

## Perception and Continuity: Active Non-Alignment in Turkish Foreign Policy

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### Abstract

*This study analyses Turkish foreign policy between 2010 and 2025, asking whether this period marks a strategic rupture or reflects continuity with the long-standing Westernisation trajectory. Employing the emerging framework of Active Non-Alignment (ANA), the study examines how Turkey's redefinition of strategic interests and alignments reflects shifting global and regional dynamics. The findings suggest that while institutional and ontological ties to the West persist, Turkish foreign policy demonstrates a perceptual shift characterised by strategic autonomy, diversified partnerships, and issue-based pragmatism. By applying ANA to this evolving policy orientation, the study offers both a reinterpretation of Turkish foreign policy continuity and a theoretical contribution to the emerging literature on alternative alignment strategies in global politics.*

**Keywords:** Active Non-Alignment, Turkish foreign policy, continuity, Westernisation.

### 1. Introduction

A question that has been instrumental in sustaining the intellectual curiosity of researchers in the social sciences is the question of explainability of practical applications with theoretical assumptions. The inherent similarity between politics, actors, values, interests, and other such phenomena naturally suggests that both practice and the theories that claim to explain it also change. The concept of foreign policy is a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon. The intricacies of foreign policy are rendered even more complex by the numerous layers and the diversity of actors involved, which makes it challenging to provide comprehensive explanations or develop coherent theories. However, it is also known that researchers have developed holistic theories of foreign policy to explain current situations in more detail and accurately. At this point, the Active Non-Alignment (ANA) approach, although still a very new theory, is a comprehensive theory that puts global developments at its centre and at the same time explains how a complex foreign policy vision can be achieved.

This study examines the relationship between continuity and rupture in Turkish foreign policy by focusing on the developments after the Arab Spring. The essence of the traditional foreign policy understanding has been shaped on the axis of westernism, and Turkey has historically shaped both the security pillar of its foreign policy and the areas of cooperation with a perception identical to the West's. This perception is based on an institutional memory in parallel with the reference points in the historical process. Alongside the Westernisation efforts dating back to the Ottoman Empire, the East has generally been perceived as a threat—an attitude that reflects the same principles that have shaped the state's

public discourse. Consequently, the West has been regarded as the central pillar of Turkey's ontological security, and this foundation demonstrates the presence of a strategic culture closely intertwined with the state's identity. The post-2002 debates on the impact of the changes on foreign policy have naturally given rise to the question of whether foreign policy represents a departure from the Westernisation approach.

This study argues that Turkish foreign policy should be understood at two levels. The first is westernisation, which has been the main direction of foreign policy both in security and the economic system. As a requirement of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and its state identity, security establishment and economic system integration have been largely identified with the West and its institutions, and this has enabled the West to function as an ontological element in Turkey's foreign policy. Secondly, in foreign policy practice, Turkey has often viewed the West—and the actors approved by it—as the main partners for cooperation and mutual gain. This has shaped the perceptual dimension of how interests are defined in Turkish foreign policy. While westernisation in the context of economic systems and security refers to Turkey's approach to security and commercial relations, perceptually it corresponds to the fact that the hinterland, which is perceived as a gain in foreign policy, does not only refer to the west. Since the Arab Spring, debates have emerged about a shift in how Turkey defines its interests, particularly regarding alignment and strategic autonomy in maintaining security. In this framework, the study asks whether westernism in Turkish foreign policy can be analysed through two dimensions—method and perception—and whether post-2010 foreign policy represents a break from or a continuation of this westernist approach.

The present study posits that the ANA approach merits consideration as a theoretical foundation for future research, particularly in the context of elucidating states' foreign policies. This is due to the fact that it is regarded as an object of explanation, with its emphasis on both the global system and the current parameters that determine the position of states within this system. In addition, ANA basically argues that states' foreign policy behaviours are shaped by their perceptions and in this respect, it emphasises the change in the definition of foreign policy practices. Turkey's foreign policy of updating or redefining its relations with the West brings with it the difficulty and necessity for those who study Turkish foreign policy to place what is happening on a theoretical basis. In this context, the second problematic of the study is exploring whether the theoretical assumptions of the ANA approach can be used to explain the main question of the study. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the prevailing emphasis on the capacity of novel theoretical frameworks to elucidate emergent scenarios. ANA theory, for instance, could potentially provide an original contribution by offering an explanation for the shift in Turkish foreign policy. In addition, this study is expected to make two contributions to the literature. The first contribution is to differentiate from traditional explanations by looking at the debate on change in Turkish foreign policy through a new and promising theory, the ANA. The second is that the theory will provide a starting point for international relations scholars to apply it to other cases. Aiming at these contributions, this study will follow the policy tracing method and will accept the conversations, visits, and events seen in this context as data.

The ANA recommends that in an atmosphere of global competition, states should not approach the system with ordinary pragmatism but rather make their foreign policy a challenge to the system with an attitude based on principled and autonomous behaviour. It is important to note that this does not signify the disregard of power relations in the historical

process, nor does it indicate the establishment of a wholly novel order. It is the conviction of ANA that foreign policy should be liberated from established paradigms and instead be based on a self-help strategy on a global scale, with a particular emphasis on regional competition. Rather than distancing itself from global power players, it considers it necessary to maintain an equal distance and dialogue with each of them depending on the issue and situation, and to maintain a consistent and predictable foreign policy approach. Concurrently, it is recommended that the prevailing atmosphere of global uncertainty should be regarded as an opportunity, and that states should capitalise on this situation by augmenting their economic capacities and redefining their dependency relations. In this manner, the ANA highlights the inaccuracy of cultivating a discourse founded upon anti-Western sentiments, underscoring the significance of international engagement on a global scale. Turkey's foreign policy makers, while displaying autonomy in economic and defence procurement, have often cited the atmosphere of global competition as an opportunity. On the other hand, the country has tried to establish its national interest with new power centres without rejecting its historical ties, and in doing so has achieved a certain level of communication with all actors on a global scale. It has deepened its relations with different organisations by developing multilateral cooperation and has become a significant actor, increasing its visibility in the international arena. In light of all this data, the empirical evidence supports the explanatory utility of ANA in accounting for and forming an object of explanation in the case studies of Turkish foreign policy.

In this framework, the theoretical assumptions of the ANA approach will first be presented. Subsequently, the applicability of the case studies in Turkish foreign policy will be examined through an evaluation of the congruence between the observed practices and the theoretical framework. Thus, the study will both question the explanatory power of the ANA as a new theoretical assumption and provide a reference point for other studies by analysing a complex concept such as Turkish foreign policy with a new theory.

## **2. Active Non-Alignment as a Foreign Policy Theory (ANA)**

It is inevitable that new theoretical concepts and assumptions will emerge in parallel with the developments in international politics. Concurrent with the notion that the liberal hegemonic system is weakening or coming to an end, the international arena is characterised by new power searches or hegemonic wars. This has given rise to the question of what policies actors should follow (Acharya, 2018; Ikenberry, 2018). With globalisation, international relations have expanded to include more than security and economics. In a very broad sense, the actors of the international arena have become obliged to produce policies on issues ranging from ideological or technological matters, to those involving human security. This state of affairs has given rise to the question of how the foreign policies of states and policymakers should be formulated. Concurrently, the unpredictability inherent in international politics has engendered a paradigm shift, offering a novel opportunity for those who had previously been passive. This has given rise to the development of novel theoretical concepts, which, in turn, have generated a visionary response (Serbin, 2023, p. 100).

In this context, Active Non-Alignment (ANA), as a divergent interpretation of the Non-Alignment approach that emerged in the aftermath of World War II, purports to offer a solution for states operating within a complex and uncertain international system. The ANA claims to integrate all the comprehensive dimensions of foreign policy and their

interrelationships at the national level. This assertion does not align with the depiction of nostalgia as a monotonous transmission of the Non-Aligned Movement that emerged in the 1960s. In essence, non-alignment can be defined as an approach that involves maintaining a neutral stance, both in periods of peace and in times of war or conflict. This situation has basically been the result of the approach perceived as a necessity in the process of states becoming nation-states. However, the ANA aims to put forward an alternative foreign policy approach to deal with the challenges of the international system rather than resurrecting the non-alignment approach, which has been deemed anachronistic (Fortín et al., 2020). Based on the idea that the international system is in a state of transformation, the emergence of new power centres alongside the declining power of the hegemon is proposed as a solution to the difficulties of new alliance and competition configurations (Fortin et al., 2023b, pp. 1–14).

Jorge Heine, Carlos Fortín, and Carlos Ominami can be cited as ANA's leading representatives. With an approach focused on the idea that the international system is undergoing significant change and the need to replace the neoliberal paradigm, ANA argues that the positions of the Global South and emerging countries in the international arena must be updated. In doing so, it first introduces the concept of the New South, meaning the rising powers, and assumes that these countries are in a very different position from the principles that characterised the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1960s. The Global South and the New South are regarded as states that stand to benefit from the changes in the international system, a definition that has been influenced by globalisation. ANA criticises the Non-Aligned Movement's understanding of these states as exploited victims of the system. The ANA's position is that these states should refrain from identifying themselves in accordance with a Western definition and should not acquiesce to the prescriptions of the neoliberal system (Amorim, 2023; Fortin et al., 2023a; Stuenkel, 2023). On the other hand, it is also recognised that the international system appears to be far from having a meta-narrative about the line of control or the global order (Tussie, 2023). Due to these assumptions, it is quite fitting to acknowledge the ANA within the framework of postcolonial theory.

The focus in most of the ANA literature is on Latin American states, but it is also a holistic foreign policy discourse, which offers a solution to the global atmosphere of uncertainty. In this context, the ANA should not be confused with short-term opportunism and pragmatism that undermines credibility. The ANA doctrine has been presented as a prescription for Latin America to achieve harmonisation with international politics, thereby providing a potential solution to the region's current state of inertia (Stuenkel, 2023, pp. 123–131). However, the scope of the ANA also focuses on how relations with hegemonic or rising powers, in particular the US and China, should be conducted. The ANA, which traces power relations in many areas, including trade, technology, military, social, and geopolitical issues, also functions as a holistic and general foreign policy doctrine (Tokatlian, 2023, pp. 33–48). In this respect, it warrants consideration as a theoretical basis for further study and application.

The focus of the ANA is on change in the international system and the appropriate foreign policy options for 'post-hegemonic' 'states like those in Latin America'. It is argued that regional cooperation options not only serve rationality but also enable the redefinition of relations with hegemonic or rising powers. The notion of regional cooperation and alliances is not perceived as a strategy to distance such states from dominant powers; rather, it is regarded as a novel and more egalitarian approach to engaging with these entities (Tussie, 2023, pp. 201–214).

This suggests that the concept of Active Non-Alignment has a counterpart in today's international system—one that goes beyond the rivalry of major powers such as the US and China, yet still acknowledges their influence and the existing power relations. This is not defined as simple neutrality either. In the context of the US and China, the ANA's primary objective is to adopt a critical stance without aligning with the opposing power when either side transgresses its principles. This is because a state is not obliged to place itself in an equal position at all times. There is no harm in being close to an actor or regional system on certain issues. ANA is a doctrine based on principles stated in the form of variable geometry. In light of the implications of multipolarity in the context of international politics, it is conceivable to adopt a stance in favour of multilateralism while maintaining a close relationship with China. However, it is important to note that there may be instances of greater distance or opposition, which can be attributed to divergent attitudes and approaches to human rights issues (Fortin et al., 2023a, p. 264). Given the fact that aligning with a power increases risk and implies a coercive imbalance, minimising potential threats is the most appropriate foreign policy option. In addition to the presence of economically rising regional and global actors, especially China, the fact that the US is still the world's superpower militarily reveals predictability as a key concept in ANA's foreign policy approach. In this particular context, ANA acknowledges that a commendable foreign policy option is not one that is unexpected, but rather one that is consistent and reliable (Serbin, 2023). This can only be achieved by relying on a very careful diplomacy that treats each issue on its own merits and makes choices at the centre of leadership (Active Nonalignment, 2023).

The search for autonomy is another of the points pursued by the ANA. The ANA as a guide to correct behaviour should be considered as a useful tool for establishing autonomy at the heart of the reality of globalisation. This is based on the integration of the Latin American region into international trade, investment and financing flows and the maximisation of its benefits. In doing so, the countries of the region define their own national development models, centred on the preservation of the policy instruments that give rise to what is defined as autonomy (Fortin et al., 2023a). In this respect, the ANA advocates prioritising national interest. The primary motivation of this policy, predicated on economic development, is to sustain it without succumbing to the influence of major powers. It is incumbent upon states to evaluate international events in accordance with their own values, a process that demands high analytical skills. As this idea suggests, the ANA recommends a proactive foreign policy, defined as the constant search for new opportunities in a rapidly changing world order. It has been posited that states with strong traditions of foreign policy behaviour and significant economic weight are able to pursue secure policies (Heine, 2022).

The ANA strongly favours the active participation of states in global activities. The changing meanings of conflict and cooperation are the basis for the ANA approach to be a continuously dynamic approach (Rodrigues, 2024). This situation allows states to successfully integrate elements of competition and cooperation in international relations. This approach, which brings out the principle of diversity, allows states to model the challenges of the global village differently and balance them with areas of convergence against potential problems. On the other hand, this understanding becomes more meaningful with the ANA's recommendation to take a balanced approach to world developments. This is because the principle of diversity breaks the view of developments in international politics from reductionism and recommends a case-by-case approach (D.K. Giri, 2023).



At its most basic level, the ANA therefore calls on states to not unconditionally accept the positions of any of the great or regional powers in the face of the changing nature of international politics and the new composition that is emerging. The main motivation of states is to defend their national interests without succumbing to pressure from any of the hegemonic powers (Basu, 2024). However, ANA is not in favour of creating an anti-Western axis. In essence, Active Non-Alignment implies that the right foreign policy approach to take action in a changing world is not ideological but pragmatic: to stand at an equal distance from those who are superior in the power scale and to ensure that no dependency relationship is formed in one direction or the other (Heine, 2024).

The ANA was presented as a foreign policy prescription for Latin American countries, as we have already mentioned. In this context, the proponents of the theory offer a bundle of approaches to the countries of the region. In order to deal with, rather than manage, the problems and pressures of the international arena, the first step recommended is to build and strengthen regional unity. Regional structures should be established to strengthen economic and trade links with the rest of the world and to promote the institutionalisation of regional states. It is thought that this will not only ensure integration with the world, but also help to reduce the factors that increase the impact of crises on countries (Amorim, 2023, p. 257; Fortín et al., 2020, p. 16). The second pillar of the prescription is a new foreign policy orientation. Despite the changes in global economic balances, it is stressed that it is still wrong for countries to conduct their foreign policies with a Western-centric approach. Another key point of the ANA is that states should change their foreign policies in line with global economic realities (Fortín et al., 2020, pp. 16–17).

The third stage is to understand the existence of new international financial structures in light of the economic parameters that are also the source of recommendations for foreign policy changes. It is recommended that states should ensure pluralism through the BRICS or Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) channels, at a time when a World Bank and IMF-centred financial support structure leaves states inert, and the rigidity of orthodox policies is increasingly questioned (Armijo, 2023, p. 79; Fortin et al., 2023b, p. 17). As a result of all this, the ANA ultimately focuses on keeping the centres of power at an equal distance, rather than fuelling rivalry over geopolitical or geo-economic issues. Importantly, ANA also emphasizes the role of institutionalisation in the international arena—both in its own development and in other global issues. It views compliance with UN structures and mechanisms as essential, considering them a universal and transparent means of preventing conflict and promoting cooperation. (Fortín et al., 2020, p. 18).

### **3. Is it possible to talk about Turkey's foreign policy having changed?**

The geopolitical position of Turkey, a country situated at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Africa, and the Caucasus, and encompassing a variety of historical, religious, and cultural affiliations, results in the identification of Turkey as a security actor that extends beyond the confines of Europe. This situation, in conjunction with an understanding of westernism – which also constitutes the primary basis of Turkey's foreign policy strategy – resulted in Turkey's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on 18 February 1950. Foreign policy, traditionally centred on security, came to have for Turkey a counterpart that expressed unquestioning participation in the institutions of the West. Turkey's participation in economic-centred institutions, including

entities such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, have further served to illustrate that the nation occupies a position aligned with the Western economic system. However, Turkey has come to no longer be regarded as an unshakeable ally of the West, especially with the proactive and autonomy-seeking foreign policies it has pursued since 2010. This situation stems not only from factors related to the West's perception of Turkey's position, but also from alleged Western actions within Turkey and against its people (Cook, 2018).

Turkish foreign policy is marked by numerous contradictions, which can be attributed to the inherent complexities of its constituent elements. It was a stable participant of the Western alliance during the Cold War period, in continuation with the principles it set out upon its establishment. It participated in the establishment of the Council of Europe, joined the OECD, and exerted pressure to become a NATO member. It sought to be effective as a representative of the West in the post-Soviet geography at the end of the Cold War and aimed at the continuation of Western policies with the roles it assumed after 11 September (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009). It is possible to identify the elements of Turkey's traditional foreign policy relating to security and the economy in the context of its accession to these international organisations and the implementation of their respective policies. Turkey has established the relationship between security and the economic system by being within the liberal hegemonic system, and the question of continuity has been realised through the differentiation of these foundations.

More recently, the engagement and active policy approach developed with Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia in recent years has led to tension within Turkey's foreign policy approach, which has been progressing on the Euro-Atlantic plane (Altunışık, 2014). As a consequence, Turkey is seeking to revise the status quo in bilateral and multilateral issues. This is not only related to the definition of the foreign policy elite within the framework of historical heritage but also to the behaviour of strategic autonomy it seeks to possess (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Yalvaç, 2012). Turkey has started to define its foreign policy with a global vision in an increasingly complex multipolarity, (Baç, 2021) and this has weakened Western empathy toward Turkey, contributing to a sense of alienation within the Euro-Atlantic alliance (Aktürk, 2021; Aydin-Düzzit, 2018).

The systemic dimension of Turkey's activism is explained by the idea that the decline of Western dominance and the multipolarity of the world provide medium-sized powers the opportunity to pursue relatively more independent policies (Rumelili, 2024). Furthermore, the notion of Turkey's strategic autonomy is predicated on a balanced and independent foreign policy, which is indexed to developments in terms of economic and military capacity. From an economic perspective, the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) exhibited a 340% increase between 2002 and 2021, while the GDP experienced a 420% growth in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. While Turkey's share in world trade increased from 240 million dollars in 2002 to 1.11 trillion dollars by 2023, its share in global trade in percentage terms increased from 0.68 to 1.3 percent (World Development Indicators | DataBank, 2024).

Another consequence of the notion that Turkey's pursuit of autonomy can be realised through self-sufficiency or by reducing its dependency relationships is the development of its defence industry. In response to the embargoes imposed by traditional arms suppliers in the context of a punitive strategy directed against Ankara, new institutions have been established and existing ones have increased production in order to address defence requirements. In this regard, Turkey has demonstrated significant advancements in its defence industry, achieving

a substantial degree of self-sufficiency in the production of defence equipment, with domestic production contributing to 80% of its defence needs. On the other hand, this development has also started to create an input in terms of exports, and Turkey has become one of the world's leading players in the sale of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) (Anadolu Ajansı, 2024b; Duran & İnat, 2023). Turkey has sold UAVs and UCAVs to more than 50 countries and now ranks 11th in the world in terms of defence industry exports. According to the Centre for New American Security (CNAS), Turkey ranked second after the USA in the sale of UCAVs between 2020 and 2023, and while the average revenue from the defence industry was 1.64 billion dollars in 2014, this figure was 7.1 billion dollars in 2024 (BBC News Türkçe, 2025; EKOTÜRK, 2025; İletişim Başkanlığı, 2023).

In contrast, it cannot be claimed that Turkey has completely severed its relations with the West in terms of security equipment, especially air defence systems. For an extended period, Ankara has been engaged in negotiations concerning the modernisation of F-16s and has requested and even paid for the purchase of F-35s (Al Jazeera, 2017; Wemer, 2018).

ANA has argued that an autonomous foreign policy can only be realised through an approach that is fundamentally based on economic development and that this is the most effective way to engage with international politics. Indeed, ANA advanced the argument that the establishment of an autonomous foreign policy is only attainable through a model that can be articulated as indigenisation, bolstered by the necessity for defence. In summary, the fundamental purpose of the ANA is to guarantee the progression of the specified developmental issue. The implementation of other foreign policy measures is contingent upon the successful resolution of this issue. Conversely, the ANA delineates the indispensable condition for a robust and predictable foreign policy as an enhancement in economic parameters. In this context, Turkey has endeavoured to transition from a one-way relationship with numerous economic indicators and trade statistics to a more balanced and reciprocal partnership. Additionally, it has sought to achieve economic stabilisation, aiming to reduce the dependency relationship by increasing its self-sufficiency rate in meeting its defence needs.

The evolution of US unipolarity into multipolarity beyond the military sphere has brought about a fragmented distribution of power. This has led to the emergence of the concept of 'rising powers,' which is characterised by these actors 'pursuit of more autonomous policies. These actors are striving to deepen and diversify their relations on a global scale through their efforts in political, military and economic fields. This has, in turn, given rise to a security architecture centred on material power transitions, manifesting itself in local scaling. The emergence of many new international and regional organisations has created local security relations formed by the rising powers and has taken its share from these developments in the context of security on a global scale. The concept of power has thus been evolving from a hierarchical structure to a more egalitarian, horizontal one. However, the pursuit of status and autonomy by rising powers has resulted in a range of opportunities, with global implications for multipolarity and regional power balances in various domains, including economic and military strength (Yeşittaş & Pirinççi, 2021). In parallel with this, these rising powers 'desire to revise the norms and parameters of the liberal order or to shape them according to their own perceptions of national interests is manifested (Stephen, 2014).

As a country directly confronted with the security threats emerging in its region after the Arab Spring, Turkey is one of the most exposed to the global impact of local security

issues. Alongside cross-border operations, its involvement in Libya, Somalia, Karabakh, Qatar, Ukraine-Russia, and most recently Syria has established it as a significant actor in the global security framework and regional security issues. This circumstance warrants its designation as a rising power, as it solidifies its autonomous position in international affairs across various criteria.

The ANA approach argues that in parallel with the weakening of the hegemonic power and the system it has consolidated, states are playing with new power configurations as well as new discourses and power combinations. In this framework, it is possible to find examples of Turkey's foreign policy makers behaving in ways that confirm this claim. In the course of various Turkish Foreign Ministry Ambassadors' Conference, former Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu repeatedly emphasised that the global system is undergoing significant change and transformation and that Turkey has a responsibility not only for its region but also for addressing the deteriorating balance and unrest on a systemic scale (Çavuşoğlu, 2022a, 2022b; Çavuşoğlu, 2019, 2020). Similarly, then Intelligence Director and current Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan argued that Turkey should be one of the founding actors of the system and that it is competent in leadership and other necessary components for this (Fidan, 2023a, 2023b). However, Turkish President Erdoğan's politics, which manifests itself in the slogan "the world is bigger than five," a reference to the permanent members of the Security Council, is shaped by the claim that the global security architecture is not capable of solving today's global problems. This discourse constitutes a framework on which the rising powers have recently agreed, and the emphasis on global security and the possibility of a better and fairer future in the final declaration of the G-20 Summit (G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders Declaration, 2025) is an example that shows the compatibility of Turkey's policy with the assumptions of the ANA. If this assumption is widely accepted, it can be argued that Turkey has the capacity to shape a discourse emphasizing that the international system has lost its normative power, and that it therefore seeks a form of influence that cannot be achieved through hard power alone.

Taken together, these trends suggest that Turkish foreign policy has undergone a qualitative transformation—not through a complete rupture from its Western foundations, but through a strategic reconfiguration. Anchored in systemic critique, underpinned by expanding defense and economic capabilities, and manifested through diversified global engagements, Turkey increasingly exemplifies the characteristics of an ANA-oriented rising power.

#### **4. Is the West No Longer Turkey's Main Foreign Policy Direction?**

The above described understanding, which forms the basis of foreign policymaking and renews Turkey's position in the international system, has raised questions as to whether there has been a break with Turkey's traditional foreign policy approaches. The argument that Turkey's domestic and foreign policies are in a constant state of permeability, in parallel with international developments (Lesser, 2025), has led to the conclusion that Turkey has fallen into an ontological vacuum since the end of the Cold War (Akkoyunlu, 2021; Aktürk, 2015; Altunışık, 2020; Bilgin, 2009). This has resulted in a scenario in which NATO and transatlantic ties and dependence, which essentially comprise the security focus of Turkey's foreign policy with the West, have been diminished. Consequently, Turkey has been able to perceive itself as having the capacity to act with greater autonomy in the region (Larrabee, 2011). Turkey's approach to the issue has been characterised by a rigid stance towards



terrorist elements in the region, following the administration's inability to exert effective control in Syria. This approach has been examined in some studies as a transition from soft power elements to hard power elements. Furthermore, this transition has been interpreted as indicative of a contradictory behaviour on Turkey's part with respect to the Middle East (Adisönmez & Oztig, 2024; Çağaptay, 2009; Yalvaç, 2012). However, in addition to Turkey's characterisation of the Syrian Kurdish militant group, YPG, as a terrorist entity, the US's provision of direct support to such groups has assumed a magnitude that has influenced Ankara's stance towards NATO.

Turkey's perceived estrangement from NATO and the perceived breach of alliance law by the latter's supporting of terrorist elements, as well as Turkey's unanswered interest in the F35s, prompted Ankara to explore alternative avenues to meet its defence and security needs (Al Jazeera, 2017; Wemer, 2018). Within this framework, Turkey made the first tender for air defence systems in 2013. The Chinese company CPMIEC was the successful tenderer, but in 2015 Ankara announced the cancellation of the tender on the grounds that the company was on the US sanctions list and the NATO wing had objected. Then, in December 2017, a contract was signed for the purchase of S-400s from Russia (Dursun-Özkanca, 2019; Hatipoğlu & Palmer, 2014), with which relations had improved, and on 12 July 2019, the first parts of the system arrived in Turkey (T.C. Millî Savunma Bakanlığı, 2019). Although it is not clear whether defence systems have been installed or not, Turkey has displayed a hard balancing act in terms of its defence needs and has aimed to use Russia as a point of resistance in its relations with the West.

Turkey's stance was perceived as a serious problem within the alliance, and on 17 July 2019, the United States removed Turkey from the F-35 project, in which Turkey is a production partner, and stated that the parts produced in Turkey would be produced in the United States as of March 2020. The delivery of two F-35 aircraft to Turkey was not fulfilled, and the training of Turkish pilots in the use of the F-35 was terminated. Perhaps the most significant consequence were the CAATSA sanctions adopted by the US Congress in December 2020.

Russia launched an attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 in the context of the security concerns created by Ukraine's rumours or attempts to join NATO and its perceived historical rights. While the attack in question was an event that consolidated the West's view of Russia, Russia was subjected to serious sanctions. Turkey's official perspective on the conflict has been consistent from the outset, emphasising the imperative to adhere to the principles of international law (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2022). Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ankara has categorically stated that this action was not in accordance with international legitimacy (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2024). In addition, it is also known that Turkey has an approach opposite to Russia's policies in Syria and Libya and that their interests are in conflict. Nevertheless, Turkey has been an actor that both sides can communicate with in the Russia-Ukraine war, selling Unmanned (Combat) Aerial Vehicles (UAVs and UCAVs) to Ukraine while not experiencing a visible deterioration in its relations with Russia. In this war, the image of a Turkey that has evidently aligned itself with the positions espoused by the West, particularly with regard to the significance of NATO, has come to the fore.

Despite Turkey's S400 move, which is described as a major crisis for the transatlantic alliance, Sweden's stance on NATO membership can be read as a situation that makes sense of the Turkish foreign policy makers' view of their relations with the West and

NATO. Turkey's initial rejection of Sweden and Finland's applications for membership was primarily due to the perceived inadequacy of their support for the fight against the PKK/YPG (Reuters, 2023). Notwithstanding Russia's reinvigorated threat perception and Turkey's escalating security crises with NATO and the US, the impediment to Sweden's membership was removed, and Sweden consequently acceded to NATO. This was able to happen because the US saw it as possible to waive the relationship-restrictive elements known as CAATSA sanctions, especially the approval of the sale of F16s that Turkey wanted, with the approval of membership, and Ankara acquiesed (Öztürk, 2024). However, Defence Minister Güler later said that Turkey had abandoned plans to purchase F-16 kits and that the modernisation of its aircraft would be carried out by TUSAŞ (Flight Global, 2024; İletişim Başkanlığı, 2024).

ANA argues that states should not reduce themselves to a fixed position and centralise their impulses to pursue the national interest. The argument for the existence of a multipolar world is predicated on the assumption that states must balance risk situations, that progress in a single context engenders risk, and that a good foreign policy should not be based on surprises but on coherence and reliability. The notion that a state should periodically adopt a critical stance without exhibiting consistent behaviour across all issues, and that the presence of profound connections in certain domains does not necessitate the establishment of similar connections in all contexts, constitutes a pivotal assertion put forth by ANA.

In this framework, Turkey has been trying to shift its foreign policy and security needs away from a relationship of absolute dependence in a manner that reads the changes in the system and aims to benefit from the possibilities of multipolarity. At this point, this behaviour does not imply a change of direction, but rather a conformity with the assumptions of the ANA. Despite the divergent positions of Turkey and Russia on various issues, particularly those pertaining to Ukraine, there has been no discernible shift in the deepening of their relations. Similarly, Turkey has pursued a policy of internal opposition within the alliance against the West regarding Sweden's NATO membership, based on the allegation that Turkey supports terrorist elements. However, by not impeding Sweden's NATO membership, it has not overlooked its critical role in ensuring the predictable foreign policy approach of its interests within the Western alliance. While this situation points to the continuity of the security concept in foreign policy, the cancellation of the tender for the purchase of the kits indicates a perceptual change in foreign policy. Turkey's stance on Western security remains characterised by its amiable and cooperative nature, albeit with certain reservations. However, its approach to addressing its own security concerns is marked by a pronounced autonomy perspective. In other words, while Turkey still maintains the continuity of its foreign policy by respecting the alliance policy under the western security umbrella, it can purchase an air defence system from a non-western actor with a change in its perception of its own security.

Evidently, Turkey's perspective and perception of the West has undergone a notable shift. As has been argued throughout this study, systemic necessities provide foreign policy makers with autonomy. The change in Turkish foreign policy not only corresponds to the transcendence of Western borders. Indeed, the objective of the foreign policy realignment is not to create a Turkey that is detached from the West or one that has completely reversed its orientation towards the West. The primary motivation of Turkish foreign policymakers has been to effect a shift in the ontology of relations with the West. Turkey's position towards the West is regarded as an approach that seeks to redefine Turkey's autonomy and to be

regarded as an equal actor. In parallel with this, Turkey, which has increased its state capacity, has endeavoured to move its relations with the West away from a hierarchical level. As an extension of this, a multilateral and multidimensional foreign policy vision has emerged, and Turkey has started to be visible seeking non-Western options at both regional and organisational levels. Turkey has participated in or been active in global organisations and developed multilateral relations with states in non-Western regions of the world. It has sought to maintain a balance between East-West and North-South, aiming for an increasing position on a global scale (Sarı & Sula, 2024).

Building its foreign policy vision on developing multidimensional engagements with global actors, Ankara has focused on becoming a global player by increasing its level of effectiveness. Turkey maintains an active involvement in numerous Western international organisations, including NATO, the OECD, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE. Despite a certain cooling of relations, Turkey has consistently articulated that its primary objective in its relations with the EU is eventual membership (Anadolu Ajansı, 2024a; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Moreover, Turkey has established a substantial diplomatic network on a global scale, with 261 missions extending from the Balkans to Africa and Central Asia and reaching as far as Latin America. This network represents the third largest in the world (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Turkey has not abandoned its Western orientation; rather, it has repositioned itself as an assertive alliance member—economically and institutionally integrated, yet capable of pursuing autonomous security decisions grounded in a multipolar worldview.

## 5. Global Diversity and Contribution to Solving Global Problems

Another prominent element in Turkey's definition of foreign policy on a global scale is its active participation in international organisations and diversification of its relations. Indeed, the foundational element of its foreign policy during this period has been characterised by emergent forms of relations that can be interpreted as hard balancing behaviour. Ankara is seeking to deepen relations with organisations such as BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Organisation of Turkic States, MIKTA and ASEAN, amid allegations that its Western allies are not acting in the spirit of the alliance. At present, Turkey is solely endeavouring to enhance its dialogue mechanisms with organisations that are predominantly economically and politically active. Furthermore, it has developed the Asia Anew Initiative (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019) and Far Countries strategies. As a scale that also shows Turkey's foreign policy direction, while two-thirds of its exports currently take place in an area of 2,000 kilometres, it is aimed to be increased to 8,500 kilometres with the strategy plans in question (T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2025). Turkey's main aim at this point can be expressed as deepening its economic and political cooperation and, by having a say in global politics, showing that unilateralism is not a necessity in its relations with the West.

Here, Turkey's possible BRICS membership can be considered as a prominent hard balancing behaviour. In order to circumvent conceptual confusion, the concept of hard balancing is employed in this instance, given that Turkey's accession to the BIRCS would entail a comprehensive realignment of its position within the Western bloc and its security and economic infrastructure. Otherwise, it is much more appropriate to prefer the concept of soft balancing in the literature in terms of actively conducted negotiations balancing the

current atmosphere of political competition. It is not possible to consider the BRICS as a genuine international organisation at this time, as it does not yet have a permanent secretariat. However, its structural significance, representing 30 percent of global trade and 40 percent of the world's population, positions it as a significant player in future power dynamics. Foreign policymakers are planning to develop relations with BRICS on the basis of the idea that the world's economic power is shifting to the 'east', with the international system beginning to express a multipolar structure, discomfort with the West's attitude towards it, and the idea of redefining relations. In addition to opening up to the Global South and diversifying its investment options, obstructions in Turkey's EU membership accession process and its exclusion from Western cooperation have led Turkey to identify the BRICS as a means of strengthening its position in its relations with the West (Kutlay, 2024). In this framework, it has been stated that Turkey has applied for membership in BRICS, and the main reason for this is that the EU membership negotiations have not been finalised (Hacıoğlu & Kozok, 2024).

ANA asserts that the presence of diversity within the domain of international politics is indispensable for the effective realisation of both competition and cooperation. In this context, the ANA strongly recommends active participation in global activities due to the dynamic nature of the areas of conflict and cooperation. The principle of diversity opens the way for states to adopt different models for dealing with challenges in the international arena and, together with balancing behaviour, allows them to approach events on a case-by-case basis and in the national interest, rather than in a reductionist manner. Turkey's efforts to be active in other international organisations, particularly BRICS, are directly related to the ANA's approach. Turkey is endeavouring to diverge from the paradigm of Western-orientated foreign policy, which has historically exhibited a unidimensional approach, and plans to adopt a more nuanced foreign policy direction by aligning with global political developments. In addition to the potential economic, military, and political crises with the West, the pluralisation of power centres in the centre of the multipolarity approach of the international system can be seen as an extension of Ankara's understanding of solving possible risks more effectively on various platforms. Within this framework, Turkey seeks to diversify and balance its activities not only in the BRICS but also in the various international structures in which it is involved, irrespective of geography. As the ANA approach expresses and, in this context, demonstrates the theory's consistency, participating in new power configurations is not a short-term opportunism but a situation of realising a country's national interest and foreign policy definition. In this context, Turkey is also perceived to be pursuing a long-term resistant vision in response to globalisation, as outlined in the article, as opposed to a short-term strategic autonomy opportunism.

Although the ANA calls for balanced and consistent foreign policy principles and an end to the unilateralism of relations in the Western centre, it does not recommend an anti-Western approach. The aim of creating an anti-Western axis is not the main motivation of the ANA. The optimal foreign policy is predicated on a pragmatic approach as opposed to an ideological one, which signifies the minimisation of dependency relationships and the maintenance of an impartial stance. From this standpoint, it is evident that Turkey's foreign policy practices are also in line with this theoretical framework.

Despite the fact that the multipolarity approach, which is identified with the decline of Western hegemony, expresses a post-Western connotation, this does not signify a world

without the West. IMF data show that the US alone generates 26 percent of the global economy, and SIPRI data show that the US alone generates 40 percent of world military expenditure. The United States of America boasts approximately 750 military bases yet still maintains a significant degree of global legitimacy through its involvement with NATO. The People's Republic of China, meanwhile, is responsible for 17 percent of the world's economic output and 12.3 percent of global military expenditure. Although income distribution in BRICS member countries can be characterised as middle income level, these countries have yet to achieve the desired level of human development. Again, the distance of these countries from the culture of democracy introduced ambiguities in terms of the BRICS development and causes us to see the western tone of the dominant order in the global system (Niblett, 2024, p. 145).

It is precisely at this point, when Turkey's BRICS membership is being discussed, that the statements of Hakan Fidan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, explain Ankara's perspective on the issue. Fidan has stated recently that Turkey looks at BRICS not as an alternative but as a complementary organisation and that interest in BRICS should be seen as a consequence of the EU's refusal to accept Turkey's full membership. Furthermore, he has asserted that Turkey is a participant in several economic initiatives, including the BRICS forum, and that it does not seek to align with an anti-Western coalition that could be interpreted as an axis shift (BBC News Türkçe, 2024; Yeşiltaş, 2024). It is seen that Turkey's foreign policy approach can be explained here with the ANA approach. Just as being on different platforms does not imply the aim of forming a post-western anti-western bloc, the main issue in foreign policy decisions is the approach of putting national interest at the centre.

Here, Turkey's trade figures with BRICS member countries allow us to understand the issue more clearly. Although the volume of trade with member states has increased from \$74 billion to \$121 billion over the last decade, it is still only 60% of that with the EU. On the other hand, \$105 billion of the trade with BRICS is composed of trade with Russia and China, and the import-export balance in trade with these two countries points to a serious foreign trade deficit against Turkey. As this ratio stands at 17% with the EU, the foreign trade deficit with the EU represents a more reasonable level. On the other hand, it is not even possible to compare the direct investments coming from the West with the investments coming from BRICS (Kutlay & Karaoğuz, 2023; YASED, 2024). The BRICS members' being stuck on the axis of Russia and China and their stance, which is still far from a norm-based approach, has the potential to turn into a threat to Turkey's existing interests. Consequently, the enhancement of Turkey's diplomatic engagement with the BRICS nations or other international organisations does not necessarily entail the formation of an anti-Western bloc. Conversely, the circumstances that have evolved in the context of these structures have been detrimental to Turkey, and it is anticipated that a considerable period will elapse before a balanced state of affairs can be achieved. Turkey's objective is to maintain a balanced relationship with the West, particularly with the EU, which, as ANA observes, signifies a reduction in the dependency relationship.

The ANA vision advocates for states to engage in international activities aimed at addressing global challenges, underscoring the necessity for institutionalisation on an international scale and the utilisation of UN structures in this regard. On the other hand, it argues that options other than the IMF and the World Bank should be used to deal with development issues and economic problems, and that BRICS or the Asian Investment and

Infrastructure Bank (AAIB) channels should be used to reduce dependency and ensure pluralism. As of 2015, Turkey is the second largest borrower from AAIB after India (Seth, 2023). This situation indicates Ankara's objective to achieve economic diversification, not only in terms of foreign trade but also in terms of sourcing resources from non-Western regions.

The Russia-Ukraine war has been a conflict with significant consequences and problems worldwide. The Black Sea grain region constituted a significant global food source; however, the war rendered it challenging for underdeveloped countries to procure grain. Turkey oversaw an important humanitarian diplomacy move under the umbrella of the UN, and the Black Sea Grain Initiative was signed by the parties. With this agreement, the grain stranded in the Black Sea was transported to the world market through safe rotations established under the supervision of the UN (Çakırca, 2024; United Nations, 2023). Constantly emphasising the importance of the UN in international politics, Turkey states that the global security architecture needs to be updated with a revision that will fully and completely implement the requirements of the UN and argues that the structure of the Security Council does not provide a remedy for wars. Furthermore, Turkey's active mediation in numerous conflict areas, notably the Ukraine-Russia war and the ongoing institutionalisation of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, exemplifies its commitment to international engagement.

## 6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Active Non-Alignment (ANA) framework offers a robust theoretical lens to explain the strategic recalibration of Turkish foreign policy over the past decade. The present study assumes that Westernism is the primary factor shaping Turkish foreign policy. It is posited that this has resulted in the establishment of a strategic culture in which the West occupies a central position in the security, economic, and political spheres. After 2002 and especially with the Arab Spring, the other reference point of the study is that there have been some changes in Turkish foreign policy. From this point of view, two basic questions were tried to be answered in this study. Firstly, should the change be interpreted as a shift in the fundamental direction of Turkish foreign policy, and does this signify a departure from the scope delineated in this text with regard to perception and methodology, or does it represent a continuation of the established trajectory? The second main question is whether the theoretical assumptions of the ANA can be used to explain this change.

Within this paradigm, Turkey has attained a certain degree of proficiency in economic parameters and defence requirements, thereby initiating a transformation in its foreign policy since 2002. This finding is consistent with the ANA's strategy for achieving self-sufficiency. Turkey can be defined as a country that can serve as an example for the ANA's foreign policy vision in terms of development. On the other hand, ANA, with its emphasis on the post-hegemonic system, sees the emergence of new power centres as necessary and states that they should be followed. The present approach adopted by the ANA, which involves the recommendation that states should insist upon revisions to the dysfunctional aspects of the global security architecture, is also reflected in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has called for the establishment of a new global security order, a concept which is beginning to be recognised on international platforms. Furthermore, Turkey has demanded an update to the structure of the UN Security Council. Turkey's active participation in international organisations, particularly the Black Sea Grain Initiative under the auspices of the UN, is



another example of an area that the ANA strongly recommends.

This study argues that Turkey's current foreign policy, starting in 2002 and continuing over the last decade, involves a relationship of continuity rather than a break with the West. For Turkey, the West is still its main source of motivation and its primary partner in security, economic, and political matters. As we have seen, especially in BRICS, Turkey's chances of breaking away from the West in all areas do not seem possible in the near future. So what do the S-400s and balancing behaviours in international organisations signify? Again, one of the claims of this article is that the way Turkey's foreign policy perceives the West has changed. Seeking an equal relationship with the West, Turkey has started to perceive a policy of reduced dependency within the framework of the requirements of the global system. At this point, it can be said that relations with the West continue in the form of continuity, but at the perceptual level, it expresses a divergence from the way Turkey defines itself and exhibits strategic autonomy behaviours.

ANA argues that the dependency of states in hegemonic relations within the global system should be reduced, that this should be based on the strategic autonomy of states, and that states can have a good relationship with a great power on one issue and a bad relationship with it on another. On the basis of this supposition it is conceivable to elucidate Turkey's divergent positions from Russia on matters pertaining to Ukraine, Syria, and Libya while concurrently procuring from them the S-400 system. Ankara does not want an unconditional dependency relationship while maintaining a relationship of continuity with the West. At the same time, since the ANA is not in search of an anti-Western formation and bloc, Turkey's position is also in line with this assumption. At this point, Turkey is neither leaving NATO nor withdrawing from the EU membership process nor withdrawing from other Western organisations. Turkey's political economy, governance system and goals do not include a demand for a paradigmatic change. The qualitative transformation of Turkey's foreign policy is not a break with the West but an attempt at strategic restructuring. In this endeavour, Ankara's primary aim is to re-establish itself as an active and equal member of the alliance, rather than being characterised as a passive participant. While integration in economic and institutional ties is expressed as the primary objective, the overarching ambition is to establish a capacity for autonomous security decision-making in the context of a multipolar international system. This has positioned Turkey as a significant player in the pursuit of autonomy by emerging powers, necessitating theoretical frameworks to elucidate this phenomenon and the rationale for foreign policy action within the system.

The ANA positions its theoretical discourses on the manner in which states' foreign policies should be set against universal uniformity. The interests of states are defined in such a way that local elements are at the centre, and not only as defined by the positivist tradition of international relations. On the other hand, ANA has developed a different perspective on the perception of the Global South in the international system and explains the salvation prescriptions of the countries in this context with a postcolonial approach. According to ANA, the most fundamental imperative is for states to discard the conventional perspective on self-definition. By redefining its foreign policy in this process, Turkey has shifted its foreign policy perception from the traditional definition. Rather than prioritising external perceptions of its role, Ankara has placed greater emphasis on its self-defined understanding of the international system, shaping its foreign policy behaviour accordingly. This study concludes that the Active Non-Alignment (ANA) framework offers a robust theoretical lens

to explain the strategic recalibration of Turkish foreign policy over the past decade.

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