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DIRECTIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF TURKEY'S REGIONAL FOREIGN POLICY

One of the characteristic features of today's multipolar world system is the lack of long-term foreign policy analysis. This is largely due to the fact that the actors in the current global system are multilateral and the course of events cannot be fully shaped in their favour. However, the real reason is that 'change' and 'transformation' are two of the most fundamental concepts of twentieth century world politics. Moreover, it is no coincidence that these two concepts are the ones most frequently used in introductions to post-2000 foreign policy analysis. This new situation concerns small and medium-sized or underdeveloped and developing countries as well as developed and great powers. Therefore, foreign policy analysis needs to be reviewed frequently. Located in the Middle East, one of the most unstable and tense regions of the world, Turkey inevitably has to be constantly involved in global and regional changing situations. Due to this necessity, Turkish foreign policy has entered a phase of rapid change/transformation. This article assesses the new directions and features of Turkey's foreign policy and its implications. In this context, the motives of Turkey's foreign policy, especially in the Middle East and Turkic world in the new world order that is emerging as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war and what role was/is given to Turkey in this process of change will be examined. To this end, after identifying the main parameters that shaped this period, the policies pursued in the Middle East and the Turkic World will be assessed. The choice of Middle East and Turkic World as the field of application in this paper is related to Turkey's geopolitical, economic, strategic position in the region and its common historical and cultural memory with the countries in the region. In the following, the basic principles of Turkey's foreign policy will be examined and then the implementation of these principles in the Middle East and Turkic world will be analysed.

Key words: Turkic world, Middle East, geopolitics, Turkish foreign policy, hegemony.

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Түркияның аймақтық сыртқы саясатының бағыттары мен ерекшеліктері

Қазіргі көпполярлы әлемдік жүйенің бір белгісі – сыртқы саясаттың ұзақ мерзімді талдауының жоқтығы. Бұл көбінесе қазіргі жаһандық жүйенің субъектілерінің көпжақты болуымен және оқиғалардың барысын олардың пайдасына толығымен қалыптастыру мүмкін еместігімен түсіндіріледі. Дегенмен, оның нақты себебі «өзгеріс» және «трансформация» ХХ ғасырдағы әлемдік саясаттың ең іргелі екі тұжырымдамасы болып табылады. Оның үстіне бұл екі терминнің 2000 жылдан кейінгі сыртқы саяси талдауға кіріспелерде жиі қолданылатыны кездейсоқ емес. Бұл жаңа жағдай шағын және орта немесе дамымаған және дамушы елдерге, сондай-ақ дамыған және ұлы державаларға қатысты. Сондықтан сыртқы саяси талдауды жиі қайталап отыру қажет. Әлемдегі ең тұрақсыз және шиеленісті аймақтардың бірі Таяу Шығыста орналасқан Түркия жаһандық және аймақтық өзгермелі жағдайларға үнемі араласуы керек. Осы қажеттілікке байланысты түрік сыртқы саясаты жылдам өзгеру немесе трансформация кезеңіне енді. Бұл мақалада Түркияның сыртқы саясатының жаңа бағыттары мен ерекшеліктері мен оның салдары бағаланады. Осы тұрғыда Ресей-Украина соғысының нәтижесінде қалыптасып келе жатқан жаңа әлемдік тәртіптегі түрік сыртқы саясатының, әсіресе Таяу Шығыстағы және түркі әлеміндегі мотивтері және Түркияға қандай рөл жүктелді, бұл өзгеріс процесінде қарастырылатын болады. Осы мақсатта осы кезеңде қалыптасқан негізгі параметрлер анықталғаннан кейін Таяу Шығыс пен түркі әлемінде жүргізіліп жатқан саясатқа баға беріледі. Осы мақалада қолдану саласы ретінде Таяу Шығыс аймағы мен түркі әлемін таңдау Түркияның аймақтағы геосаяси, экономикалық, стратегиялық жағдайымен және аймақ елдерімен ортақ тарихи-мәдени жадымен байланысты.

Одан әрі Түркияның сыртқы саясатының негізгі қағидаттары қарастырылып, бұл ұстанымдардың Таяу Шығыс пен түркі әлемінде жүзеге асырылуы сараланады.

Түйін сөздер: Түркі әлемі, Таяу Шығыс, геосаясат, Түрік сыртқы саясаты, гегемония.

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Направления и особенности региональной внешней политики Турции

Одной из характерных черт сегодняшней многополярной мировой системы является отсутствие долгосрочного анализа внешней политики. Во многом это объясняется тем, что акторы нынешней глобальной системы являются многосторонними и ход событий не может быть полностью сформирован в их пользу. Однако истинная причина этого заключается в том, что «изменение» и «трансформация» – два наиболее фундаментальных понятия мировой политики XX века. Более того, не случайно, что именно эти два понятия наиболее часто используются во введениях к анализу внешней политики после 2000 года. Эта новая ситуация касается малых и средних или слаборазвитых и развивающихся стран, а также развитых и великих держав. Поэтому анализ внешней политики необходимо часто пересматривать. Расположенная на Ближнем Востоке, одном из самых нестабильных и напряженных регионов мира, Турция неизбежно должна постоянно вовлечена в глобальные и региональные изменения ситуаций. В связи с этой необходимостью турецкая внешняя политика вступила в фазу быстрых изменений/трансформации. В данной статье оцениваются новые направления и особенности внешней политики Турции и ее последствия. В этом контексте будут рассмотрены мотивы внешней политики Турции, особенно на Ближнем Востоке и Тюркском мире в условиях нового мирового порядка, который формируется в результате Российско-Украинской войны и какая роль была/есть отведена Турции в этом процессе перемен. С этой целью, после определения основных параметров, формировавших в этот период, будет дана оценка политике, проводимой на Ближнем Востоке и в Тюркском мире. Выбор ближневосточного региона и Тюркского мира в качестве поля применения в данной статье связан с геополитическим, экономическим, стратегическим положением Турции в регионе и ее общей исторической и культурной памятью со странами региона. Далее будут рассмотрены основные принципы внешней политики Турции, а затем проанализирована реализация этих принципов на Ближнем Востоке и Тюркском мире.

Ключевые слова: Тюркский мир, Ближний Восток, геополитика, внешняя политика Турции, гегемония.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, discussions surrounding globalization have gained momentum. Events such as the 2001 terrorist attack, economic challenges, and the surge in irregular migration following the Arab Spring have further amplified the rhetoric of regionalism and nationalism. In this rapidly changing international system, states are compelled to establish and prioritize their foreign policy objectives. This raises the question of whether regional powers like Turkey should prioritize common values or national interests in their foreign policy approach. Turkey, positioned geopolitically and driven by self-protection and international efficacy, has found proponents of regionalism and nationalism within its borders. This study argues that Turkey, as a regional actor, should strategically focus on the Turkic world to enhance its power and security, ultimately assuming the role of a «regional

leader» by fostering common values and interests.

Firstly, it is important to clarify the concept of the Turkic world. In his work «History of Turkism», Yusuf Akchura, who was deeply influenced by the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, one of the pioneers of Turkism, delineated the borders of the Turkic world as follows: «When we refer to the Turks, we encompass all tribes descended from the race that adherents of ethnography, philology, and history sometimes refer to as the Turkic-Tatar or Turkic-Tatar-Mongolian. These tribes share remarkably similar customs, languages, and intertwined historical experiences» (Akcura, 2021). In this context, the Turkic world does not encompass all Turkic peoples but specifically refers to Turkic republics capable of pursuing independent foreign policies. The rationale behind this selection is that these republics have established frameworks conducive to cooperation based on shared values and interests. The included states are the Republic

of Turkey, Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which emerged following the collapse of the USSR. Citizens of these states identify as Turks and belong to diverse tribal communities within the same nation, speaking various dialects and accents of the same language. Despite historical divisions between Eastern and Western Turks, as highlighted by Zia Gökalp, the commonalities between them persist.

Turkey's foray into the Turkic world commenced with the independence of the Turkic republics after the dissolution of the USSR. Supported by allies such as the United States and other Western countries, the vision of extending Turkish influence «From the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China» became prominent during this period. However, the success of this initiative was hindered by factors such as Russian influence over the states and their skepticism towards Turkey, which was perceived as a U.S. ally. Moreover, Turkey's inability to fully integrate into the region due to the Russian Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) posed additional challenges. Nonetheless, progress was made towards Turkish integration, evident in the initiation of Turkish summits in Ankara in 1992. Subsequently, in 2009, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (CCTS, Türk Kenesi) was established through the Nakhchivan Agreement involving Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan later joined the council, followed by Hungary as an observer country. Most recently, Turkmenistan participated as an observer in an online meeting held in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the 8th summit in November 2021, the Turkic Council underwent a name change to the Organization of Turkic States, indicating a commitment to expanding cooperation.

Turkey's geopolitical orientation towards the Turkic world is primarily centered on strengthening political, economic, military, and cultural relations. It is important to note that Turkey does not seek imperialistic objectives, which is in line with both international law and the fundamental principles of its foreign policy, emphasizing «Peace at home, peace in the world». As a regional power, Turkey endeavors to foster shared values and interests within the Turkic world by adopting a strategy of «regional leadership», thereby augmenting its power potential within the international system. The unity of Turkic states holds the promise of surpassing the strength of any individual nation-state, thus amplifying the resonance of Turkey's shared interests and values

with its union members on the global stage.

The objective of this research is to establish a theoretical framework that elucidates Turkey's role as a regional leader in the Turkic world, emphasizing why the Turkic world represents the ultimate destination for Turkey. The research methodology entails a comparative analysis of Turkey's regional hegemony strategy in the Middle East between 2002 and 2016, and the regional leadership strategies observed within the Turkic world from 2016 to 2021. The research aims to address the next questions:

- Does the Turkic world serve as the geopolitical key to transforming Turkey into a regional power?
- Should Turkey embrace «regional leadership» as a strategic approach for its foreign policy?

In this context, our hypothesis posits that Turkey will enhance its regional geopolitical influence through the Organization of Turkic States, with which it shares common values and interests. This approach is anticipated to facilitate Turkey's increased efficacy on the international stage. The proposed strategy for Turkey's implementation is Sandra Destradi's regional proposal titled «Regional Powers and Their Strategies: Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership», as expounded in the article «Regional Leadership». Thus, the initial part of the article will examine this work, providing the theoretical foundation for the research, and endeavoring to explain the concepts of «imperialism», «regional hegemony» and «regional leadership».

The subsequent section will explore Turkey's foreign policy directions during the historical period spanning from 1923 to 2002, aiming to identify key trends. The third part will scrutinize Turkey's foreign policy between 2002 and 2016, utilizing three Middle Eastern states (Iraq, Syria, and Egypt) as case studies. The discussion will assess the success of Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East while employing Destradi's «regional hegemony» strategy in conjunction with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. Finally, the article will explicate the reasons behind Turkey's geopolitical focus on the Turkic world from 2016 to 2021.

Concerning Turkey's foreign policy, the strategy adopted towards the Turkic world is defined as «regional leadership». The Organization of Turkic States is identified as the pivotal instrument to assume the role of a regional leader. Consequently, the article aims to demonstrate the primacy among Turkey's three identities Westernization, Islam,

and Turkism and explore whether strategic pursuit should gravitate towards regional hegemony or regional leadership.

Theoretical Foundation: Regional Hegemony and Regional Leadership

In addition to classical theories of international relations such as realism, liberalism, and Marxism, critical theory has gained popularity, particularly since the 1970s when the perception of a decline in U.S. power emerged. Critical theories argue that classical theories of international relations are insufficient to explain contemporary issues and primarily focus on the concept of power. Within critical theory, the notion of «hegemony» arises, referring to dominance or supremacy, although its precise meaning varies within the social sciences. Prominent writers like Abram Fimo, Kenneth Organski, Immanuel Wallerstein, and George Modelski have shed light on this topic by emphasizing the rise, fall, and shift of hegemonic power. One commonality among these authors is their identification of a single hegemonic state within the international system engaged in a struggle for hegemony with a closely aligned state.

For example, Wallerstein was the first to analyze the modern world-system in his book on the emergence of capitalist systems in the 16th century, using Portugal as an example. According to this perspective, Portugal became the first European state to introduce a capitalist system, and its economic advantage was a significant driving force behind Portuguese geographical discoveries during that period (Wallerstein, 2015). Subsequently, Spain, France, Britain, and the United States followed suit. Modelski suggests that a third major power benefiting from conflicts between great powers can become a hegemon. In the late 17th century, for instance, when the Netherlands held dominance, their rivalry with England weakened both states, ultimately leading to France's emergence as the dominant power of the 18th century (Modelski, 1978). In addition to hegemony, there are other definitions of states within the international system that possess the potential to influence other states to varying degrees. The foreign policy of a state can impact the entire international arena or a specific region. In this context, states can be classified as great powers, superpowers, or regional powers. Great powers or superpowers possess global influence, while regional powers are limited to exerting influence within their specific regional sphere (Buzan, 2003). Another definition of regional power suggests that

the responsibility of a state acting as a regional power lies in maintaining regional peace and order (Flemes, 2010). Sandra Destradi, in her 2010 article «Regional Powers and Their Strategies: Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership» focused on countries such as China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, not only as emerging economic powers but also as systemic powers. Destradi highlights how these regional powers, which emerged after the Cold War, significantly influence regional interactions, shaping the degree of cooperation, conflict, and institutionalization. Her work aimed to define ideal-typical strategies that these states could pursue in their relations with neighboring countries. Destradi identifies the following conditions for becoming a regional power: (Destradi, 2010).

- Belonging to the considered region;
- Demonstrating superior power capabilities;
- Exerting some level of influence over the region.

In this context, Destradi listed the strategies that regional powers should follow, namely leadership, hegemony, and imperialism. An imperial strategy, based on the unilateral use of military force, is considered imperialistic. On the other end of the spectrum, if it is a cooperative strategy aimed at achieving common goals, it is referred to as leadership. Hegemony represents a strategy that falls between these two extremes. According to Destradi, the United States, being a global power, often resorts to an imperial strategy. Similarly, regional powers adhering to an imperial strategy may also resort to the threat of military intervention if subordinate states do not comply with their will. Otherwise, they risk losing their dominant position.

While imperialism can be relatively easily defined, there is no widely accepted definition of hegemony in the literature on international relations. Hegemony is defined as «the obvious power of one state over others to establish political and military dominance» (Dağ, 2016). The concept of hegemony emerged in the 1970s as a concept in international political economy. Many sociologists have defined hegemony differently and examined the causes and consequences of hegemony. William Robertson analyzed hegemony in four parts: «as international domination», «as state hegemony», «as a result of consensus» and «as leadership exercised by historical blocs in a specific world order» (Robertson, 2016).

On the other hand, regional hegemony can be divided into «dependent regional hegemony» and «autonomous regional hegemony». Dependent regional hegemony derives its power from global

hegemony and good relations with international organizations. Autonomous regional hegemony, on the other hand, often conflicts with these actors and relies on its own identity or historical background. Turkey is dependent, while Iran can serve as an example of autonomous regional hegemony (Jane, 2020). According to Destradi, referencing Gramsci, hegemony is the ability to convince subordinates that they are acting based on consensus. According to Gramsci, hegemony is a form of domination, even if it avoids the use of force. To depict power, Gramsci draws inspiration from Machiavelli's «centaur metaphor»: like a centaur, a half-human, half-animal creature, power is always dualistic. To the extent that the consensual aspect of power is at the forefront, hegemony dominates. However, there is also hidden coercion involved (Gramsci, 1986).

Charles, one of the leading figures in the debates on hegemony, argues that only a state that clearly surpasses others in material capabilities can stabilize the global economy. A hegemon, who creates a stable environment for its own development, acts out of necessity initially and also invests in stabilizing the system. Other states benefit from the stability created by this hegemon without sharing the expenses. Such a hegemon is described as «benign» (Destradi, 2010). Today, the negative connotation of the concept of hegemony is based on Gilpin.

Gilpin's neorealist approach, based on the maximization of individual utility assumed by international actors, strips hegemony of its benevolent position, making it an actor pursuing national interests. In this case, the hegemonic state considers stability and peace as secondary tasks and, in return, gains benefits from the states that benefit from it. The states in question had to submit because they were too weak to mount effective resistance. This type of hegemon is referred to as «coercive» (Gilpin, 1981).

In contrast to the definitions mentioned above, Destradi proposes three distinct strategies for hegemony. The first form is «hard» hegemony. This hegemonic strategy is based on the contradiction between the hegemon's expressed rhetorical commitment to common goals and its intention to act unilaterally and establish a form of dominance over subordinate states. In this context, secondary states are coerced, through sanctions, threats, or political pressure, to change their practices, albeit to a lesser extent under the influence of incentives. Another hegemonic strategy is the «intermediary hegemony». Here, the hegemon focuses on providing material goods and rewards to secondary

states to coerce them into compliance. Moreover, norms and values are shared to some extent between the hegemonic and subordinate states. The final strategy, «soft hegemony», relates to a strategy that resembles leadership to a large extent. However, unlike leadership, the goals and interests of the hegemon still take precedence (Destradi, 2010).

In this research, Destradi differentiates between hegemony and leadership and argues that there is a fundamental difference in the methods pursued by states. A hegemon seeks to achieve its goals by considering its own interests and presenting them alongside the interests of subordinate states. A leader guides a group of states in creating and achieving common goals. A regional leader, like a regional hegemon, may change the values and interests of its followers, but in turn, this change affects the leader itself. Thus, leaders and followers share a common purpose. Additionally, in leadership, as opposed to hegemony, mutual benefit exists rather than coercion. The key characteristics of a leader can be identified as follows: (Guy, 2018)

- Leadership is a process.
- Leadership involves influence.
- Leadership occurs in a group context.
- Leadership is aimed at achieving a goal.

Destradi emphasizes that international/regional leadership can be carried out in two ways. The first is leadership initiated by the leader, and the second is leadership initiated by the followers. However, Destradi highlights that leadership relationships initiated by followers cannot be a strategy that regional authority should adopt.

The Key Principles and Transformation of Turkey's Foreign Policy (1923-2002)

The Republic of Turkey, if its geopolitical position and correct policies are implemented, can play a role in the international system as a hegemonic power. On the other hand, the foundations of Turkey's foreign policy were briefly defined by its founding leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as «westernization (modernization)», «anti-revisionist» and «peace at home, peace in the world» (Aydın, 1999). In other words, the goal of young Turkey is not to create an empire or expand its territory, but to build a strong, stable, and peace-loving nation within the framework of the National Pact. This country is the main building block of the Republic, not a conjunctural and temporary.

In this context, the question of Turkey's accession to NATO, which perceived a threat from the USSR in the early stages of the Cold War, can

be considered. Turkey's accession to NATO is evidence that it not only continues the inherited system of alliances of *realpolitik* but also continues to align itself with the West. Furthermore, its declaration of seeking EU membership in 1959 was driven by economic reasons as well as the tendency to see itself as a Western state.

Moreover, in the context of «peace at home, peace in the world», which is one of the key principles, Turkey until the 2000s preferred to stay away from the internal problems of its neighbors, particularly the states of the Middle East (Oğuzlu, 2021). The fact that it kept a distance from Middle East issues during this period can be explained by Turkey's western identity. For example, in the 1970s, debates on whether to join the Organization of Islamic Cooperation or not were also oriented towards identity.

Turkey, both in line with its national interests and within the framework of Western foreign policy, integrated with the West. One example of this integration is the Arab-Israeli wars. Turkey initially defended the territorial integrity of Palestine but recognized Israel, established in 1948, in less than a year and became the first Muslim state to send and receive mutual ambassadors in 1952. In the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, Turkey maintained neutrality. Ankara's position should be evaluated within the framework of *realpolitik*, considering the support provided by Muslim Arab states to Damascus for the transfer of Hatay to Syria (Karpas, 1975). In addition to the Hatay issue, it should be noted that despite the close position of Arab states towards the USSR, Israel and Turkey are members of the Western bloc. Turkey adhered to this position not only in the first Arab-Israeli war but also in the second Arab-Israeli war (1956) for the same reasons. In the 1960s, Turkey began to distrust the West due to the Cyprus issue and it started to change its foreign policy. In addition to the Cyprus issue, the economic opportunities that emerged in Arab countries also created an attractive factor for Turkey. Thus, Turkey started to follow a path different from the West regarding the Arab-Israeli issue. Turkey's position in the third Arab-Israeli war that started in 1967 is one of the most vivid examples of this change. Thanks to this war, Turkey developed trade with Arab countries and sought support for its theses on the Cyprus issue. In the fourth Arab-Israeli war that broke out in 1973, Turkey's pro-Arab position became more evident. In fact, the economic crisis caused by the 1973 oil prices allowed Turkey to establish closer relations

with its Middle Eastern neighbors due to economic factors (Hale, 2021). By the 1980s, Turkey's agenda mainly focused on domestic issues such as security threats from terrorist organizations ASALA and PKK, the military coup agenda of 1980, and subsequent movements for democratization.

Cyclical changes that occurred with the end of the Cold War largely pushed Turkey towards isolation. With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey's allies began questioning its geopolitical significance. The key feature of Turkey for its Western allies was its geographical proximity to the USSR. Furthermore, this period focused on ensuring Turkey's internal security and territorial integrity. However, the 1990s saw periods in Turkey's foreign policy where its «Westernness» identity came to the forefront. In order to maintain its strategic position during the Cold War era and maintain good relations with the West, Turkey acted in conjunction with the West in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans, pursuing a policy that was compatible with the West in these regions.

On January 17, 1991, a decision was made to use the Incirlik Air Base, and on the same day, Operation Desert Storm began. At the same time, Turkey deployed 180,000 soldiers to the border with Iraq. However, the request to send troops to Saudi Arabia was not accepted as it was unconstitutional. Although this situation was compatible with the policy of «Westernness», it marked the beginning of a rupture with the principle of «Peace at home, peace in the world», which is one of the main directions of Turkish foreign policy and, accordingly, the policy of non-interference in Middle Eastern affairs.

As can be seen, changes in the system led to Turkey's geopolitical position once again becoming important for Western states. These changes occurred this time in the Middle East. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when NATO was seeking a new area of legitimacy, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait provided NATO with the opportunity it desired. However, Turkey did not receive reciprocal support in this regard; on the contrary, a new security problem emerged. With the intervention in Iraq, political pressure on the Kurds of Northern Iraq was lifted, and there was an increase in PKK activity in the region. After this, Turkey, which had remained aloof from Middle Eastern problems since 1923, began to view the region from a security perspective. In the 1990s, Turkey defended the territorial integrity of Middle Eastern countries, especially Iraq, while simultaneously engaging in military combat against the PKK. Turkey's strategy

of aligning with the West in the Middle East in its foreign policy was also ineffective. In particular, Western interventions in Iraq favored the PKK despite Turkey's sensitivity.

During this period, when its allies were combating religious terrorism, Turkey found itself isolated in its fight against the PKK, which was the most important internal security issue. From 1990 to 2002, besides the PKK issue, Turkey had to address numerous other challenges, particularly political and economic ones. As a result, Turkey had to adopt a reactive position rather than directing its foreign policy in line with its interests and preferences (Oğuzlu, 2021).

The Middle East in Turkey's foreign policy: The strategy of regional hegemony (2002-2016)

The role of the Middle East in Turkey's foreign policy during the specified period is of great importance. During this period, with the Iraqi intervention in 2003, also known as the Second Gulf War, and the «Arab Spring» that accelerated in 2011, most armed conflicts in the world took place in the Middle East, and the absence of a dominant global or regional power in the region fueled instability. Turkey's policy in the Middle East, which is considered to be shaped in this context, will be examined in the context of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, and the success of implementing «regional hegemony» and «regional leadership» will be periodically evaluated within the theoretical framework.

Iraq

As mentioned above, relations between Turkey and the United States improved in the early 1990s but began to fluctuate subsequently. In the 2000s, the most important issue between the two states was the status of Kurdish presence in Northern Iraq. This issue is vital for Turkey in two respects. Firstly, the PKK established a base in Northern Iraq, and secondly, it began to consider the possibility of an independent Kurdistan. When the Kurdistan Regional Government was formed in 2002, the neoconservatives in power in the United States were planning an intervention in Iraq. The new Turkish government, on the one hand, did not want to go against its strategic partner, but on the other hand, it was concerned about the violation of Iraq's territorial integrity and the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. From July to March 2003, following the crisis in Teskere and the incident in Meshker on July 4, 2003, relations between Turkey

and the United States deteriorated further, and Turkey was completely excluded from the emerging Iraqi order. After this exclusion, Turkey began to play a more active role in the region in order to have a say in establishing order in the Middle East.

In the process that started after the US intervention in Iraq, the destabilization of Turkey's southern border was added to its perception of security. The overthrow of Saddam and the rise of Kurdish nationalism continued to have a negative impact on relations between Turkey and its allies. However, Turkey, without jeopardizing its Western identity, sought to export its model to the Middle East, emphasizing that Islam can be synthesized with Western values. This position of Turkey was also supported by the West. Since the internal dynamics, values, socio-cultural and economic structures, state tradition, and history of each state differ from each other, the desire to be exemplary in the Middle East can be explained by establishing regional hegemony within the theoretical framework of study. In this context, disputes about whether the Western-Islamic synthesis should be modeled in the Middle East in Turkey's foreign policy of that period and whether Turkey should participate in the «Greater Middle East» project are also considered.

In 2007, a pivotal moment occurred in Turkey's policy towards Iraq specifically and the Middle East as a whole. That year, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) were stationed on the border with Iraq. Due to the increased attacks by the PKK and the death of Turkish soldiers, on November 5, 2007, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan traveled to Washington to meet with Bush. After this meeting, the United States realized that they had to agree to some of Turkey's demands because Turkey demonstrated the intention and capability to act independently on this issue.

The meeting on November 5, 2007, can be seen as the first indication that Turkey could become a «regional hegemon» in the region. Following the meeting, the TSK changed the current military situation by conducting operations against the PKK presence in Iraq using its ground and air forces. This situation also indicates a new era in U.S.-Turkey relations and the revival of a common Middle East policy (Hale, 2021).

Overall, in the initial period of the AK Party government (2002-2007), Turkey acted in harmony with the West in its Middle East policy and wanted to be an exemplary model in the region with a Western-Islamic synthesis (Sinkaya, 2021). H. Barack Obama, elected President of the United States in November

2008, considered Turkey an important country for rebuilding relations between Muslims and the U.S. after the intervention in Iraq. When Ahmet Davutoglu became the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2009, Turkey's Middle East policy gained greater significance and visibility. During this period, both in domestic politics and on the international stage, Turkey's orientation towards the Middle East and its efforts to play an active role faced criticism as being Islamist and neo-Ottoman. The words of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2010 illustrate the scale of Turkey's foreign policy: «We [the Turkish and Arab world, from Kars to Morocco and Mauritania, from Sinop to the southernmost point of Sudan and the equator, from the Bosphorus to the Gulf of Aden] aim to transform this generation into a belt of complete security, economic integration, and a great zone of prosperity that the world will look up to. We envision full liberalization in the broadest sense within the geography we are referring to. We want a transportation vehicle departing from Kars to seamlessly travel with cargo all the way to Morocco and Mauritania» (Hurrüyet, 2021).

Despite the accusations of revisionism against Turkey's Middle Eastern policy, officials have denied it, stating that Turkey's foreign policy is driven by realism. Once again, during this period, the problems arising from artificial borders in the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East were emphasized (Sinkaya, 2021). In this context, as we have stated within the theoretical framework of our research, the visionary in Turkey's foreign policy corresponds to the «regional hegemon» strategy. It is because Turkey, while pursuing its own interests, sought to impose its objectives on other states. In Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq from 2008 to December 2016, it heavily supported Masoud Barzani, the acting President of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. In this regard, Turkey concluded an oil agreement with Barzani, overshadowing its relations with Iraq. Turkey undertook these steps as part of its longstanding policy to ensure Iraq's territorial integrity (Doster, 2021). By keeping Barzani close, it aimed to establish hegemony over him and, ultimately, on September 25, 2017, it sought to prevent the independence referendum from taking place.

Syria

In 2010, the Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan convened in Istanbul and collectively issued a Joint Political Declaration pertaining to the establishment of the Quadruple

High-Level Cooperation Council. One of the most important goals of the declaration was to ensure economic integration in the region, and the main goal of Turkey was to initiate liberalization in the region under its leadership. In the same year, Turkey voiced opposition to imposing new sanctions against Iran at the UN Security Council. These developments can be viewed as strategic steps in Turkey's pursuit of «regional hegemony». Even during the initial months of the «Arab Spring», the Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time emphasized Turkey's aspiration to assume a leadership role in this wave of change. The minister's statements exemplify Turkey's intention to proactively shape events, recognizing that failure to lead amidst these developments would leave the country most vulnerable to their adverse effects. If we fail to lead change under active leadership, we will be the country most affected by these developments in this geography (Safak, 2021). While Turkey had made efforts to cultivate positive relations with Syria between 2002 and 2011, its Syrian policy underwent a significant transformation following the Arab Spring. The primary objective became to minimize the influence of the Ba'ath party in the region, specifically along the «Sunni» axis. In this context, Turkish foreign policy aimed at aligning the Middle East with the prevailing global order, seeking to bring the region in line with contemporary international norms (Isyar, 2021). Literature suggests that the initial characterization of Assad as a «brother» by former Prime Minister Erdogan was aimed at encouraging reforms within Syria. Erdogan made several demands of Assad in this regard. However, as Assad did not comply with these demands, the Turkish government shifted its support towards the opposition. Erdogan's demands to Assad can be summarized as follows: (Migdalovitz, 2010).

- Abandoning control of the Golan Heights to enhance relations with Israel.
- Withdrawing support for Hezbollah in Lebanon.
- Adopting a two-state solution on the Palestinian issue, leading to the withdrawal of support for Hamas.
- Seeking inclusion in the Middle East Free Zone and implementing liberal policies within this framework.
- Embracing the inclusion of the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) in positions of power.

Turkey's demands went unmet by Assad. Since 2011, the Syrian crisis has emerged as the most significant security issue, both domestically and internationally. The Syrian border, spanning 911 km

in addition to the Iraq border, has become a refuge for terrorist organizations. Initially, Turkey sought to raise awareness about the problem within the international community and activate NATO, but the United States maintained its distance from the Syrian crisis. Turkey's first military response occurred on October 3, 2012, following the attack on Akcakale. Between 2014 and 2017, Turkey's security concerns were further compounded by attacks from DAESH. Particularly in 2015, numerous civilians in Turkey fell victim to DAESH terrorism. Concurrently, PKK-YPG attacks intensified in connection with the Syrian crisis, and Turkish soldiers were frequently targeted when civilians were present at the borders. In 2016, the PYD seized control of northern Aleppo to consolidate its territorial gains. In response, Turkey launched the Euphrates Shield Operation on August 24, 2016, countering the PYD's attempt to establish a state along its border. Since 2016, Turkey has maintained a military presence in the Syrian theater. Moreover, Turkey faces a significant refugee crisis. According to official figures published by the Directorate of Migration Management, there are currently 3,736,760 Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey in 2021 (T.C.B., 2021). When accounting for Syrians whose exact numbers are unknown and fall into the category of irregular immigrants, this figure increases even further.

Egypt

The Arab Spring presented Turkey with an opportunity to exert its leadership in shaping the Middle East. Specifically, Turkey's support for the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and its involvement in Egyptian affairs led to increased accusations of seeking to establish a new Ottoman presence in the international arena. In 2013, the Turkish Foreign Minister stated, «A hundred years ago, Yemen and Skopje, or Erzurum and Benghazi, were part of the same country. Those who unite all of Europe are not called «Neo-Romanists», but those who seek unity in the Middle East are branded as «Neo-Ottomanists» (Vatan, 2021). This statement can be seen as an indication of Turkey's regional hegemony strategy in the Middle East within the theoretical framework of this study. From a European perspective, Turkey is perceived as striving for hegemony in the Middle East.

According to German writer Jürgen Gottschlich, «Erdogan is calculating to become a stronger leader in a Sunni Middle East after the overthrow of Assad» (Isyar, 2021). This sheds light on how Europe views the issue. Establishing leadership in the Sunni bloc

is of utmost importance. Mohammed Morsi, who came to power after Mubarak in Egypt, signifies an opportunity for Turkey's leadership potential. The first high-level meeting between Morsi and then-President Abdullah Gul took place in 2012. Morsi emphasized the close relationship they established with Turkey and considered Turkey as an example in various aspects. Turkey's policies on Palestine, Syria, and Iran are expected to be followed by Egypt. During Morsi's early tenure, efforts were made to facilitate mutual visa liberalization and establish common highways with Turkey. Numerous high-level dialogue and cooperation agreements were reached between Turkey and Egypt during this period. However, Morsi, disregarding the socio-economic problems and the desires of the Egyptian people, aligned with Turkey within the Sunni bloc but remained in power for only a year. In 2013, Sisi, the leader of the Supreme Military Council, dismissed Morsi and seized power. The AK Party, which had close ties with the Morsi administration, condemned the action as anti-democratic and vehemently opposed the coup in the international arena. Erdogan soon declared non-recognition of the new government. Strained relations emerged in various domains, particularly in the economy. Consequently, in the same year, diplomatic relations were significantly reduced as both countries mutually declared ambassadors *persona non grata* (Numan, 2018).

An additional significant issue has intensified the tense bilateral relations: the East Mediterranean. Sisi has been involved in activities that contradict Turkish interests in the region. Egypt, Greece, the Greek Cypriot Administration, and Israel frequently convene in the East Mediterranean. The Egypt-GCA alliance has gained particular prominence as of late. Egypt, acting as the sole representative of the island, enters agreements with the Greek Cypriot Administration, while Lebanon establishes an exclusive economic zone with Israel. This situation naturally arises due to Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) not being recognized (Numan, 2018). Hence, Turkey's enthusiastic efforts to serve as a role model for the region and establish hegemony have negatively impacted its relations with all the states involved.

The strategy of becoming a regional role model and pursuing hegemony has proven unsuccessful. Turkey, which found itself largely isolated in the region, shifted its focus away from the Middle East between 2002 and 2016, as it grappled with internal issues. However, following the coup attempt on

July 15, 2016, and the rise of nationalist discourse in domestic politics, Turkish foreign policy pivoted towards the geopolitical reality of the Turkish World.

Turkish World in Turkish Foreign Policy: Regional Leadership Strategy (2016-2021)

First of all, it is important to note that there has never been a Turkish Union establishment in any period of history. Ziya Gökalp named the system in which all Turks gathered under the roof of a single state, «ilkhanate», and determined that the only ilkhanate was established during the Metehan period. He said, «Mete, in response to this renunciation, united all the tribes, provinces and khanates of the Turkish race and formed an ilkhanate. Mete's idea was to unite all Turks (Gokalp, 2015). However, further historical events forced the Turks to go to various geographies. Sometimes different states were established in the geographies they went to, and sometimes they came under the domination of other different states. In this case, no Turkish state has followed a policy such as unification with the others. However, no matter how politically they continued to exist in separate divisions, Turkey (Seljuk and Ottoman) and the Turkish World never broke off their interaction. When the Republic of Turkey was included in the system as a nation-state based on the identity of «Turkishness», Turkistan was adopted as the ancestral homeland and various sensitivities were developed (Yaldız, 2018). In particular, the following words of the founding leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk express Turkey's sensitivity towards the Turkish World: «Today, Soviet Russia is our friend, our neighbor, and our ally. We need this friendship. But no one can predict what will happen tomorrow... Then Türkiye should know what to do. We, this friend of ours, have our own brothers and sisters who have one language and one faith. We must be ready to own them.» Indeed, until 1991, Turkey's relations with the Turkic World were developed within the framework of relations with the USSR and did not go beyond that. However, with the disintegration of the USSR, the five Turkish Republics Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan gaining their independence aroused great excitement on the Turkish side. It means potential to openness in the mentioned regions has arisen because of the unity of language, religion and nation. Therefore, Turkey was the first state to recognize all five states. With the support of the Western powers following the collapse of the USSR being a role model to the states

in the region has been received quite positively from the point of view of Turkey. In this context, Turkey has established many organizations in the region, endeavored to develop bilateral and multilateral relations, and organized various activities in fields such as education and culture. The early 1990s is the period of institutionalization in the relations of Türkiye and Turkish states.

One of the aforementioned studies of Turkey was TİKA's in 1992 in order to help the development of Turkish-speaking countries (TİKA, 2021) ... In the same year, «Heads of State of Turkish-Speaking Countries The summit» has been realized. In 1993, Turkey and five Turkish states with his participation, TÜRKSOY (International Organization of Turkish Culture) was established in order to «strengthen the unity and brotherhood of the hearts of the Turkish Peoples, transmit the common Turkish culture to future generations and introduce it to the world» (Turksoy, 2021). In addition, Turkey also provided the five Turkish states with import, project loans, and scholarships to students from the region, and launched direct flights as one of the important projects (Yaldız, 2021). In addition to these, Turkey has started to open schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education on the basis of primary, secondary, high school and university in all five states during this first institutionalization period. However, although the institutionalization infrastructure was established, this initial excitement did not last long. First of all, Turkey's cultural and educational activities in the region have been used for bad purposes by terrorist organizations such as FETÖ, which has led to a decrease in trust in Turkey. The second reason is that it became popular in Turkey during the 1990s and the idea of the «Turkic World from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China», which was received with excitement, is called Turanism in some parties. Especially, Russia and Iran accused Turkey of following Turanian/imperial policies. This policy has put Turkey in a difficult position in the region. Thirdly, Russia's recovery in a short time, returning to the international arena and declaring the post-Soviet space «backyard» within the scope of the doctrine of the close environment, proved that Turkey could not be effective in the region alone. The economic, political and military allegiances created during the Soviet period caused the Russian hegemony to be rebuilt in a short time. In short, Turkey's sudden and uncontrolled attempts to the region have ended in failure, and relations have continued on a superficial basis. Turkey's orientation towards the Turkic World in this first

period can also be explained largely by the strategy of regional hegemony. It is because Turkey has tried to open up without taking into account the realities of the region, the internal political, economic and social structures of the Turkish states. It is not correct to think that the states in question want another «brother» when they have just gotten rid of one older brother. In addition, Turkey does not have an economic potential to meet the regional needs in this period (Stephan, 2003).

For all these reasons, relations between Turkey and the Turkic World have been static in the 2000s. In addition, as mentioned above, the 2000s are mostly a period when Turkey is moving towards the Middle East. Even TİKA, which was established to deal with the Turkic World, directed its interest to the Middle East and North Africa during this period. Turkey's re-establishing close relations with the Turkish World took place in 2009. In this period, the Turkic Council (Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries) and TÜRKPİA (Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries) were established to further institutionalize the relations. The most basic goal of the Council was to create an integration within the Turkic world. In addition, the Turkish Business Council was established in 2011, the Turkish Culture and Heritage Foundation in 2012, and the Turkish Academy in 2014 (Yaldız, 2018).

Turkey, which shifted its course to the Turkic World in the 2010s, has started to emphasize its «Turkish» identity by defending common values in the context of its national interests, especially after 2016, and has become engaged in the region. Turkey has not been able to achieve success by using the strategy of regional hegemony in the Middle East. All these reasons mean that Turkey should turn its face from the Middle East to other regions as well. In this context, the Balkans are the first region that comes to mind where Turkey can lead or establish hegemony. However, most states in the Balkans are EU members, while those that are not are candidate countries. The EU will not allow Turkey to make moves against its own interests in the region. There are also reasons why we chose the Turkish World sub-region instead of the Central Asia and Caucasus region as the region that Turkey will lead in our study. First of all, Georgia did not hesitate to fight with a great power like Russia in a move that could destroy its independence. Although the relations between Turkey and Georgia in the political, military and economic context can be explained by cooperation, it is obvious that there are no different ties between

them. The existence of Armenia, another state in the Caucasus, is based on hostility towards Turks and Turkey. Although Tajikistan is a state with which Turkey can cooperate, like Georgia, the Iranian factor should be taken into account in bilateral relations.

In the period after 2016, many bilateral and regional cooperation areas have been created, especially in the fields of economy and energy. In Turkey, the identity of «Turkishness» started to be emphasized more in the official cadres of the state. The most important reason for this situation in domestic policy is the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, and when examined regionally, Turkey-Russia in 2015 the fact that Kazakhstan mediated the plane crisis between and the coming to power of Mirziyoyev after the death of Kerimov in Uzbekistan have been the reasons that brought Turkey closer to the Turkic World (Yaldız, 2021). Again in 2016, in the Four-Day War that broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey displayed a clear stance in favor of Azerbaijan (Sam, 2021).

At the 11th Ambassadors Conference held in 2019, «Again Announcement of the «Asian» initiative (T.B, 2019), It shows that Turkey has finally turned its route to Asia, especially to the Turkish World. Geostrategically returning to Asia was one of the most important issues at the Diplomacy Forum held in Antalya in 2019. In the speech of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu at the opening of the «Asia Again» workshop held in the same year, the words «Asian in the west, European in the east» are striking. To give a concrete example of the axis shift in question while Turkey scholarships were mostly given to the Middle East and North Africa as a percentage for a long time, the total of Central Asia and the Caucasus increased to 13.58% in 2019 and to 21%59 in 2020. There are also two important issues in terms of the integration of the Turkish World in 2020. The first of these is that countries help each other individually by acting jointly within the scope of the fight against Covid-19. The second and more important thing is that the military cooperation, which always remained in theory, was put into practice with the 2nd Karabakh War. Other Turkish states also provided support to the cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan at a minimum level (Yaldız, 2020)

In a speech by Çavuşoğlu in Kyrgyzstan in 2021 «Our Asia initiative again will add a new dimension to our relations with our ancestral homeland Central Asia. Because we are the branches of the same giant plane tree, the arms of the same strong trunk» (Akıncı,

2021). His words are another proof that Turkey has started to act with a «Turkish» identity instead of an «Islamic» identity in foreign policy. The Turkic Council summit, which is expected to be held in Uzbekistan on March 2021, but held online due to the pandemic, is noteworthy in terms of integration with the Turkic World. Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan participated; Hungary as an observer participated in; For the first time in 30 years of relations between Türkiye and the Turkish World Nursultan Nazarbayev also attended the informal meeting attended by Turkmenistan as Honorary President. The most important decision taken at the meeting is that the Council should now function as an international organization. Secondly, the celebration of Azerbaijan's success against Armenia, although they do not actually support it, is the first collective support given to Azerbaijan by the Turkish World. At the meeting in question, Nazarbayev proposed that the name of the Turkish Council be changed to the Union of Turkish States in order for it to act more integrally. Indeed, at the 8th Summit of the Turkic Council convened in Istanbul on November 12, 2021, the name of the Keneş was changed to the Organization of Turkish States. The main agenda of the said Summit is that the Turkish states. The third was the development of cooperation methods with international actors, the establishment of the Turkish Investment Fund and the approval of the Turkish World 2040 Vision Document (TDT, 2021).

Turkey's opening to the Turkish World is far from hostile this time, seems to be moving close to realpolitik. Turkey should follow a regional leadership strategy in the Turkic World, putting aside the «regional hegemony» strategy that it used and failed both in the Turkish World in the 1990s and in the Middle East between 2002 and 2016. In other words, instead of conveying its own interests and goals to the region, it should grasp the realities of the region and develop common interests. Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan should be sovereign equals in political, economic, cultural and all other fields. Because Turkey is a regional leader, it is more developed economically and its tradition of political state is older. They should transfer their experiences to other Turkish states and deepen relations around the round table. In addition to all these, Turkey should lead regionally, not by opposing Russia and China, but by showing a cooperative state model.

Conclusion

Sandra Destradi stated that regional powers can also dominate their own regions with the strategies of «imperial», «regional hegemony» and «regional leadership». Using the element of military power and forcing the countries of the region to adopt their own policies, acting collectively by presenting common goals to the imperial region is called regional leadership. Regional hegemony, on the other hand, is in the part Decoupled between these two. Although no direct military force was used, the region's own it is a strategy to force their wishes to be accepted. The theme of our study is regional leadership and regional hegemony. As a regional power, Turkey, both because of its geographical location and because of its imperial past, is in a profile that is inclined to implement the aforementioned strategies. On the other hand, two important areas where Turkey can implement these strategies are the Middle East and the Turkish World. In this context, our study focused on Turkey's strategies in these two regions. In 1923, as the successor of the Ottoman Empire, he entered the international system. Participating in the Republic of Turkey, «Westernism (Contemporary)» in its foreign policy, It has adopted the principles of «Status Quo» and «Peace at Home, Peace in the World». Turkey, which is in the post-imperial nation-state process, has not been directly related to regional problems during this period. In the nation-state process, Turkey defined itself with the identities of «Turkish», «Muslim» and «Western». Until the 2000s, Turkey acted with a Western and «Western» identity, with few exceptions, especially during the Cold War. The years 2002-2016 is the period when the Middle East and North Africa gained importance in Turkish foreign policy. The reasons for this situation can be listed as follows:

- AK Party's coming to power and bringing its «Muslim» identity to the fore,
- international destabilization with the end of the Cold War system,
- Turkey's partial loss of geopolitical importance for its ally West,
- Increasing fundamentalist terrorism, especially in the Middle East and in the regions of interest of Turkish Foreign Policy,
- Increasing PKK attacks on Turkey after the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 and the pressure on terrorism originating from the PYD/YPG.

Especially Turkey, which contradicted the United States during the invasion of Iraq, has started to develop good bilateral relations with the countries in the Middle East and its immediate geography, especially Iraq, Syria, Iran, and has also made expansions related to the Gulf and North African countries. During the period of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, relations tried to deepen, and Turkey openly tried to be regional hegemony. In particular, the Arab Spring and the call to take into account the demands for democracy made to Assad were met with enthusiasm in Turkish Foreign Policy with the coming to power of Morsi in Egypt. When Assad turned down his demands for democracy, relations with Syria were strained, and when Morsi was removed from power in a coup, relations with Egypt came to a breaking point. It can be argued that Turkey used the regional hegemony strategy theoretically in this period. Due to the realities of the region and the changing interests of global actors, Turkey could not achieve the desired result in the steps it took, had to grapple with unprecedented security issues in the Middle East and was isolated in the international arena.

After the problems in the Middle East, Turkey has turned its route to the Turkish World, another region where it can lead. First of all, there are two reasons why we use «Turkish World» instead of «Central Asia and Caucasus», which is frequently mentioned in the literature. The first is the establishment of the Organization of Turkish States, which is an important step for the Turkish World, in 2021 and an attempt to create a sensitivity in this context. The second is that Georgia, which is one of the regional countries in question, tends to cooperate more with the EU, Tajikistan with Iran, and Armenia with Russia rather than Turkey. There are many reasons why 2016 was chosen as the beginning of the Turkish World orientation in Turkish Foreign Policy. First of all, with the People's Alliance, the foundation of which was laid with the 15 July 2016 coup process in Turkey, Turkey highlighted its «Turkish» identity in foreign policy along with its «Muslim» identity between 2002 and 2016. In addition, 2016 was the year in which the states of the region developed close bilateral and multilateral relations with each other and with Turkey. For example, under Kerimov's rule, Uzbekistan did not participate in the activities of the Turkic World, especially after the Andijan events, its relations with Turkey have always progressed stagnant. With the death of Kerimov in 2016, Uzbekistan started to be involved in the activities of the Turkic World.

Kazakhstan acted as a mediator between Russia and Turkey, and Turkey officially supported other Turkish states partially in the Azerbaijan-Armenia War. For all these reasons, 2016 is a milestone for the convergence of the Turkish World.

The roots of this rapprochement actually date back to 1991. The independence of the Turkish states in 1991 was met with enthusiasm by Türkiye. This excitement was fueled by Turkey's western allies and encouraged Turkey to be a model for the post-USSR region. In this context, the early 1990s is the period of institutionalization for Türkiye and the Turkish World. Institutions such as TİKA and TURKSOY were established, and various economic, cultural and political investments were planned in the region. However, it did not take long for the Turkish world to reunite with each other. Turkey's strategy towards the region has been unsuccessful due to reasons such as the re-emergence of Russia, Turkey's lack of financial strength, and the distrust of the regional states towards Turkey. One reason for this failure is that the newer Soviet Union The fact that the regional states that gained their independence did not want to be under the influence of another elder brother can be evaluated as the fact that they saw Turkey's initiatives as a regional hegemony strategy. Throughout the 2000s, relations have progressed stagnant as a result of both this negative start and Turkey's attention to the Middle East. Towards the 2010s, the relations between Türkiye and the Turkish World started to revive again. TURKPA and the Turkic Council were established in 2008 and 2009, then the Turkish Business Council in 2011, the Turkish Culture and Heritage Foundation in 2012, the Turkic Academy in 2014, and attempts were made to deepen institutional relations. In 2019, Turkey announced the «Asia Again» initiative and also emphasized the importance it attaches to the Turkish World within this program. In the Karabakh War that took place in 2020, both Turkey and other Turkic Republics declared their support to Azerbaijan. This is perhaps the first example of military integration of all Turks. Ultimately, the Turkish states decided to act in a more integrated manner and established the Organization of Turkish States in 2021. Moreover, the participation of Turkmenistan, which has an active neutrality status, and its participation in the Organization as an observer member is a very important issue.

As can be seen, the real region that Turkey can lead is the Turkish World. Turkish, where common values such as history, culture, religion

and language are shared. It is suggested to use the regional leadership approach within the scope of common values instead of the regional hegemony approach, which has not been successful before, within the scope of the theoretical framework in the World. In the study, Turkey's foreign policy in the Turkish World in the 1990s and in the Middle East between 2002-2016 was perceived as a regional hegemony approach within the scope of the theoretical framework, so it could not achieve the targeted success. Turkey should lead the Turkish World in a sovereign and equal way, create common values, and act with a regional leadership approach,

taking into account regional and country values, without assuming any elder brother role instead of regional hegemony approach. Turkey should not make the mistake of exporting a model, should behave respectfully to the internal dynamics of each state and share its experiences. In addition to all these, the only reason for Turkey to be the state that can lead the Turkish World regionally is that it has a more rooted state tradition and a more developed economy. It is considered that Turkey's leadership in the Turkish World will also bring regional leadership to it, and it will be for the benefit of everyone.

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