppress engagement despite favorable structural conditions. This suggests that the framework developed in this article is useful not as a direct predictor of mediation behavior, but as a factor influencing whether the structural conditions are more conducive to it.

This article does not quantify or systematize the analysis of PTT's satisfaction variable. Qualitatively, at the regional level, Ankara's mediation appears to have generally been of a more order-supporting nature, concerned with preventing destabilizing spillovers, including, for instance, in relation to conflicts in Iran, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. It has generally preferred as little disruption as possible in its immediate neighborhood, and its mediation interventions assumed a more preventive character out of necessity. In geographies further afield, Ankara appears to have adopted a more autonomy/status-seeking posture, with mediation diplomacy representing one of several avenues that merit further inquiry. Future research could test and refine the framework developed in this article by operationalizing the satisfaction variable, incorporating more systematic data on mediation diplomacy, and extending the analysis to other middle power states as well as different regional settings.

Conclusion

This article makes four key contributions to our understanding of how macro-level factors influence the behavior of middle powers in mediation. Firstly, it shows that the structural logic of Power Transition Theory is a useful lens through which to examine how changes at the top of global and regional hierarchies influence the incentives of middle power mediators. As the fragmentation of global and regional orders accelerates, uncertainty increases and the credibility of alliance commitments decreases. In such circumstances, middle powers are increasingly turning to mediation to manage uncertainty, expand their diplomatic maneuver room, and pursue greater autonomy, recognition, and status. The article presents a 2X2 framework to analyze how global and regional changes may interact in shaping these incentives. In doing so, it engages PTT, which traditionally focuses on dominant powers, challengers, and war onset, in dialogue with scholarship on middle powers and mediation.

Secondly, the article presents a quantitative operationalization of systemic change at global and regional levels. This is based on a simplified version of the Geometric Indicator of National Capability, which combines a state's share of GDP and military expenditure in order to measure capability parity among leading dyads. The classification thresholds identified provide a useful baseline for examining the 2X2 framework. This demonstrates that movement towards capability parity between two leading dyads can be a useful proxy for assessing systemic shifts.

Thirdly, the empirical discussion of Turkey's mediation activism suggests that its behavior may be responsive to structural shifts. Periods of heightened uncertainty appear to engender more conducive conditions for mediation. However, the Turkish case also shows that structural factors alone are insufficient to explain variation in mediation behavior over time. For example, the lull in Turkish mediation between 2015 and 2019, despite favorable structural conditions, suggests that domestic pressures, regional positioning and credibility deficits can suppress activity in this policy area. According to this view, systemic change is best understood as a permissive rather than determinative condition through which mediation

becomes a more attractive foreign policy instrument for middle powers, increasing their willingness to devote greater resources to it. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of macro-level factors in mediation research and, more broadly, in the study of middle power agency. The structural lens can shed light on the factors that shape the behavior of these states, as well as on the reasons why and the times at which diplomatic opportunities emerge, and which actors are well-placed to seize them.

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Notes

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AI Statement

This article made limited use of AI tools for language polishing (ChatGPT 5.4, 25-28 April 2026).