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Washington's diplomatic policy towards Turkey from a geopolitical and
communicational standpoint

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Abstract

The nature of US-Turkey relations has been altered in the past decade. Ankara's moves from Libya to Northern Syria and from the Eastern Mediterranean to the mountains of Nagorno Karabagh, seem to be causing a sense of alert towards the West. In spite of the above mentioned, Washington seems to be handling the issue with a careful and transparent approach through public diplomacy. The purpose of this paper is to examine fundamental elements in this bilateral system between Ankara and Washington, illustrate a brief background of Turkish-American and attempt to interpret the reasons behind the adoption of the specific US policy towards Turkey. The main argument of this paper is that the US public diplomacy has a specific strategy that is interconnected with the state's foreign policy objectives and hierarchical decision-making structure; nevertheless it is as multidimensional as foreign policy in the US itself, with various domestic actors shaping it. An additional point this paper tries to prove, is that the present day diplomat needs to develop a familiarity with modern diplomacy tools that evade from the traditional practice of the craft. In the final segment of the main argument a hypothesis under which US foreign policy is shaped by the diversity and all the unique voices within American society can be found. Finally there is a list of conclusions reached after analysing all the indications and data, with an additional part in which the author enlists proposed initiatives that may prove beneficial as informative content for our academic institution and ultimately for the country it is based in.

Περίληψη

Οι αμερικανοτουρκικές σχέσεις έχουν υποστεί αρκετές μεταβολές κατά την τελευταία δεκαετία. Οι κινήσεις τις Άγκυρας από τη βόρεια Συρία μέχρι τον Καύκασο δείχνουν να προκαλούν ανησυχία στη Δύση. Εν μέσω της προαναφερθείσας κατάστασης, οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες επέλεξαν μία στρατηγική δημόσιας διπλωματίας για μια σειρά θεμάτων τα οποία είναι κομβικοί παράγοντες των διμερών σχέσεων με την Τουρκία. Σκοπός αυτού του κειμένου είναι να εξετάσει τα θεμελιώδη στοιχεία που καθορίζουν την πορεία των σχέσεων ΗΠΑ-Τουρκίας, να αποτυπώσει την διαδικασία την οποία έπρεπε να υποστούν πολιτικές θέσεις που συζητούνταν σε πολιτικό επίπεδο στις ΗΠΑ μέχρι να ενσωματωθούν στην εξωτερική πολιτική της χώρας και την επίδραση που είχε η «ψηφιακή διπλωματία» στην προώθηση αυτών των θέσεων. Τα βασικά επιχειρήματα του κειμένου είναι ότι η «ψηφιακή διπλωματία» παίζει πρωταγωνιστικό ρόλο στην άσκηση εξωτερικής πολιτικής και όπως είναι λογικό για το κράτος με τον πιο πολυπολιτισμικό χαρακτήρα στον πλανήτη, οι απόψεις διαφόρων κοινοτήτων διαμορφώνουν την «ψηφιακή διπλωματία» του State Department και κατ' επέκταση την αμερικανική διπλωματική πολιτική εν γένει, κάτι που παρουσιάζεται μαζί με τα μοντέλα διαμόρφωσης εξωτερικής πολιτικής στην προκειμένη περίπτωση απέναντι στην Άγκυρα. Στο πνεύμα του θέματος, ως γλώσσα εκπόνησης της εργασίας επιλέχθηκαν τα αγγλικά για να μεγιστοποιηθεί το δυνητικό επίπεδο προβολής (engagement) της.

Introduction

Public Diplomacy in an increasingly digitalised world

In a world where communications are immediate, robust and unrestrained, the potential of ideas and words influencing global affairs is higher than ever. Since the evolution of digital media and the vast increase of accessibility to information one can witness the alterations this new era has brought upon contemporary elements among societies, such as politics and diplomacy. The knowledge an aspiring diplomat must possess, with regards to traditional fields of foreign policy conduction and the ability to interpret and act within international law, is indisputable. Nevertheless, the emergence of these new aspects of everyday life, such as massive media outlets and social media, has created the necessity for adaption towards the demands of the present social interaction patterns that exist on a global scale. Public diplomacy is defined as an international political advocacy utilising legitimate means for the purpose of raising public support on specific issues of international relations. It is not as new as some may think, taking in mind that the United States set the foundation on public information administration entities in order to pursue the state's interests, in 1919 when President Wilson created the Committee on Public Information with advertiser George Creel in charge of the agency. For primary global powers such as the United States, public diplomacy has transformed into one of the most vital means of statecraft. A state's ability to ensure security and pursue its strategic goals lies within its ability to shape global affairs on several levels. Embassies, speeches, media appearances etc. remain at the core of this task. However digital diplomacy is being increasingly chosen as the present public diplomacy node far evolved from the past models of centralised state diplomacy conduction. Digital diplomacy has transformed from being a supplementary tool to a main channel of world leaders and governments around the world, as audiences line up on their social media news feeds in order to inform themselves on the latest developments.¹ It is not a secret that governmental bodies are increasingly developing and deploying communicational plans of action that embrace the magnitude of social networking along with mass media outlets.² The concept of digital diplomacy takes advantage of ubiquitous features of modern life that social media have become and utilises them as an amplifier of a government's positions and priorities on global affairs which contributes to the shaping of the actual issues. The diplomatic community of the United States in particular has caught up with the fact that technological advancements and the digital transformation functions as a means of transmitting immediately and virally official state "content", while it simultaneously creates opportunities for a two-way dialogue between the country and the public abroad.³

¹ Burson-Marsteller's, 2017: Twiplomacy Study 001.

² Leight et al, 2011: Place Branding and Public Diplomacy: 136.

³ Strauß, N., S. van Der Kruike-meier, H. Meulen, and G. van Noort. 2015. Digital diplomacy in GCC countries: Strategic communication of Western embassies on Twitter. *Government Information Quarterly* 32 (4): 369–379.

Therefore, there is an increasing amount of research that studies the purpose and effectiveness of social media, statements and other public diplomacy tools, with analyses usually focusing on whether attempts promote public engagement on a level that allows diplomats to exploit the innovative perks of these channels in their favour, providing them with another means of fostering and exchanging ideas with external audiences.⁴ As indicated in the study that was implemented by Bjola, attention has been concentrated at the very content of public diplomacy and the ways those signals are perceived and responded by other states and the broader public.⁵ The demand for change in the understanding we have with regards to the field of diplomacy, is precisely addressed by the State Department when it “greater focus is being given on the task of evaluating the effectiveness and impact of digital diplomatic efforts”, as put by the Commission on Optimising Engagement in 2018.⁶

Contemporary American-Turkish relations (1945-2001)

The bilateral relations between the US and Turkey since the dawn of the 20th century until today is described in detail by the Congressional Information Services. The starting point for the relations of the two states dates back to 1831 when the US established diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire and almost a century later with the Republic of Turkey, its modern successor-state. Turkey had joined the Second World War a few days before it finished and became a founding member of the United Nations. A year later, in 1946, facing Soviet demands for shared control upon the Turkish straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles) Turkey requested assistance from the United States, which countered Soviet aggression by sending naval forces in the area. Later during the decade Turkey (along with Greece) was designated as a special collaborator of anti-Soviet aid within the framework the Truman Doctrine had set. During the next decade (1950s) the relations between the two countries extended further, with Turkey participating in the UN mission that was deployed in the Korean War in 1952 and ultimately leading to a NATO membership two years later. Halfway through the decade the United States established joint use of the space later became known as the Incirlik Air Base. This was the first time the two states had an official bilateral forces agreement. Turkey was an important ally to Washington during the Cold War era. From 1962 until the late 70s, despite the “Iron Curtain” being the main theme of global politics, Turkey’s main concern was Cyprus. President Johnson advises Ankara against an invasion in 1964 (The Johnson Letter) after the fallout of combined Greek-Turkish administration on the island. The invasion of 1974 caused an arms embargo by Washington. During the last 20 years of the millennium, one can say bilateral relations between the two states were normal, with the ups and downs affairs with global powers include. For example Turkey was relatively unhappy for the

⁴ Comor, E., and H. Bean. 2012. America’s ‘engagement’ delusion: Critiquing a public diplomacy consensus. 74 (3): 206.

⁵ Bjola, C. 2015b. Introduction: Making sense of digital diplomacy. In *Digital diplomacy: Theory and practice*, ed. C. Bjola and M. Holmes, 1–9. New York, NY: Routledge.

⁶ *Optimizing Engagement: Research, Evaluation, and Learning in Public Diplomacy*. 2018. Report by M&C Saatchi for the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD) at the US Department of State (April).

closure of 10 out of 13 US military bases on its soil, but on the contrary they were happy that Washington listed the PKK as a terrorist organisation and that Americans provided help for the capture of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan. A noteworthy fact is that during its centenary lifespan, the Turkish Republic has already experienced three coups, along with additional failed attempts.

Purpose of this study

So what does the state of US-Turkey affairs have to do with the field of public diplomacy? The nature of their bilateral relations has been altered in the past decade. Ankara's positioning in several issues, from Libya to Syria and from the Eastern Mediterranean to the mountains of Nagorno Karabagh, seems to be causing a sense of alert towards the West. Washington observes the issue with closely and reacts with officials' tweets, press releases, statements and ultimately actions, criticising Ankara's cooperation with Moscow on a strategic level, questioning its devotion to the strategic goals of NATO, while simultaneously underlining the dangers Turkish policy in Syria might contain for any future hopes regarding peace and stability in the Middle East. The purpose of this paper is to examine fundamental elements in this bilateral system, illustrate a thorough geopolitical background of Turkish-American relations during the past 20 years, exhibit public diplomacy content, evaluate their efficiency and finally attempt to present patterns as for the interpretation of US public diplomacy towards Turkey that turned into action. The main argument of this paper is that the US public diplomacy has a specific strategy that is interconnected with the state's foreign policy objectives and hierarchical decision-making structure; nevertheless it is as multidimensional as foreign policy in the US itself, with various domestic actors shaping it. A secondary argument of this paper is that the specific policy is that the United States foreign policy has a layered structure, meaning that depending on the actions of the other state and their continuity, Washington adopts an equivalent plan of action. An additional point this paper tries to prove, is that the present day diplomat needs to develop a familiarity with modern diplomacy tools that evade from the traditional practice of the craft. The core of this text is divided into two main segments; one for the actual geopolitical issues touched by the topic (political transformation of Turkey since the AKP era, the religious elements detected in the state's foreign policy, human rights violations, Syria, purchase of Russian defence systems, Libya, confrontation with NATO allies in the Eastern Mediterranean and engagement in terrorist activities and correlation with sanctioned states) and the public diplomacy aspect (US public diplomacy strategy in general, statements, tweets and decisions transmitting diplomatic signals). The reason for choosing this specific bilateral system is the fact that it constitutes a complex relationship (due to reasons that will be analysed further in the main body) and the fact that it is subject of spectacular alterations that due to their magnitude one might argue that they change the nature of American-Turkish relations from positive to negative.

Political Factors affecting US-Turkey relations

Value of Turkey to the United States of America

The geopolitical value of the Turkish Republic is undoubtedly high, taking in mind the geography of the area and the strategic advantages it offers for the US and its allies. Even though the end of the Cold War “devalued” Turkey’s importance in comparison to the past, it remained a vital US partner, as one of the most important bases for American operations (Incirlik) in the Middle East remained on its territory. Incirlik is also home to about 50 US B-61 nuclear missiles, underlining the trust and importance Washington has put on Ankara. The fall of the Berlin Wall changed the world drastically from an international relations point of view, but several main elements of US foreign policy remained unaffected by the new world order. The dogmatic approach the West had towards the strategic prerequisites that need to be fulfilled in order to maintain control of the global chessboard, remained guided through Spykman’s⁷ Rimland theory. According to that, the US and its partners needed to create a geographical “crescent”. The theory argues that in order for the US to hold the reigns of global order, it is crucial that the areas from the Baltic Sea down to the Arab Peninsula and from there to Japan, are under the Western sphere of influence, in order to create a “rim” preventing Russia and China from developing into naval superpowers. In this theory the Turkish straits are an important checkpoint and not being put under western control could result to large scale Russian naval deployments in the Mediterranean Sea. Despite of the fact that this theory is nearing its expiration date for a number of reasons (climate crisis creates an opening for Russia in the Arctic Ocean, development of ballistic missiles does not constitute control of Eurasia strictly a naval power case etc) we can still detect elements of the “Rimland” in modern geopolitical strategies. Turkey constitutes along with Greece the biggest part of NATO’s Southern Flank, meaning that Western strategy views the space as a unified barrier facing the passage to the Black Sea. The disputes between the two states of this NATO sector often make it to mass media’s headlines, without seriously jeopardising the alliance’s goals during the period 2001-2016. Ankara seemed to be leaving behind the escalation with its neighbours and the coups that prevailed in the country with the dawn of the 21st century and the election of a new prime minister in 2003. Recep Tayyip Erdogan won the election and during the first years of his “Peace and Friendship Party” (AKP) rule Turkey-U.S. relations were shaped by Turkey’s growing economic and political clout in the Middle East. The trade volume between the two states experienced a linear increase making the US a top trade partner for Turkey. Relations kept improving with US already having recognised the PKK (Kurdish militant organisation) as a terrorist group in the late 90s, providing intelligence against the group in Northern Iraq, where several insurgencies emerged from. In 2003 the Turkish parliamentary system did not approve of America’s operation “Iraqi Freedom”, approved the use of its bases for the attacks in the territory of its Southern neighbour though. All in all, five years deep into the new

⁷ Minghi, J. (2011). *The Structure of Political Geography* (1st ed., pp. 1-8).

millennium, US-Turkey relations had reached their peak, with Ankara posing as a crucial strategic point for American operations in the Middle East while, being a secular state, posed as a political and cultural bridge in the Eurasia. Adding the fact that Turkey had agreed to deploy missile defence radar “umbrella” on its territory, there were no serious indications that implied the forthcoming shift that was about to happen, transforming the country’s status from a trustworthy NATO ally that the West can depend on for the implementation of its strategic goals, to a country that risks some of the alliance’s most important principles and endangers the Southern Flank of the organisation as a whole.

Religious Politics

In order to study the alterations in the nature of US-Turkey relations, one has to illustrate and analyse the elements in Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy that stroke a chord in the State Department.

The process of islamisation of the Turkish state has been gradually evolving for the past years. The coup attempt in 2016 resulted to a vast increase with regards to the pace of this process. Recep Tayip Erdogan changed the governing system of the country to presidential, maintaining himself in power for 18 years. The Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Turkish leader applied a series of substantial alterations in several aspects of Turkish society, including school curricula with “adjustments” being performed in more than 170 educational topics. The Ministry of Education withdrew evolutionary theories and replaced them with Islam related subjects, while the government proceeded to the removal of 33.000 teachers along with the termination of several schools due to their “correlation with the coup attempt. The number of religious schools (imam hatip) at the same time experienced a spectacular increase in the country.⁸

The government called these changes “a focus on value based education”, part of the president’s plan of bringing up a “pious generation”. A member of the ruling party told media in 2017 that teaching mathematics to students, who do not know jihad, is useless. Prior to the above mentioned amendments, the number of students in the 537 religious schools was close to 270,000 in 2012 while five years later the number of schools increased to 1,408 with over half a million students. If we add the individuals who attend religious schools outside the state education system this number is approaching a staggering million students perceiving religion as a primary topic of secondary education.

The number of Islamic references included in presidential speeches is noticeably increased as well, positioning “jihad” as the spearhead of Turkey’s policy towards the Kurdish issue. In specific, during the attacks on the city of Afrin in Syria, the Turkish president used words from the “Al-Fath” chapter of the Quran, placing the Prophet’s victory over his enemies and the justification for Turkish operations in Northern Syria

⁸ Baker, 2018: BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 805 pp 1.

in parallel. An interesting detail is that Friday prayers called for a holy war against the Kurds, while another one is that when Turkey seized control of Afrin, the president called his troops “the last army of Islam”.⁹

A truly shocking moment was when during a nationally televised speech of the Turkish president a child with military uniform walked up the stage and she was told she was to martyr in case she were killed during war. Additionally the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey Bekir Bozdag portrayed Recep Tayip Erdogan as a ruler who is acting on behalf of God. To paint the complete picture, in 2018 the friendly-towards-the-government Yeni Akit’s newspaper columnist Sevki Yilmaz, called al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden a national hero, while adding that the transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system would be an act similar to the “Ababeel” (according to the Quran the Abadeed are birds sent by God to destroy the army that was marching towards Mecca to destroy the Kaaba). All the above align with an increasing number of public attacks on women, under the justification that the clothes they were wearing were not “appropriate enough”. It is worth mentioning that on New Year’s Eve 2016, young men were handing out flyers preaching in favour of the prohibition of New Year’s celebration under the context set by Islam.¹⁰

Policies like those are not constrained on a domestic level, with several entities established in order to promote Islamic ideals abroad. A great example of such an entity is the Turkish Youth Foundation Turkey Youth Foundation TÜGVA (Türkiye Gençlik Vakfı), in charge of which is the president’s son Bilal Erdogan. The foundation receives great favouritism and immunity by the Turkish state, with the country’s media watchdog fining a media outlet when it exposed that TUGVA receives obscene amounts of money and it has infiltrated inside the mechanisms of the Turkish state, functioning as a preliminary process for individuals who are later recruited by the Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT). Among the initiatives the foundation is involved are “educational camps” the youth of Turkish Diaspora around the world, teaching children the ideals of Islamic faith and neo-ottoman realism. The “mentors” that have been assigned to teach children about these topics are high profile islamists, often anti-Semitic clerics that call for an armed jihad, like Nurettin Yıldız.¹¹

Turkey has also appointed Murat Mercan as ambassador in D.C., an alleged Islamist who has connections with the Iranian regime and maintains links to the radical Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı) is the new ambassador, in a move that can be interpreted as an attempt by Erdogan to pursue influence over the US Muslims.

⁹ Baker, 2018: BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 805 pp 2.

¹⁰ Erdogan Tells a Weeping Girl, 6, She’d Receive Honors if Martyred (Published 2018). Nytimes.com. (2021). Retrieved 11 December 2021

¹¹ President Erdoğan’s family foundation TÜGVA runs jihadist boot camps in Turkey - Nordic Monitor. Nordic Monitor. (2021). Retrieved 11 December 2021

He was also the chairman in the Foreign Policy Committee in the Turkish Parliament. The Turkish president possibly seeks to utilise him in order to lobby the newly elected American administration, a task he was assigned with, in the past during the Obama administration. A profiling note about the new ambassador was found amidst a confidential case that included an investigation for Iran's covert activities in Turkey, which concludes that Mercan promotes and Islamist agenda while falsely pretends to cooperate with the Western allies. Moreover, he is an important, alleged, pro-Iran figure. One of the investigative notes mentioned a meeting the new ambassador of Turkey in D.C had in an Ankara café where he re-assured some people-probably Iranian officials-that Turkey's support towards the NATO Lisbon agreement, for an early warning ballistic defence system against Iranian missiles, happened only because Turkey needed to lift some pressure off its "neck" and that through vetoes and interventions during the implementation process, then the situation would work again in favour of Iran.

Human Rights Violations and International Crime

During the national election of 2018, OSCE observers expressed their concerns with regards to the constraints on news reporting and the pre-election campaign environment in general. A distinctive point among the data reported is the fact that a presidential candidate was restricted to run for the election and was not allowed to participate in a free and equal basis, as it should in human rights oriented society. According to the 2020 State Department Report on Human Rights for Turkey, members of security forces in the country are responsible for a number of abuses.¹² Under the wider anti-terror laws that were adopted in 2018 the Erdogan regime maintained a restrictive policy against fundamental freedoms and violated the rule of law. Since the failed coup attempt more than 70,000 people employed by the police and the military were fired or suspended, with an additional, whopping 150,000 people removed or suspended from their civil servant positions. On top of that, about 100,000 citizens were arrested and 1,500 NGOs were shutdown under the justification that they had alleged ties with terrorist and criminal organisations. The most common allegation is having a correlation with Fethullah Gulen's movement, who Erdogan presents as the orchestrator of the 2016 coup attempt. Fundamental human rights violations in Turkey include suspicious deaths of people in custody, torture, unjustified arrests and continuous detention of tens of thousands of individuals (including politicians, public servants, artists, lawyers, journalists and activists and U.S. Diplomatic Mission's, employees for purported ties to "terrorist" groups), arbitrary killings, existence of political (mostly elected) officials and purposefully targeting individuals located abroad.¹³ Other significant issues can be detected within the Turkish judicial system's independence with severe constraints on freedom of speech, shutdowns on social media platforms and the internet, expression of threats and violent incidents against journalists, conventional media shutdown on the grounds

¹² 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkey pp 2-4

¹³ 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkey pp 11-14

of criticism against officials and their policies, severe censorship and last but not least violence against minorities, that derives from social and racial injustice (against ethnic minorities and LGBTQ community members). The regime took little to none measures with regards to the investigation, prosecution and punishment of the officials that are allegedly involved in cases of human rights abuses, therefore impunity remains as a serious developing issue in Turkey. Groups that remain as the main target of hate speech and discrimination are Alevis and Christians, with the Armenian Apostolics included and the term “Armenian” constituting a common racial slur. According to an analysis of national and regional newspapers by the Hrant Dink Foundation in 2019, it was discovered that there were over 5,000 publications that included hate speech targeted towards the groups mentioned above. The majority of these news articles were mainly Armenians, Greeks, Syrians and Jews. Atheists were also intimidated by the media, even though that was at a relatively lower level than other minorities. Refugees and immigrants (mainly displaced Syrians) are also facing increased violence and discrimination in Turkey. In October the ECHR ruled that the Turkish Republic had violated Article 10 on Freedom of Expression under the European Convention of Human Rights that states that “everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises”, after prosecuting citizens for their criticism and insults against the Recep Tayyip Erdogan.¹⁴ The case initiating this action was that one of Vedat Sorli, a Turkish citizen that was sentenced to 11 months of prison under the argument that he had shared two insulting posts on his Facebook page that were insulting to the president. The criminal proceedings and the decision for his conviction that also resulted to his five year suspension period are equal to limitations of the “applicant’s right to freedom of expression”, as put by the European Court of Human Rights. There are plenty of other cases that highlight the violations of human rights Turkish policy is subject to, nevertheless they will be analysed later during the text, as they are also subject of the US communicational policy towards Turkey.

Turkish activity in Syria

Since 2016, Turkey has performed four military operations in Syria. Each one of them was aiming at specific objectives and was planned in order to respond to rapidly changing scenarios on the field. Ankara’s key priorities when it comes to Syria are driven by internal politics and definitely played a part in Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party maintaining power.

These military operations are far from legitimate as argued by several boards and analysts across the globe. Turkey operated in Syria by using the justification of terrorist threats from the territories in its southern border and invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter arguing that any attacks deployed by Kurdish militants in northern

¹⁴ Article 10, European Convention on Human Rights

Syria grants Ankara the right to use force. Of course as shown in previous International Court of Justice cases in the past, since the state of Syria had no part in the attacks implemented by the Kurds, there is no right to invoke Article 51 in this instance.¹⁵

Internally, Turkey uses the Syrian conflict as a cover to suppress the Kurds living in its south. In the past years, consecutive military operations in Syria have assisted the reigning president to connect with increasingly nationalistic elements and rally support around crucial election dates. After the coup attempt in July 2016, the government's policy on Syria played a major role in gaining the credibility of the Turkish Armed Forces while re-establishing the balance between civilian and military power.¹⁶

Regarding foreign policy, these military operations have resulted in tensions with the United States. Washington's support for the Kurds has caused "stubbornness" Ankara to an extent that U.S. policymakers did not anticipate. This pushed Turkey to develop ties with the other involved party on the field, Russia, probably being the initiation point leading to the deeper arms-trade relationship they developed later.

The Syrian riddle is a major and most complex field of conflict on which Ankara experienced difficulties, especially since Turkey has opposing views on the issue, compared to the other state actors involved. President Erdogan achieved to set up a cooperation protocol which consisted of unorthodox means of conflict de-escalation, while still maintained a firm hostile stance against the Assad regime.

Turkey seized the opportunity and implemented its plan for the establishment of a safe zone parallel to the Turkish-Syrian border 20 miles deep in Syrian territory, ultimately pursuing the retreat of Kurdish YPG further south. The two sides entered negotiations about the viability of such "safe zone" and finally reached to an agreement granting the control of the centre part of the zone to Turkey, excluding key locations such as Qamishli, Manbij and Kobani from the agreement and awarding their control under joint administration constituted by the SDF and Assad's forces.

A critical factor with respect to the analysis of Turkish-Russian relations in correlation to Syria is the fact that the two sides executed their plans upon different interpretations of the deal that was made in October 2019. Vladimir Putin made the assumption that his Turkish counterpart would be pleased after half of his demands were met and therefore would approve the "liberation" of the Idlib region by Assad's forces in exchange of meeting the rest of his demands, nevertheless Erdogan rejected that after all. Turkey backed up its ground in Idlib during the offensive of February 2020 and actually gained some lost ground back from the Syrian army. Later on, when Erdogan visited Vladimir Putin in Moscow, the Turkish president made his

¹⁵ 2019 Völkerrechtliche Aspekte der türkischen Militäroperation „Friedensquelle“ in Nordsyrien

¹⁶ JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy Turkey's Offensive in Ayn Issa, Syria: Analysis & U.S. Policy Implications pp. 6

positions clear leading Putin to accept a ceasefire agreement without even consulting Assad's view on the matter, but it seemed more like the recognition of the fact that there's going to be a delay on the final victory in the Syrian war.¹⁷

What primarily rushes Russia for a win in Syria is not the existence of several terrorist elements (including al-Qaeda related groups) integrated within rebel bodies in Idlib, protected by Turkey. The primary motive lies within the need for a victory in order to stabilize the situation of a crushed ally, Bashar al-Assad. Moscow cannot provide the required resources for the reconstruction in Syria in order to solidify the status of the dictatorial regime and cannot rely on Tehran's capabilities as well due to the severe economic impact the latter suffered for the past years. During late 2020 Russia attempted to lead the humanitarian agenda through a conference regarding refugee returns, in Damascus, a move that failed due to the absence of an EU delegation and the fact that Turkey did a better job at utilizing the humanitarian crisis to its own advantage. Therefore Russia is trapped inside a situation where it cannot effectively tackle a new Turkish offensive aiming to extend its border areas within the "security zone" while at the same time it cannot surpass the shield Ankara has raised in Idlib providing "safe haven" for the rebels.¹⁸

This dead-end will hardly be altered, especially in favour of Russia's interest, unless the Biden administration reverts the policies adopted by Donald Trump with regards to US support towards Kurdish rebels in Syria. An alternative scenario in favour of Moscow would be the US policy shift on the territories east of the Euphrates, something that could possibly bring international aid in for the purposes of post-conflict reconstruction. Turkey's involvement in Syria has also provided Erdogan with new leverage over the EU, as the latter is gravely concerned on the management of refugee flows.

Overall involvement in Syria has not only been a source of conflict between Turkey and its partners, but has also equipped them with new means for the conduction of an increasingly aggressive, nationalistic foreign policy.

Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean

Problems between Turkey and neighbouring Greece are not something new, but since 2019 tensions have been steadily rising. Firstly Ankara is not communicating in a similar "frequency" with Greece as one is signing a delimitation memorandum with Tripoli's acting government in Libya, with a vague and questionable delimitation method that did not receive approval from the international community, while the latter's arguments are grounded on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

¹⁷ JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy Turkey's Offensive in Ayn Issa, Syria: Analysis & U.S. Policy Implications pp. 4

¹⁸ JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy Turkey's Offensive in Ayn Issa, Syria: Analysis & U.S. Policy Implications pp. 6

Turkey Re-Examining the Status Quo

Over the past 15 years Greece has registered a record number in the violations in the Aegean Sea by Turkish navy and air force, in some cases with the danger of losing human lives.¹⁹ In 2017 during Erdogan's visit in Athens was marked by revisionist statements. The Turkish President specifically made a statement arguing that it is necessary to amend the Lausanne treaty of 1923, the treaty between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies after the First World War that signalled the birth of the modern Turkish Republic, a treaty that is widely perceived by the international community as an important tool of preservation of peace in the region. Erdogan's argument is that the conditions for a peace treaty were not fair for the Turkey at that point of history, keeping in mind that Turkey was a defeated state. Athens of course does not want to initiate any discussion with regards to the Lausanne Treaty as it is seen as one of the expansionist tensions Turkey is expressing during the past decade, for what analysts have characterized as an Erdogan's nostalgia for the Ottoman Era, a policy perceived by Greece as an indirect attempt of redefining borders in Thrace and the Aegean islands therefore a threat towards the Greek sovereignty.

Territorial Waters and Air Traffic

The term territorial water is used in order to describe a zone of sea parallel to a state's shores. This zone is constituted by the water region itself (water column) the airspace above and of course the seabed below the surface. This status in a sea region includes one and only restriction with regards to sovereignty which is called "Right of innocent passage" which is the notification of movement towards the coastal state. Greece has not expanded their territorial water zone to 12 nautical miles a right they are lawfully allowed to exercise by the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention in 1982. Greece established the 6 mile zone for territorial sea in 1936. Nevertheless the national airspace limit was 10 miles due to the legislation of 1931. In 1964 Ankara also extended the territorial sea zone to 6 miles. Alongside that Turkey claimed that states pursuing wider territorial waters should do that in reciprocity as for the Turkish zone. In simpler words Turkey has followed a policy applying the 12 mile zone in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea and the 6 Mile zone in the Aegean Sea. The avoidance of expansion of Greek territorial waters is of that crucial importance to Ankara, that possible consequences led Turkish leadership to establish a *casus belli* (a move that is justification for war) status in case Greece decided to establish the 12 nautical mile rule, a decision that was ratified in 1995 in the Turkish National Assembly. This decision by Turkey constitutes a violation of the United Nations Article 2.4 that calls upon all members to avoid the use of threats of use of force towards the national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of other member states.

¹⁹ Athanasopoulos, H. (2001). Greece, Turkey, and the Aegean Sea. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland. Pp 24

It is crucial to examine the legal arguments included in Turkey's claims in order to clearly understand the nature of the dispute with Greece. Ankara's interpretation of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (which is not signed or recognized by Turkey) is that a state has the right to expand its territorial waters up to 12 nautical miles, but this is the maximum distance and is not always applicable. Additionally they argue that the Aegean is a part of geographical uniqueness and therefore "special circumstances" rules should be applied on this case, rules that should not allow Greece to expand the sea territory as they argue that this would turn the Aegean essentially into a "Greek Lake", something that of course is against Turkey's crucial interests in the area. Furthermore the Turkish side argues that extension of territorial waters is something that can only be applied with the coastal neighbours consent in cases of bordering semi-enclosed or enclosed sea regions. In terms of legal rigidity, Ankara's arguments are very weak. Since the 1970s unconditional extension of territorial sea to 12 nautical miles has become a widespread practice attributed to the adoption of a commonly acceptable rule of customary international law for all coastal states, a rule that even Turkey has used in order to expand their sea border in the Mediterranean and the Black sea as mentioned above. The argument for the special circumstances surrounding Aegean due to the nature of that particular geographical area cannot stand as it might be indeed a semi enclosed or enclosed sea nevertheless the cooperation that Ankara demands is limited to scientific and environmental research, while additionally we have cases of other similar geographical areas e.g. the North Sea, where Baltic states ships cannot access it without entering Danish, German or Swedish territorial waters or for example Oman and Iran where is the passage in the Strait of Hormuz but still no neighbouring country has disputed Iran's, Oman's, Germany's or Denmark's right to expand their territorial waters just because they had to pass through a territory controlled by these countries.²⁰

Cyprus

Turkey has re-initiated debates and resurrected anger and uncertainty with regards to a contemporary issue in the region, Cyprus. The question of Cyprus as a whole remains unresolved but movement from the Turkish side in the abandoned town of Varosha has ignited a new wave of reactions. In specific, Varosha (seafront at Famagusta), a seaside town that was considered a major tourist destination until the mid 70s, was to remain a restricted area under resolutions 550 and 789 of the Security Council and that no one except its inhabitants would have the opportunity to live in the area.²¹²² Turkey ignored the United Nations decisions, implementing the plan of reopening Varosha claiming it was a part of the unrecognised "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus". The Security Council once again condemned these actions, but in the field Ankara continues without any disruption, even giving permits to pop-artists in order for them to record video clips in the occupied town.

²⁰ Syrigos A. (2020) *Turkish claims in the Aegean Sea and East Mediterranean*

²¹ UNSC Resolution 550 (1984)

²² UNSC Resolution 789 (1992)

Russian S-400 Air Defence System Acquisition

Turkey claimed that its airspace was repeatedly violated during the course of the Syria Civil War by Russia and Syria, creating a feeling of insecurity. Ankara approached Moscow in 2016 and entered talks for a possible Russian solution to its air defence arsenal. Right after the coup attempt Ankara started examining its choices with regards to defence systems, with the American Patriot, the Russian S-400 and a Chinese system that was about to be developed on the table. Initially Beijing won the contract which was cancelled shortly after. Turkey did not have time for the development of a new system. The coup attempt significantly weakened its Air Force's personnel and since they couldn't solve the pilot shortage, immediate update of air defence systems made sense.²³ While in military terms the selection of the S-400 can be interpreted with the above criteria, several scholars emphasize that it constitutes a purely political move. The Russian defence system could cause problems with regards to its use as an active unit of air defence in a NATO member. Apart from the fact that it cannot be integrated with all the other systems Turkey possesses and NATO's AWACS, the statements that accompany its purchase are majorly related to "political autonomy", interpreting the acquisition of the S-400 as a reaction to the support the West shows towards the YPG Kurds in Northern Syria. Main concerns of the US State Department and Congress around the Russian missile system, are related to a possible scenario/nightmare for the American military strategy in which the system is somehow integrated within the defensive mechanism of a NATO member and subsequently jeopardizes the F-35 project. More in depth, the US is concerned that the Russians will be able "crack" the fifth generation's fighter jet stealth technology by selling their weapons to NATO states. Of course, this is the reason Washington responded to the S-400 acquisition by removing Turkey from the F-35 project, even though it was a manufacturing partner state in the programme and it had already made a considerable deal for 100 aircrafts and had already sent the 2.5 billion dollar deposit to the production company, Lockheed Martin. "Turkey's decision to purchase Russian S-400 air defence systems renders its continued involvement with the F-35 impossible," the White House statement on Turkey's removal from the programme read. It was added that "the F-35 cannot coexist with a Russian intelligence collection platform that will be used to learn about its advanced capabilities".²⁴ Ankara has already agreed on the obtainment of a new batch of the Russian anti-aircraft system, ignoring the warnings and dangers this situation might imply for the region, NATO's Southern Flank and Western security as a whole.

Turkey's involvement in organised crime and Iran's sanction evasion

According to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime index, Turkey is in 12th place for global organised crime, out of the 193 UN member-states,

²³ Beyoglu, K. A., (2020). Turkey and the United States in the brink: Implications for NATO and The US-Turkish Strategic and Military Partnership . First ed. Carlisle, PA:SSI and U.S. Army War College Press. Pp 71

²⁴ July 17th 2019 White House Statement regarding the removal of Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet programme

scoring worse than any European state. The research that was published on the September 28th 2021 evaluated the level of criminality in Turkey with a score of 6.89 out of 10, with no European and only three Asian states (Iran 7.1/10, Iraq 7.05/10 and Afghanistan 7.08/10) scoring worse than that, but also leads specific crime categories like human trafficking and shares the first place with DR Congo and Iraq, when it comes to illegal firearms trade. “Illegal firearms trade is widespread in Turkey, with the use of assault rifles and the trafficking of guns experiencing a vast increase during the past years. Turkey as a whole plays a huge role as a country of origin, transit and destination simultaneously”, mentioned the report. The same document claims that Turkey has turned into a “mafia-state”. “The Turkish government often utilizes criminal activities, such as illegal gold and oil trade and human trafficking in favour of its interests. Turkish organised crime controls the heroin trade in Europe”, the report added.²⁵

In addition to that, Ankara seems to be involved in the Iran sanctions evasion scheme, violating the international embargo. The US Department of Justice announced that the Turkish state owned bank “Halkbank” is charged for fraud, money laundering and sanction violations, in a multibillion dollar conspiracy aiming to overcome Washington’s sanctions against Tehran, in a case assigned to the New York Southern District Court. To put it simply Halkbank functioned as storage for an Iranian fund pool that gathered money from illegal Iranian oil trades. The bank knowingly accepted payments by front companies that had their Iranian nexus concealed illicitly transferred more or less \$20 billion worth of restricted Iranian funds. Halkbank deceived US regulators about the scheme and allegedly created in order to bypass Iran sanctions by allowing Tehran to have access to billions worth of funds, according to John C. Demers, Assistant Attorney General for National Security. He added that it is one of the most serious international violations on sanctions ever recorded and that no party had business profiting through US law evasion and jeopardy of the American national interests and security.²⁶

How communicative content evolves into foreign policy

This part presents the official United States public diplomacy strategy and examines three phases of its application into foreign policy; indication of political intentions, where the state is transmitting signals towards another country, people or social group, a preliminary phase where the state is adopting a temporary measure as a cooperative gesture/warning depending on the situation and a final phase where a topic has become subject to irreversible action. Subsequently there will be an outline of the subject and the transmitters of said political intentions, before they found their way getting integrated within US foreign policy. Following, the text illustrates the ways an important historical fact was finalized through Presidential action, with

²⁵ 2020 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime Report

²⁶ 2019 Department of Justice Report “Turkish Bank Charged in Manhattan Federal Court for Its Participation in a Multibillion-Dollar Iranian Sanctions Evasion Scheme” pp. 1-2.

important social media actors playing their part with regards to the shaping of this political decision. The main argument of this paper is expressed in the next segment, with the position supported being that domestic public diplomacy contributes in the shaping of American foreign policy, something I attribute to the multidimensional process a foreign policy decision has to undertake in order to be activated.

In an era of disinformation the lack of factual news reports is leading to the corruption of communicational platforms. United States public diplomacy strategy is the primary channel that traffics messages between the American state and all people abroad, even in instances where human rights violations can be detected. The American Centre for Public Diplomacy itself argues that public diplomacy is essential to the security of the state.²⁷ Therefore it is not surprising that the State Department mechanisms have invested in the development and the update of this aspect of foreign policy, utilising diplomacy from a digital scope through social media. Pamment argues that when the mission is to project its global humanitarian role, transmit a signal regarding foreign affairs or to express its support on a specific matter, Washington targets the broadest audience possible. In some other cases public diplomacy aims at specific states, geographical areas etc. Regardless of the indisputable influence of domestic over foreign policy the logical utilisation of public diplomacy is to develop communications with external audiences. Washington seems to prefer Twitter when broad attention on a message or over a political decision is the wanted result.²⁸ In order to fully understand whether the US digital diplomacy was implemented under a rational actor model, the definition of foreign policy objectives is obligatory followed by the extent to which they are reflected within its Twitter content. Rational actor model means that the state ensures that foreign policy decisions by the US and foreign actors are made under benefit-maximising conditions. Priority on issues results from central determination processes and actions are very carefully examine before they are finalized. Systems on this formation assume that states are unitary actors and have mechanisms that act in a hierarchical order therefore the policies executed by the subordinates are subject of a process that reaches the administration of a country.²⁹ Consequently, an empirical parallelism between foreign policy objectives and social media content published by officials that shape the country's foreign policy should be observed in order to support this argument, something that will be presented later on. The administrative structure of the State Department's digital diplomacy does not provide us with clear data on the degree of centralization it functions under, as both types of patterns (centralised and de-centralised) are noted, functioning concurrently. Some of the accounts belong to diplomats and State Department officials while others belong to Senators, Committee Chairmen, Judges or Special Envoys, or even artists. In examples like the US Embassy in India, Ambassador Verna has stated that he made

²⁷ Collins, DeWitt, LeFebvre (2018) Hashtag diplomacy: twitter as a tool for engaging in public diplomacy and promoting US foreign policy pp. 4-6.

²⁸ Pamment, J. 2014. The mediatization of diplomacy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 9 (3): 253–280.

²⁹ George, A. 1980. Presidential decisionmaking in foreign policy: The effective use of information and advice.

sure that there was an increase between the embassy and the State Department in order for a good coordination with regards to public messaging to be achieved. After some controversial Tweets by the social media team of the US Mission in Cairo, headquarters directed the ambassadors and consuls that there should be wider oversight over the content they generate. However, other samples on Facebook or Twitter portray a lack of coherence among the published content. Brian Fung perfectly described the state of digital diplomacy as messy³⁰. Embassies hold dozens of social media accounts; official accounts, pages on specific initiatives and issues, personnel personal accounts etc. It is impossible to control what someone publishes at any given time, and this is why the State Department instead of constraining free speech and opinions naturally allows this content that represents an opinion on an international issue to be expressed, taken it is not harmful to the interests and security of the state. Still, this is not the norm, because again hierarchy prevails again and organised and systematic efforts are always subject to larger audiences, as it is proven by an example of 2013, when the US Embassy in Beijing had an effective effort with the publishing of the actual air quality data for the Chinese capital, content that had astounding engagement rates with more than 5000 re-tweets and over two million Google searches in China, despite of the internet and social media restrictions.³¹ Taking into account all the above one can claim with confidence that digital diplomacy is a shaping factor for foreign policy and that it can be conducted either in a centralised form under the oversight of the State Department's Headquarters or in a much more fluid state due to the unrestricted character social media has and their integration within today's societies

Diplomacy stages in correlation to public communication

The following part examines three different issues in the US-Turkey relations that are currently in three equivalent stages of development, from digital diplomacy to irreversible foreign policy decisions. All three examples are directly tied to the aspects of US-Turkey relations presented during the first part of the main body.

The first one is the issue of human rights violations in Turkey which has received great attention in the United States Congress as well as in the European Union. Two cases have received attention significantly higher than others, with respect to human rights violations; those of businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala and co-chairman of the Kurdish HDP party Selahatin Demirtas. During the first address of the newly elected Biden administration, spokesman Ned Price commented on the latter case recalling the ECHR's ruling in favour of the release of the detained politician,³² who is facing a case for alleged links to the PKK, according to the government. "We have taken note of the European Parliament's January 21 resolution, as well as the European Court of Human Rights' binding December 2020 ruling for

³⁰ Sandre, A. 2013. Twitter for diplomats. Diplofoundation and Istituto Diplomatico. https://issuu.com/diplo/docs/twitter_for_diplomats. Accessed 1 December 2021.

³¹ Zhang, J. 2013. A strategic issue management (SIM) approach to social media use in public diplomacy. *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (9): 1327–1331

³² CASE OF SELAHATTİN DEMİRTAŞ v. TURKEY (No. 2) (Application number. 14305/17)

the release of Selahattin Demirtaş." Apart from a public statement, Washington deployed digital diplomacy as well, in case a clear message made by the State Department representative was not clear enough towards Ankara, addressing this time the case of Osman Kavala. In October 2021, the US Embassy in Turkey along with 9 embassies from Western countries published a tweet that called upon the immediate release of the philanthropist that is detained on unclear grounds, vaguely being charged for links to terrorist organisations and the orchestration of the Gazi Park Protests in 2013.³³ The tweet caused a serious diplomatic crisis between the 10 countries and Ankara, with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs calling the act an interference with the country's judicial system and the Western countries responding that they acted consistently with Article 41 of Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.³⁴ Turkish president Erdogan and his minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Cavusoglu publicly stated that the embassies have apologised for the incident and this is how the expulsion of their missions was averted; nevertheless no country involved has recalled the statement which is still online at the "US Embassy in Turkey" Twitter account to this day. Therefore this is a topic in the US-Turkey relations, where Washington used digital diplomacy directly for the pursuit of a foreign policy goal, overcame the political cost and was practically an indication of intentions by the US, as the political aftermath was downgraded.

The second segment connects the S-400 missile system issue with the monetary downfall of the Turkish state. Washington had expressed its discomfort with Turkey's decision to acquire the Russian weapon, varying from Senator's speeches calling their acquirement an outrageous action that risks vital interests of the United States, to immediate results like the removal from the F-35 programme. An indirect result, but possibly a major objective of these inputs (speeches, tweets) and ultimately of the sanctions they brought, could be the pressure applied on Turkey's currency. Of course reckless spending on ambitious and often impossible projects, warfronts in Syria, Libya, Iraq and internally and corruption sped up things with regards to the negative course of Lira. But having your state sanctioned on several levels by a global superpower is creating the perfect mixture rating houses are looking in a state that is about get its credit capability downgraded, creating a "snowball" effect as dictated by market psychology, that enhances the magnitude and speed of the economic and political value of the country. This example is sorted as a warning, based on the costly

³³ Tanir, I. (2021). Kavala statement was consistent with diplomatic treaty, US says. Ahval News English. Retrieved 9 December 2021, from <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-usa/biden-administration-issues-first-statements-turkey-regarding-demirtas-kavala>.

³⁴ Article 41

1. Article 41 (1961) Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1) Without prejudice to their privileges and immunities, it is the duty of all persons enjoying such privileges and immunities to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State. They also have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of that State.

signals theory, as Washington transmits a message that is not permanent, yet it constitutes a designed theory put into practice.³⁵

The final example that will be examined is “The enactment of the U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021” which the paper argues is a mild countermeasure to the Turkish-Russian relations that have been developed over the past decade.³⁶ Among the most important points of the legislation that passed in US Congress on December 2021, as an amendment of the new 700 billion dollar Pentagon budget, is the provision of financial aid for the upgrade and modernisation of the Greek Armed Forces, the funding of private groups in order for them to invest on strategic infrastructure in Greece and the “green light” for an induction of Greece in the F-35 programme. The bipartisan, interparliamentary amendment that is now part of the US strategic planning for the following years is also mentioning the pursuit of stronger ties in the “3+1 group” (Cyprus, Greece, Israel + United States), a cooperation that is causing the officials in Ankara nervousness. The fact that Washington has included Greece in its mid-term strategic planning while practically inviting Athens to the F-35 fighter project, reminding that Turkey was removed from the programme not long ago, constitutes a clear political action in its final form, which in this case seems to be irreversible in the near future. The signal it is trying to send is that the United States will pick geopolitical stability instead of unpredictability in the given situation, “punishing” Turkey for their “Russian Affair” by including its contemporary archrival in the region the upper hand in terms of hard power.

Examples of different foreign policy implementations

Rational model of foreign policy adoption

In order for the policy on “The enactment of the U.S.-Greece Defence and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021” to be designed, drafted, passed from Congress and Senate also demanded the will to promote them on a political figure level. Such examples are Senators Marco Rubio and Robert Menendez. Their pro-Greek ideas were not unheard as both of them have spoken in the past with flattering words for Athens’ role in the Eastern Mediterranean region. But lately there has been a notable increase on the intensity through which both Senators try to project Turkey’s bully role in the region, even going to the extent of calling Ankara “currently a threat to national security”.³⁷ Let us bear in mind that these are words of the president of the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee for a country that currently is a NATO member, of course due to the fact Turkey’s foreign policy creates tension within the alliance. This adoption of this policy is an example of rational actor

³⁵ Erdogan’s credibility plunges along with lira. Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East. (2021). Retrieved 14 December 2021, from <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/erdogans-credibility-plunges-along-lira>.

³⁶ “U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021”. Pp 5-9.

³⁷ Fifty-four Senators sign letter criticizing Turkey’s human rights record. Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East. (2021). Retrieved 5 December 2021, from <https://www.almonitor.com/originals/2021/02/senators-wyden-rubio-50-sign-letter-biden-turkey-human-right.html>.

models, since a politician promotes positions and ideas to a point that they gain attention during the process of political decision making, in any US body, ultimately leading to its adoption. The geopolitical conditions and a state's structure and ambitions on any given system have the primary role in the shaping of a political figure's opinion on a foreign policy issue, but let us not forget that both Senator Menendez's (New Jersey) and Senator Rubio's(Florida) districts are two of the biggest Greek communities in the United States, meaning that American citizens of Hellenic descent express the same positions.

Armenian Genocide Recognition

United States recognition of the 1915 Armenian Genocide by the Ottoman Turks, in April 2021 is a topic that is related, besides the obvious which are the memories of the victims in the massacre and their descendants, directly to the US-Turkey relations. It is not random that the recognition occurred more than a century after the tragedy took place, as Washington was showing a Stoic stance against it, in order to avoid conflict with an important NATO ally. Since one of the main themes of the Biden administration was to prioritise human rights all over the world it seemed the right timing to achieve a double purpose along with the honouring of the genocide victims and that was proving to Ankara that they have a plethora of ways to hold Turkey responsible for its past at any given time. It also touches one of the main notions of digital diplomacy which is connecting with audiences in other countries. For example people in Turkey rarely get informed about an issue such as the Armenian Genocide, as it is completely rejected by the state, a picture that is strongly enhanced by the fact that the education system presents a completely different narrative on what happened to Armenian populations of Anatolia during the 1910s. Despite all that, the main point in relation to our subject is not the geopolitical impact this action might have or the verification of a historical fact by one of the most important actors in the international political system. The main characteristic of this example is that it constitutes a case in which several social media actors with a high engagement rate had a great part until this policy was officially adopted by the state's adoption protocols. Apart from the notable activity by several non governmental entities, think tanks and Armenian community pages that contributed in the online promotion of the discussion on genocide recognition, it was artists, athletes and celebrities that drew the spotlight and cause the keywords on the topic to go viral on Twitter for the US region. One of these accounts belongs to Turkish basketball player Enes Kanter, a devoted follower of Fethullah Gulen, with more than half a million followers. His tweets, stating that it was about time that everyone in the world acknowledges that the Turks slaughtered populations in Anatolia during the dawn of the 20th century and their definition as genocide is a necessity for justice to the families of the victims, not only went viral but also put the player's family in trouble back in Turkey, with police arresting his father. A Turkish court condemned Enes Kanter in 15 years of imprisonment for

allegations regarding once again maintaining ties with terrorist organisations.³⁸ The other account whose content engaged a huge spectrum of US and international audience with the issue of recognition of the Armenian Genocide, was Kim Kardashian's, with the producer's(?) 70 million followers being the biggest online exposure the issue ever received, even more impressive considering the wide range of audiences' demographics.³⁹ This is a bright example of how content made by and for domestic audience contributes to the shaping of United States policies that have an impact on an international level. It is not argued that they are the primary motive or driver of course, that would be absurd, but the importance digital diplomacy has to the policy production process and the transition from political views to policy adoption is a factor that should by any means not be underestimated.

Domestic digital diplomacy leads to statecraft

It would not be an unreasonable for someone to assume that domestic actors with significant audiences on social media play a part in the shaping of foreign policy itself. It is not a secret that these platforms have a significant impact in the shaping of political opinions, often in a bad and non-informative way, and wider effects on our society as a whole. The power digital platforms possess with regards to the ignition of developments of international magnitude can be proved through several types of sources. A great example on the immediate consequences they might create is the Tahrir Square protests of 2011, what the majority of scholar groups that followed the issue called a "the first digitalized revolution". This is due to the fact that social media created a social core protesting for the governing regime and multiplied its engagement rate through the use of Facebook and Twitter. Of course there are examples where instead of social media the mediator role is played by an audiovisual content platform such as Google's YouTube or (before it got banned) LiveLeak.com, a pattern more common in the case of the Libyan Civil War or even in the case of ISIS if we want to touch a negative side of the digitalised content for political goals on an international level.⁴⁰

Analysing the US domestic examples of social media impact on international relations, a psychosocial approach is needed in order to interpret the way public opinion transforms into political action with regional or global effects. As whistleblower and former Facebook (Meta) employee Frances Haugen pointed out with her latest revelations on reports on social media effects on various age, racial, social groups, the platforms contribute to a series of results on people, such as

³⁸ NBA Star Enes Kanter Raises Awareness About Armenian Genocide – Asbarez.com. Asbarez.com. (2021). Retrieved 1 December 2021, from <https://asbarez.com/nba-star-enes-kanter-raises-wareness-about-armenian-genocide/>.

³⁹ Robinson, W. (2021). Kim Kardashian marks 100th anniversary of Armenian genocide. Mail Online. Retrieved 9 December 2021, from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3054518/We-recognized-soon-Kim-Kardashian-takes-Twitter-mark-100th-anniversary-Armenian-genocide-1-5million-people-massacred.html>.

⁴⁰ Tufekci, Z., & Wilson, C. (2012). Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square. *Journal Of Communication*, 62(2), 363-365. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01629.x>

development of psychological conditions, alterations in behavioural patterns and the shaping of political consciences (or unconsciousness in the case of QAnon and the violation of Capitol security in 2020).⁴¹

The reason US digital diplomacy is influenced by several actors that promote various international interests, provided they abide with US foreign policy goals, is the fact that foreign policy itself is shaped by the multiculturalism within the American society. The United States population consists of million immigrants and US born children by immigrant parents, constituting 26% of the country's population. Being a liberal state that gives the opportunity to people of foreign nationalities to be integrated in the society and the political system, the United States inherits its foreign policy shaping in the same context it's society is an ever-changing canvas of different cultures. There are several communities that have promoted the policies Washington eventually adopted such as the Armenian, the Greek and the Jewish communities in the US, not only through initiatives and cultural diplomacy, but also through conduction of their own scientific analysis, part of which was actually adopted as official policy and used on this paper in order to support this very argument.⁴²

All the above, illustrate an accurate picture of an aspect of the American society and political structure. The way the US political processes and governance system functions does not allow unilateral decisions, especially on foreign policy, without the intervention of other domestic governance bodies. For example the presidency has to accept certain conclusions made by advisory boards, foreign policy committees, the Congress and the Senate, while the State Department has a certain degree of autonomy in several aspects of US foreign policy. Therefore, apart from the flaws one might detect in this governmental system, it is faithfully tied to democratic institutions and processes that eventually express the opinions of communities that have made their arguments clearly articulated and projected to their regional, state and federal leadership.

In the system this paper examined, actors that drew attention to the topics they advocated for and led to a foreign policy shift happened to have their goals aligned with current state strategic planning and Washington's series of actions regarding relations with Ankara. This also shows how important is representation on a digital level, even in the form of "soft" cultural public diplomacy for smaller regional states, as the publishing of their standpoint on a specific matter towards a massive audience, and especially towards people that affect policymaking and statecraft in one of the biggest powers in the world, is vital for 21st century conduction of diplomacy.

⁴¹ The Facebook Files. WSJ. (2021). Retrieved 29 November 2021, from https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-facebook-files-1631713039?fbclid=IwAR12C8fASMAqNAi_B8CW286ZhScvvWpD06M-9-q9d3sxSrjDVXGaO4x3NBE.

⁴² Shain, Y. (1995). Multicultural Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy*, (100), 69.

Conclusion

All in all, this research leads to three reasonable conclusions, one being the current state of bilateral affairs between Washington and Ankara and the other two main arguments that were presented.

Conclusions on factors that affect US-Turkey relations

Bilateral relations between the two NATO partners are significantly deteriorating. The islamisation of Turkey started during the last years of the Obama era; nevertheless the Democrat administration dismissed the indications that signalled worrying ties between Ankara and radical Islam elements, something that was harmful to a country that its secular character was the distinctive trait that increased its strategic value. The violation of human rights strikes a chord for the Biden administration and contrary to his predecessor Donald Trump, the President of the United States show no intention of holding back criticism on the violations Turkey has preceded. Ankara's aggressive policy with NATO partners such as Greece and other Major Strategic Partners (MSP according to the Department of State) such as Cyprus or Israel is also a known thorn in for the American-Turkish relations, with Washington worryingly observing AKP's government jeopardising the alliance's Southern Flank and creating major security risks. Moreover the relationship it has developed with Moscow put more stress in an already delicate situation, with the emerge of issues of security of vital technological information, since the Russian S-400 air defence system is feared to be a Trojan Horse that could endanger the efficiency or even worse the viability of the American F-35 jet fighter programme. Further instability is caused by Turkey's actions in Syria and the attempt to create a buffer zone on its southern border, removing Syrian Kurdish populations and establishing a settling plan by placing Syrian rebels to inhabit the region. This action also constitutes a disruption of US anti-terrorist policies, as Turkish Armed Forces are targeting Kurds, the only US ally that currently fights against members of the Islamic State. All the above along with the suspicious trades with Iran, manifest a clear picture of the actions that led the United States to the decisions of downgrading Turkey, but not cause a sudden diplomatic dead-end, investing a larger part, in comparison to previous years, in Greece as a regional ally that monitors the region and acts as a ballast to problems that may arise in the south-eastern border of Europe. This gradually increasing measure intensity adopted by Washington, in my humble opinion, will continue as long as the current AKP leadership does not change its course on domestic, foreign and monetary policy levels and the US is perfectly aware of that. Signals indicate that American hopes are that economic, domestic and international pressure on Turkey with regards to all these issues will "exhaust" the AKP out of the leadership, leading to a transitional period with a much more rational political leadership in charge. This plan sounds logic in the mid-term, but has to include assessment as for the possibility that the upcoming leadership in Turkey will be obliged to adopt similar irrational governance positions due to fear of political cost, as Erdogan's "vision" is deeply enrooted in the Turkish

educational system and the expectations of the people, in a growingly Islamic nationalist society.⁴³

Public content is part of foreign policy shaping

The second conclusion is one of the arguments of this paper, supporting that public diplomacy and public content (written, audio or visual) is without a doubt a factor in modern foreign policy shaping. During the main body several instances of public diplomacy and digital diplomacy content in specific were presented, connecting this aspect of foreign affairs with existing paradigms in the US-Turkey bilateral relations. Having established that public statements, reports, tweets and speeches by policymakers was the driving power for the implementation of policies that downgraded Ankara's value to US foreign policy and the states' eagerness to recruit digital communications in favour of interstate policy conduction, is underlining the necessity for a modern state to update its mechanisms and utilise those means in order to efficiently pursue their respective foreign policy objectives. This functions in the United States in the same way domestic political debate does. Opinions are expressed and the party that supports its positions with clear arguments and an increased projection then it increases the possibility that this opinion will one day transit into policy making.⁴⁴

The US multidimensional statecraft and opinion diversity from a domestic scope

Finally, the most important in my opinion conclusion extracted by this research paper, is an obvious verification of the theory that US foreign is a multidimensional process in which several bodies provide the inputs on a governmental level (presidency, Congress, Senate), even more provide public diplomacy incentives through their digital presence, often being members of ethnic communities that have been integrated within American society. These results occur due to the nature of American society itself, being the most diverse population on the planet, having clear effects that translate into foreign policy alterations.⁴⁵

⁴³ Baker, 2018: BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 805 pp 2.

⁴⁴ Sandre, A. 2013. Twitter for diplomats. Diplofoundation and Istituto Diplomatico. https://issuu.com/diplo/docs/twitter_for_diplomats. Accessed 1 December 2021.

⁴⁵ Shain, Y. (1995). Multicultural Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy*, (100), 69.

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