

Article

Overcoming Systematic Punishments: A Neoclassical Realist Approach to the US-Turkey Relations After the S-400 Crisis

Nobuhide Mert Matsumoto

Marmara University, Faculty of Political Sciences, İstanbul, Turkey

jptrgsm@hotmail.com

Abstract

Turkish–American relations have always had tough and contested times. In most of these issues, both states are influenced by domestic political dynamics. After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 and American support to YPG/PYD in Northern Syria, the Turkish–American relationship entered new turbulent times. After these developments, Turkey realigned itself with Russia in the region. In 2017, Turkey signed a S-400 acquisition deal with Russia as a major air defense system. This deal deteriorated Turkish–American relations further, which led to the termination of F-35 deliveries and even to sanctions. This research will contribute to the literature of neoclassical realism as a profound case study. Then it will move on to Gideon Rose’s neoclassical realist ‘Innenpolitik’ analogy to understand both Turkish and American domestic dynamics in this crisis. This research will end with the implication of Randal Schweller’s ‘Underbalancing Theory’ to explain this crisis-prone structural anomaly. It will help the readers of this article to understand how this bilateral relationship could re-normalize again as a stable alliance.

Keywords

Turkish–American Relations, S-400 Crisis, Neoclassical Realism, Foreign Policy Analysis, Domestic Politics

Introduction

Turkish–American relations have notoriously experienced hard times since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis when the US withdrew Jupiter missiles in Turkey without consulting with the Turkish authorities. While this action was justified as a condition of being a great power, for Turkey as a middle power ally, it created huge disappointment over the US assurance. Even though the main topic of this

research is about the S-400 crisis, it is vital to remind that domestic perceptions and threat ordering divergences between Turkey and the US are not new, but a prolonged issue among two allies.

In the aftermath of the US support to YPG/PYD in their fight against ISIS and failed coup attempt in 2016, Turkey cleared the way for the purchase of the S-400 Missile Defense System from Russia instead of American made Patriots. Though Turkey's position stands in urgent need of A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) capabilities due to the decreased number of fighter jet pilots. (Beyoghlow, 2020, p. 40) Many scholars and even some state officials believe that the S-400 procurement was purely politically motivated and appeared as a tool of foreign policy. For this reason, this research will take neoclassical realist theories of foreign policy as key literature to understand what led two countries to end in S-400 Crisis.

The first part will start with a literature review of neoclassical realism (NCR). Brian Rathbun underlined that all neoclassical realists are as well as Structural Realists. (Rathbun, 2008, p. 297) This review will first focus on what is a structural anomaly of neorealism. Then it will proceed to the existing literature of NCR and on its explanatory power to analyze foreign policy decisions and causes of structural anomalies. This part will also define how this research could contribute to the literature of NCR as a profound case study.

The following part will approach S-400 Crisis from Gideon Rose's *Innenpolitik* dynamics. The part will emphasize internal dynamics like 'national character', 'partisan politics', and 'socio-economic structure' of the US and Turkey over the S-400 Crisis. (Rose, 1998, p. 148) Such kind of explanation will help us to understand why the S-400 crisis was a structural anomaly. This analysis will help readers to understand the reasons for the underbalancing of the US and the pile-on bandwagoning of Turkey in the Middle East.

The next part will go deep into Randall Schweller's underbalancing theory and its implications on the S-400 Crisis. Schweller argued that factors like 'elite consensus', 'government vulnerabilities', 'social cohesion', and 'elite cohesion' can push great powers to underbalancing. (Schweller, 2004, p. 169) Unforeseen American underbalancing in the Middle East region due to domestic dynamics pushed Turkey to a pile-on bandwagoning with Russia in the Syrian civil war.

The last part will define the S-400 crisis between the US and Turkey as a perceptual shock, which was defined by Christensen and Zakaria. This part will conduct a rhetorical analysis of Turkish and American foreign-policy elites. Though the S-400 crisis seemed unforeseen by both states, this research will show how domestic dynamics developed it as outcome of this anomaly. Such kind of structural anomaly made the emergence of the S-400 Crisis inevitable as a systematic pun-

ishment. NCR understanding will help readers of this research to understand and overcome the perceptual shocks that instigated the S-400 Crisis and following corrosion of the relations.

What makes this crisis special is because many scholars and policymakers classified it as the worst case in bilateral relations. Former US ambassador to Turkey James Jeffrey defined the S-400 Crisis as 'the worst crisis' in the bilateral relations (Voice of America, 2021) It is because, alike from previous ones, it was both crucially linked with changing international environment and also with domestic constraints of two states. This research will use several neoclassical realist lenses, like Innenpolitik and underbalancing, to explain how this relationship evolved as a perceptual shock and a systematic punishment due to domestic dynamics. It will also help the readers of this article to understand how this bilateral relationship could re-normalize again as a stable alliance.

Literature of Neoclassical Realism and Turkish-American Relations

For many years of the Cold War, structural realism constituted a backbone for Turkish – American relations. Turkey's security concerns and American interests made alliance and balance as main themes of this relationship. However, the emergence of ISIS in a region where the US was reluctant to aground its soldiers has become one of the greatest divisive issues between the US and Turkey. This situation was due to both countries having different security priorities and agendas. Prominent structural realist Kenneth Waltz argued that 'a great power which did not want to fulfill a great power' role is a 'structural anomaly'. (Waltz, 2000, p. 33) This research will show how this structural anomaly developed due to the Syrian civil war step-by-step and led to the S-400 Crisis.

The decision of the US to leave the initiative in Syria to Russia pushed Turkey to fix its relations with Russia after its historical low due to the crisis of the downing of the Russian jet in 2015. This could be epitomized in Stephen Walt's argument of 'proximate power' where Moscow becomes closer than Washington in Syria. (Walt, 1985, p. 10) This development makes Turkey's purchase of the S-400 Missile Defense System inevitable. As Waltz argued, even if structural realism is still relevant, it is not a theory of foreign policy (Waltz, 1996, p. 55) It cannot explain the development of structural anomaly of the American and Turkish alliance. For this reason, this research will pick neoclassical realist analysis of foreign policy as its guiding theory for understanding the S-400 Crisis.

The findings of neorealist scholars revealed that both Turkey and the US as a great power did not behave in a way of what structure of the international politics dictated them to. Even with all these developments, both Ankara and Washington preferred to define this relationship from the basis of alliance dynamics. Until the

Syrian civil war, Turkey and the US tried to find points of convergence based on the ideational ground of democracy promotion and stabilization in the Middle East. Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell underlined that perceptions (or misperceptions) of leaders and people, complex international signals, problems of rationality (like domestic dynamics, election politics, etc.), and constraints on mobilizing state power could lead to systematic anomalies. (Ripsman, et al., 2016, pp. 20-24) This paper will gradually address how all these affected Turkish-American relations and brought us to S-400 crisis.

However, the Syrian civil war underlined a turning point where this alliance relationship was critically bound by the effects of domestic politics. Differentiated foreign policy priorities and concerns created a shock of perception between the two countries. Christensen and Zakaria argued that perceptual shocks are sole events that have cumulative effects of gradual, long-term power trends. (Rose, 1998, p. 160) S-400 crisis emerged as a perceptual shock of changing long-term power trends in the region.

Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell underlined two types of neoclassical realism (NCR) in their book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Type I of NCR tries to explain why anomalies of structural realism develop, while type II focuses on explaining foreign policy decisions and constraints. (Ripsman, et al., 2016, pp. 26-30) While the same book also defines a Type III NCR, which is hybrid and tries to explain shifts in the international system through domestic lenses. (Ripsman, et al., 2016, p. 96) This research will serve as a case study of Type III NCR, with its extensive focus on Turkish-American domestic dynamics for understanding the S-400 crisis.

Turkey's definition of new and imminent threats creates an immense, restricted strategic environment. NC realists argued that 'more imminent and dangerous threats could limit state actions for fulfilling the necessities of what structure dictates to it'. (Ripsman, et al., 2016, p. 52) Washington's limitation to mobilize national power due to domestic pressures against involvement in another conflict also constrained it to realize its great power role. Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell underlined state and social harmony is not always straightforward, which requires continuous consultation with society. (Ripsman, et al., 2016, p. 71)

Rose also underlined that the state's foreign policy cannot always be defined with the limits and opportunities of the international environment. (Rose, 1998, p. 151) The next part will focus on his *Innenpolitik*, or domestic dynamics, and how it caused an underbalancing by the US and Turkish pile-on bandwagoning. NC realist Rathbun argued in his article that overarched domestic political influences created a 'systematic punishment'. (Rathbun, 2008, p. 311) Overcoming systematic punishments requires extensive understanding of both neorealism and NCR,

while this research will try to serve both Realist and Turkish-American relations literature as a case study of type III NCR.

Innenpolitik and S-400 Crisis

Until 2014, the Turkish airspace was repeatedly violated by Russia and Syria. This created a strong sense of insecurity combined with relentless frustration over Ankara's allies. In 2016, Turkey decided to start a rapprochement with Moscow to solve the problem of insecurity in Turkey, which was caused due to the Syrian civil war. Turkey at that time expressed its will to purchase an air defense system that has A2/AD capabilities combined with SAM capabilities. For this reason, Turkey started to negotiate defense contracts with the US consortium for Patriot Systems, with Russia for S-400 Systems, and also with China.

As Kasapoğlu and Ülgen argued, S-400 Missile System shows better prospects in terms of SAM capabilities when compared to the American Patriot System. (Kasapoğlu & Ülgen, 2019, p. 3) SAM capabilities are an urgent need for the Turkish state, whose airspace was violated without actual physical support from its allies. Some scholars like Beyoglow argued, 'in interim, Turkey, aimed to solve the problem of pilot shortages caused by the failed 15th July coup attempt and following the removal of soldiers linked with the Fethullahçı Terrorist Organization (FETÖ)'. (Beyoglow, 2020, p. 40) While in actual military terms this directs us to this position, many scholars underlined the purchase of S-400 systems as a purely political move.

The S-400 System could create problems in terms of using them as an active air defense mechanism of a NATO country. As Kasapoğlu argued, S-400s could not become interoperable with Turkish Air Force's and also with NATO's AWACS reconnaissance planes, who use different radar and early warning systems. (Kasapoğlu, 2019, p. 15) This creates a relentless debate in Turkish domestic politics, as the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) and its partner Nationalist Action Party (NAP) defined the process as key to ensuring Turkey's sovereign rights. An American Congress Report indicated Ankara's purchase as a move to 'achieve political autonomy' after Western allies' disappointing response to Turkey's security concerns in the Syrian Crisis and also in the 15th July coup attempt. (Zanotti & Thomas, 2019, p. 16)

This research will not reject such claims but try to define how the S-400 acquisition become a prevailing issue between Turkey and the US from theoretical lenses. It will also try to explain how Turkey's *Innenpolitik* conditions motivated Ankara to purchase S-400 Systems at the expense of its limitations and problems like sanctions and its disqualification from the F-35 Fifth Generation Multirole warplane production program.

a. Innenpolitik and American Foreign Policy

American foreign policy since its independence in 1776 has been witnessed a relentless debate between isolationism and interventionism. To understand this debate, students of International Relations should go deep into the domestic characters of respective states and their effects on foreign policy decisions. As Gideon Rose argued, all states, even if they are in anarchy and self-help system, has unique characteristics. (Rose, 1998, p. 148)

While the post-Cold War period indicated an anomaly for American foreign policy, where the US as the dominant power in Waltzian terms acted as a force of good based on its hegemonic power. This anomaly, which started with the Clinton administration, was continued until the Obama administration, who refrained from entering new and costly wars. This approach has derived from American public opinion, which decided to not become embroiled in the Middle Eastern crisis, which led to the election of Donald Trump as the President of the US.

The last period of President Obama and President Trump's term in office show a return to the Jacksonian tradition of American foreign policy, which pushes the US to the reluctance of using American military power for purely ideological purposes. (Clarke & Ricketts, 2017, p. 371) As Jacksonian heritage is based on a kind of 'limitation of American action for sole national interests' in the Eurasian Crisis (Clarke & Ricketts, 2017, p. 371), it robustly impacted American role as a great power and its hegemonic position in the Middle East. President Trump, who set 'America First' as his guiding principle, created a huge resentment in American involvement in Syria. Even after Russia's and Iran's involvement in Syria created huge rebalancing in the Civil War, the Obama administration remains hesitant to mobilize American power. In 2018, President Trump said that 'the US cannot continue to act as gendarmerie of the world' which has become a shock for many people. (Gilles, 2018)

As both Obama and Trump administrations lacked complete control over the US Congress, partisan politics of both Republicans and Democrats played an important role in shaping American role in Middle Eastern policy. Even though the Obama administration has general confidence, its Syrian policy was viewed as 'negative'. (Barron & Barnes, 2018 , p. 1) In the 2016 elections, people who refrained from voting for Hillary Clinton stressed her failure in the Middle East policy, which sourced from an attack on the US Embassy in Libya. Even in 2019, Donald Trump decided to distance himself from the former administration fully with a complete withdrawal plan from Syria, which was rejected by Senate Republicans. (Smith, 2019)

Despite being a great power that has responsibilities to engage in the Middle East, American public opinion is distancing itself from new involvements. According

to a 2016 Pew poll, 57% of Americans said that the United States ‘should focus on its problems while let others take over global and regional issues.’ (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016, p. 70) This opinion takes an important impact on both Democrat and Republican candidates in the 2016 Presidential Election. Many Americans admonished their state to address developing great power rivalry rather than dealing with domestic affairs and problems of Middle Eastern states. Silent majorities, which echoed by President Trump in the aftermath of the 2016 elections, had a crucial impact on American foreign policy who want domestic economic reforms rather than pushing a global agenda. The next part will show how these Innenpolitik conditions led the US to an underbalancing in the Middle East, which ended with S-400 Crisis.

b. Innenpolitik and Turkish Foreign Policy

Since 2015, when the US decided to distance itself from being involved in the Syrian crisis and following the crisis of downing of a Russian jet, both Turkish foreign policy and domestic politics see grave changes. The Turkish downing of the Russian plane in Syria concluded with a Russian SAM build-up in Syria, which limited Turkey’s ability to conduct cross-border precision-guided airstrikes. After the crisis, the US and NATO rhetorically supported Ankara’s position and called for commencing talks, but remained reluctant to actively supporting Turkey against Russia. (Hürriyet, 2015)

In 2016, Turkey experienced a hard shock when a military faction linked with FETÖ initiated a failed coup attempt on 15th July. While Russia expressed its support to the JDP Government immediately after the failed attempt, the US and Western allies acted slower. Following the coup attempt, Turkey’s frustration over American relations grew. In 2017, Washington failed to respond to Turkey’s request for the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, who is the leader of FETÖ. Turkish officials underlined that ‘the US cannot be a reliable ally anymore as it becomes a safe-haven for the enemies of the Turkish state.’ (Flanagan & Wilson, 2020, p. 192)

While incumbent Trump Administration created a new shock in 2017 when Washington decided to provide heavy weapons to PYD/YPG militants. (Flanagan & Wilson, 2020, p. 190) These developments created a perception of threat to Turkey’s territorial integrity and survivability. Changing developments in Syria pushed Turkey to realign itself within the conflict while also purchasing S-400 Missile Systems. In 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that ‘S-400 purchase was a key step to modernize Turkish air defense capabilities that can help in its war against terror.’ (Hürriyet, 2019)

Developments in the Syrian civil war since 2015 reaffirmed Turkey’s political culture that is based on Sevres Syndrome, and hard-pressed it to act in voluntary

isolation based on self-help. (Schmid, 2014, p. 212) In line with this, Presidential Advisor İbrahim Kalın echoed Turkey's new policy as precious loneliness. Also, President Erdoğan's leadership correspondingly called Turkey's purchase of S-400 a matter of sovereignty. (BBC Türkçe, 2019) His relationship with Russian President Putin also takes an important role in the creation of a 'marriage of convenience'. (Erşen & Köstem, 2020, p. 240) Such a kind of realignment, based on interest-based cooperation, is essential to put under analysis. As the Congressional Report of the US underlined, Turkey's national character ended with Ankara's self-perception as a 'junior partner' for the West, which pushed them to act wisely. (Zanotti & Thomas, 2019, p. 19)

Another Innenpolitik development that influenced Turkey's decision to buy the S-400 missile defense system was party dynamics. In 2018, Turkey shifted to an executive presidential system, and with the following elections in 2019, ruling JDP aligned with the Nationalists Action Party (NAP) under the name of the People's Alliance or '*Cumbur İttifakı*'. As Tarık Oğuzlu discussed, the ruling JDP has taken significant steps to revive Turkey's Middle Eastern and Islamic identity (Oğuzlu, 2008, p. 14). While JDP's alignment with NAP created a deep policy change in Turkish foreign policy. As NAP sided with JDP government over the course of the Operation Euphrates Shield and the Operation Olive Branch, Turkey's foreign policy orientations also see a change of rank-ordering in Turkish threat definitions and policy orientations. Collaboration between the JDP and NAP spilled over to different areas of foreign policy, as Devlet Bahçeli, who is the leader of the NAP, supported JDP's decision to buy S-400 Missile Defense System. In his speech, Bahçeli defined S-400 as a prospect for Turkey's survival and a national matter for its sovereignty. (Hürriyet, 2019)

Yet again, the preceding part indicated that Turkey's public opinion takes a conformist position over the issue of S-400s. According to an opinion poll, 44% of the Turkish population supported, while 31,1% has no idea about Turkey's purchase of the S-400 system. (Daily News Hürriyet, 2019) Crisis after the failed coup attempt on 15th of July, Pastor Brunson Crisis, the issue of extradition of Fethullah Gülen, and American support to YPG/PYD in Northern Syria created a vast knock-back to the Turkish public opinion towards the US. Again, an opinion poll by Kadir Has University uncovered that more than 60% percent of Turkish public opinion see the US as an essential threat to Turkey's national interests. (Erşen & Köstem, 2020, p. 241)

American Underbalancing and Turkey's Pile Bandwagoning

Even though both Turkey and the US are bound by the balance of power politics, Rose's *Innenpolitik* dynamics had a huge impact on the two countries. Gideon Rose underlined that countries' responses to threats are highly constrained in

leaders' access to states 'relative' material power. (Rose, 1998, p. 169) Whether it is a great power like the US or whether being a middle power like Turkey, it relies on the state leader's ability to extract national power through domestic politics. Neoclassical realist approach also provides an important prospect for understanding realism's balance-of-power politics.

This part of the research will firstly define how the domestic dynamics of the US pushed Washington to an underbalancing. Underbalancing is an important concept that, derived by Randall Schweller, where elite and social level fragmentations led states to behave less likely to follow the balance-of-power politics. (Schweller, 2004, p. 170) The following section of this part will cover, how American underbalancing in the Middle East led Turkey to shift to a pile-on bandwagoning with Russia over the issue of the S-400 missile defense system.

a. American Underbalancing in the Middle East

The US's over-involvement in the Middle East in the aftermath of 9/11 and following the War on Terror generated an inner debate and criticism over the American role as a great power. The policies of the Obama and Trump administrations show a 'transmission belt' which is defined by Schweller as 'mediation and redirection of policy outputs against external forces'. (Schweller, 2004, p. 164) Even Russia's position as a re-rising power in the Middle East, the US abstained from countering the Damascus regime and Russia aggressively in the Syrian civil war.

Even structural realist understanding sees balancing as a natural process when a new great power tries to intervene in regional issues. Moscow's rise in the Syrian civil war took miscellaneous responses, as even prominent structural realist scholars Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt advocated the US for leaving the ground to Russia to deal with the Syrian regime. (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016, p. 82) However, what led to American underbalancing in Syria should be pursued in the country's domestic dynamics. As Schweller argued, over the actors' preferences, domestic politics can sometimes have a decisive effect on structural dynamics. (Schweller, 2004, p. 168) It can also clarify the structural anomaly of the American decision to minimize its footprints in Syria, despite stationing its soldiers in Northern Syria.

Schweller's thesis over underbalancing in the neoclassical realism highlights the importance of 'elite consensus' which can lay constraints on taking decisive and costly government actions that also confined recent American politics. (Schweller, 2004, p. 171) Under the Obama administration, American elites failed to reach a consensus on how to respond ongoing civil war in Syria. As most of the republicans rejected Obama's plans to carry out an intervention against Damascus over a risk of public veto in the 2016 elections. Hence, the Iraq War was perceived as president Bush's war, nor subsequent Obama and neither Trump administration

privileged such kind of bipartisan support again. Kenneth A. Schultz underlined that the problem of bipartisan support creates a risk of dramatic policy swings, which could constrain the ability to make long-term commitments to allies and adversaries. (Schultz, 2018, p. 9)

As both President Obama and Trump agonized from having solid congressional support, the American government faced a huge vulnerability. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, called for a 'Just Say No' campaign against Obama's policy initiatives, curtailed his hands in foreign policy decisions. (Kane, 2017, p. 21) Schweller argued, in a vulnerable government, leaders simply fail to neutralize the external threat while also satisfying its great-power ambitions. (Schweller, 2004, p. 174) Obama administration's weakness to address the Syrian civil war paved the way for deeper Russian involvement in the Middle East. Contrary to President Trump's valiant action over Bashar Assad's use of chemical weapons in Syria and against Iran, his administration also suffered from identical constraints.

American social unwillingness to give their consent to following administrations created a weak social cohesion, where Schweller also underlined the significance of deep political disagreements. (Schweller, 2004, p. 175) Most of the American people voiced their unwillingness to continue costly and enduring wars in the Middle East region. The American public increasingly pushed the US to concentrate on emerging great power rivalry and respond to domestic issues like the economy, infrastructure, and immigration. As Rose argued, weak social cohesion led to a failure of state power mobilization. (Rose, 1998, p. 163)

Like a problematic elite consensus, weak elite cohesion in the US leads to incoherent half-measures, which defined by Randall Schweller. Even elites in Washington acted unwillingly to involve Syria; President Trump's attempt for complete withdrawal was likewise failed by both Democratic and Republican lawmakers. American elites experienced hardships over determining whom to balance and with what costs in the Middle East. Hence, Jacksonian tradition led to a dilemma in Syria, where the US continues to possess military power in Northern Syria for its national interests. Even this, it miscarried to answer the questions of what is our goal in Syria and what are these national interests.

b. Turkish Pile-on Bandwagoning in the Middle East

American underbalancing in a relatively unstable region, where Turkey has excessive security concerns, generated a shock for Ankara. While many scholars and political analysts defined Turkey's decision to buy S-400 systems and rapprochement with Russia as a shift of axis, it could similarly define as a 'pile-on bandwagoning' which was named, by, again, Randall Schweller. (Schweller, 1994) As bandwagoning is a type of loose balancing, Kenneth Waltz defined it as 'fad'. (Waltz, 2000, p. 38) From structural lenses, which can define American behavior

as a structural anomaly, Turkey's conclusion for stirring closer ties with Russia could also be given the impression in the same way.

Stephen Walt defined the importance of 'proximate power' over the balancing behavior, who also defined bandwagoning as a common practice in a situation where balancing is simply not available. (Walt, 1985, p. 17) Turkey's participation in the Astana Process with Russia and Iran demonstrated Ankara's domestic concerns over America's Syrian policy and their support for YPG/PYD forces. After Washington's realignment in Syria and Russia's seizure of over-hand, it pushed Turkey to bandwagon with a new hegemon in the Syrian civil war based on status-quo, which is also defined by Schweller as a result of underbalancing by a great power in a region. (Schweller, 1994, p. 79)

Turkey's shock after American support to YPG/PYG in Northern Syria and after the 15th July coup attempt resurfaced Sevres Syndrome. As Dorothee Schmid argued, it led to voluntary isolation from the West and pushed Ankara towards other regional powers in the Syrian Civil War. (Schmid, 2014, p. 213) Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan underlined Ankara's disappointments with the words of 'stab-in-back' after the US decision to support a group that was designated as terrorists by Turkey. (Barron & Barnes, 2018 , p. 4) Foreign policy and security circles in Ankara decided to overtake measures for securing Turkish interests.

Schweller argued that in a 'piling-on bandwagoning' state align with winning camp in a war that its outcome was already determined. (Schweller, 1994, p. 107) Turkish decision to participate in Astana Process, with countries like Russia and Iran, who have limited common identity and goals in Syria, could be explained with this. As piling-on state joins the stronger coalition for avoiding victors' punishments and proliferating from a post-war settlement. (Schweller, 1994, p. 95) Turkey's decision to buy S-400 Missile Defence Systems indicated Turkey's will to show its new relationship with Moscow after the 2014 Jet crisis. As Kasapoğlu and Ülgen underlined, Turkish decisions for defence contracts could not solely focus on strategic decisions but also through domestic and regional political dynamics. (Kasapoğlu & Ülgen, 2019)

Discovering Perceptual Shocks and Systematic Punishment in Turkish-American Relations After the S-400 Crisis: Rhetorical Analysis

As Schweller shows in his article, 'constant mobilization is not always possible' even for great power with global agenda. (Schweller, 2004, p. 200) After the US' underbalancing in the Middle East due to domestic limitations, Turkey faces a perceptual shock of abandonment in the Syrian crisis. While Turkey's purchase of S-400s created a huge shock for American officials, where domestic and bilateral

relations among the two countries already deteriorated. Rose argued that foreign policy decisions are profoundly related to 'how each country's policy-makers understand their situation'. (Rose, 1998, p. 158) As this research underlined, both Turkey's and the US's inner dynamics and perceptions created a structural anomaly.

While both Washington and Ankara explained solutions for solving S-400 Crisis, where even some American lawmakers offered to buy S-400 systems and Turkey was still keen to buy Patriot system along with S-400. Little progress was shown as neither Turkey nor the US attempted to solve their reciprocal perceptual shocks. Washington's underbalancing in Syria and Ankara's decision to pile-on bandwagoning with S-400s created this shock, which can only overcome by first acknowledging the situation.

Western scholars and politicians extensively interpreted Turkey's purchase of S-400 as a 'Turkey's shift of axis'. (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020, p. 122) This extensive thinking creates a shift in perception of Ankara by Washington. For understanding perceptual shock and systematic punishment, this research uses rhetorical analysis of Turkish-American officials. NCR, in some cases, relies on foreign policy elites (FPEs) and their opinions on how they understand the world around them. (Ripsman, et al., 2016, p. 123) For empirical analysis of S-400 as a perceptual shock and systematic punishment, this research conducted a rhetorical analysis of FPEs from both countries.

Turkish state news agency underlines Greece's historical acquisition of the Russian S-300 system (which is still operational in a separate national manner in the Aegean Sea). (Teslova, 2019) Many Turkish officials and people accept the American stance on S-400 as a double-standard and a perceptual attitude. Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar proposed a Greek model for the use of S-400s. (Hürriyet Daily News, 2020) However, even with all these developments, US State Secretary Anthony Blinken defined 'Turkey as a so-called ally' and classified the issue as 'being in the same direction with Russia.' (Haber Türk, 2021) This speech shows how Turkey's gradual policy changes create a perceptual shock in American FPEs.

While Turkey defined S-400 purchases closely with its national sovereignty and security, Turkish President Erdoğan underlined that the previous Obama administration denied Turkey's purchase of Patriot Missile Systems and S-400s than became an issue of national security for Turkey. (TRT Haber, 2019) This also shows how Turkey's perceptual shock towards Washington's support became an effective motivation for buying S-400s. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu insisted that Turkey sees the US' stance in Syria as a more urgent issue to focus on compared with S-400s. (Sputnik Türkiye, 2021)

While politicization of the S-400 issue in both countries made things worse, domestic politics made the issue a chronic one. Turkey's use of anti-Western rhetoric for creating a grand coalition of JDP and NAP created a vicious circle in foreign policy. (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020, p. 123) Turkey increasingly started to define the issue as a matter of national independence. After trials of the system in 2020, President Erdoğan declared that they are not bound by America's stance towards these trials. (Deutsche Welle Türkçe, 2020) While in the US, the new administration increasingly sees the S-400 issue as a limited opportunity to create bipartisan support to foreign policy, since Anthony Blinken warned Turkey in that way. (Reuters, 2021)

Even both countries still adopt alliance rhetoric to define Turkish-American relations, the S-400 crisis increasingly became a systematic punishment. In line with Blinken, American Syria Special Representative James Jeffrey defined S-400 as the greatest obstacle in improving bilateral ties and underlined that there would be no improvement in Biden Administration. (Akal, 2021) This rhetorical analysis shows us that perceptual shock and systematic punishment led Turkey and the US to a gridlock, which is tough to crack even what the international system dictates.

Overcoming Perceptual Shocks in Turkish-American Relations

After the decision, the US immediately sanctioned Turkey over its future role in F-35 multirole jet deliveries. A Congressional report underlined the possibility of further sanctioning with CAATSA, which was blocked by President Trump earlier. (Zanotti & Thomas, 2019, p. 18) Before implying sanctions, US officials should make clear foreign policy analysis to understand how Washington's underbalancing created a perceptual shock in Turkey. Washington should also see that Ankara's pile-on bandwagoning is more like a fad, in line with Kenneth Waltz, rather than a complete shift of axis. Erşen and Köstem argued that Turkey's new relationship with Russia could be named as a 'strategic partnership' due to geographic realities and economic interdependence, rather than a wholly new alliance. (Erşen & Köstem, 2020, p. 241)

Not only in terms of politics, but Turkey's decision to buy S-400 Missile Systems rather than the American Patriot System created another shock. Not only Congress and the public, for the first time since the Cold War, the Pentagon also suffered from a perceptual shock. In April 2019, Pentagon overruled Turkey's offer to create a technical Joint Working Group on S-400, as they saw it as 'not essential or a way for resolution for the US.' (Reuters, 2019) Many technical-level proposals for solving this crisis were dismissed by the Pentagon due to extensive disagreements at the military-level related to the war in Syria. Foremost, Turkey and the US should overcome their military level disagreements on the field than

should move to the political ones. As security interests define the basis of every cooperation at the structural level, Pentagon always actively fulfilled the role of a crucial foreign policy advisor to the US Government.

On the political level, Ankara and the new administration of Joe Biden must understand *Innenpolitik* dimensions and their implications over the foreign policymaking process. On 30th December of 2020, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu announced the creation of a 'Joint Working Group' whereas it could be a first step for overcoming perceptual shocks. (Hürriyet Daily News, 2020) Former US European Command Commander Lieutenant General Ben Hodges claimed that the US and Turkey should first avoid defining their alliance with the basis of the S-400 crisis and should establish a trust-and-respect framework. (Kabasakalli, 2021) This speech also confirms the importance of freeing the S-400 issue from bilateral perceptual shock and systematic punishment.

Just like in the 1960s, the S-400 crisis between Turkey and the US show similar problems of diverse threat perceptions and orderings, the US's growing inability to fulfill its great power status due to domestic dynamics, Turkey's inflexible policies due to domestic dynamics, and increased lack of communication among two states.¹ (Sever, 2006, p. 80) Without alliance motivations based on mutual trust and respect, there will be little room for restoring the full-Cold War-like US-Turkish Alliance soon.

Conclusion

Turkish – American alliance since the 1960s have seen continuities and changes and convergences and divergences. The current S-400 crisis is one of the grimmest crises that some scholars concluded the case as a shift-of-axis in Turkish foreign policy. In contrast, this research tried to approach, from a neoclassical realist perspective, to show how this crisis developed as a structural anomaly.

From structural lenses, the US, a long-standing hegemon and a great power in the Middle East, faced new regional realities. These realities, combined with domestic dynamics, pushed Washington to tolerate Russia as a rising power in Syria and the broader region. While the equivalent inner dynamics hard-pressed Turkey to distance itself from its existing alliance structure to a bandwagoning, which is a fad since Turkey and Russia also have diverse agendas over the future of Syria.

This research used neoclassical realism's *Innenpolitik* analogy to explain the structural anomaly between Turkey and the US. This shows the United States' national

¹ 'Ayşegül Sever underlined that four factors that Western-Turkish Alliance in the 1960s are again different priority orderings, Britain's inability to carry weight in the region, inflexibility of Turkish implementation of Baghdad Pact and increasing lack of communication between Turkey and the US.' (Sever, 2006, p. 80)

character, leadership, partisan politics, and socio-economic character in recent years played an important role in its emergent underbalancing in the Middle East region. While vice-versa, the situation could also be implied for the Turkish case, whose rank orderings of threats and priorities in Syria changed, with also changing and emerging domestic dynamics like nationalism, Presidential System, and growing mistrust against its Western allies.

Randall Schweller's theory shows us that elite consensus, elite-social cohesion, and weak governments in the US made an underbalancing in the Middle East region unescapable as Washington increasingly fell short in mobilizing domestic power capabilities. This underbalancing pushed Turkey to pile-on bandwagoning for shielding the status quo in Syria.

Foreign policy elites, both from the US and Turkey, increasingly vocalize the S-400 crisis as an existential matter for normalizing the alliance. This shows how they increasingly support the existence of perceptual shock and systematic punishment between two states. As a result of the overarching impact of domestic constraints composed of power changes in the region, a structural punishment hit this relationship hard. Prevailing reluctance to accept this situation even made things more problematic, since no move for normalization could be carried-on.

As the last part indicated, while the US considers further sanctioning of Turkey under the frame of CAATSA, Washington should also consider that this will create no effect other than increasing and deepening this perceptual shock. What Turkey and the US should make is careful foreign policy calculations over the domestic dynamics and simply over Structural power asymmetries, while the US is a great power and Turkey is a middle power with different threat rank orderings. Without a re-start of the communication between Washington and Ankara, based on reciprocal comprehension, S-400 Crisis will unescapably linger to be a systematic punishment among two allies.

Acknowledgments

The author wants to thank Dr. Lecturer Nur Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu from Marmara University Political Sciences and International Relations Department, who is the lecturer of 'Turkish-American Relations in the Post-Cold War Period' who aided him for this article to come in being and for sharing her valued comments. The author is also grateful to Associate Professor Emre Erşen from Marmara University for additional sources that he suggested over the topic. The author of this article is also thankful to Dr. Ferit Belder, who is the editor of the Journal of Rising Powers and Global Governance, for his reviews that made this research better. The researcher is also thankful for comments and criticisms of commentators of this article Nursena E. Şadoğlu from Marmara University, Şeyma Filiz

from Galatasaray University Political Communication MA, and Serim Türkay from Marmara University Political Sciences and International Relations MA. The author also thanks to his family, who supported him through his educational life.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Bio

Nobuhide Mert Matsumoto is a Bachelor's graduate from Marmara University, Communication Faculty, Journalism Department and Political Sciences and International Relations Department with a double-major degree. Currently, he is a master's student in International Relations at the Institute of Social Sciences in Marmara University, Turkey. He has additional works on Realism, Asia-Pacific, war studies, security studies, nuclear weapons, and digitalization.

References

Akal, D., 2021. Deutsche Welle Türkçe - Jeffrey: Türkiye fırsatları kaçırdı, Biden döneminde iyileşme beklemiyorum. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.dw.com/tr/jeffrey-t%C3%BCrkiye-f%C4%B1rsatlar%C4%B1-ka%C3%A7%C4%B1rd%C4%B1-biden-d%C3%B6neminde-iyile%C5%9Fme-beklemiyorum/a-56351773>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Barron, R. & Barnes, J., 2018 . Trump Policy in the Middle East: Syria, Houston, Texas: Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

BBC Türkçe, 2019. S-400 - Erdoğan: Mesele doğrudan egemenlik haklarımızla ilgilidir, geri adım atmayacağız. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-48756983>

[Accessed 27 November 2020].

Beyoghlow, K. A., 2020. TURKEY AND THE UNITED STATES ON 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.

Clarke, M. & Ricketts, A., 2017. Donald Trump and American foreign policy: The return of the Jacksonian tradition. *COMPARATIVE STRATEGY*, 36(4), pp. 366-379.

Daily News Hürriyet, 2019. Nearly half of Turks favor purchase of S-400 missiles: Survey. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nearly-half-of-turks-favor-purchase-of-s-400-missiles-survey-144704>

[Accessed 27 November 2020].

Deutsche Welle Türkçe, 2020. Deutsche Welle Türkçe - Erdoğan: ABD'nin yaklaşımı bizi bağlamaz. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.dw.com/tr/erdo%C4%9Fan-abdnin-yakla%C5%9F%C4%B1m%C4%B1-bizi-ba%C4%9Flamaz/a-55374137>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Erşen, E. & Köstem, S., 2020. Turkey's Interest in Closer Relations with Russia: Global, Regional and Domestic Dynamics. *SİYASAL: JOURNAL of POLITICAL SCIENCES*, 29(2), pp. 231-245.

Flanagan, S. J. & Wilson, P. A., 2020. Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Partnership and the U.S. Army. In: First, ed. *Turkey's Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, pp. 179-197.

Gilles, P., 2018. *Le Monde / Trump en Irak: Les Etats-Unis ne peuvent pas continuer à être le gendarme du monde*. [Online]

Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2018/12/26/trump-a-la-rencontre-des-troupes-americaines-en-irak_5402425_3210.html

[Accessed 27 November 2020].

Haber Türk, 2021. Haber Türk - Biden'in dışişleri bakanı adayı: Türkiye'nin S-400 alımı kabul edilemez. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.haberturk.com/biden-in-disisleri-bakani-adayi-turkiye-nin-s-400-alimi-kabul-edilemez-2943478>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Hürriyet Daily News, 2020. Hürriyet Daily News - Turkey to use S-400s just like Greece using S-300s: Akar. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-use-s-400s-just-like-greece-using-s-300s-akar-159366>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Hürriyet Daily News, 2020. Turkey eyes predictable ties with new US administration. [Online]

Available at: https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-us-agree-to-setup-joint-working-group-on-s-400-issue-fm-cavusoglu-161263?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=post&utm_campaign=turkey-us-agree-to

set-up-joint-working-group-on-s-400-issue-fm-cavusoglu-161263&utm_term=p

[Accessed 31 December 2020].

Hürriyet, 2015. ABD'den düşürülen Rus uçağı hakkında açıklama. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/abdden-dusurulen-rus-ucagi-hakkinda-aciklama-40021114>

[Accessed 27 November 2020].

Hürriyet, 2019. Bahçeli'den S-400 mesajı. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/bahceliden-s-400-mesaji-41273093>

[Accessed 27 November 2020].

Hürriyet, 2019. Erdoğan altını böyle çizdi: İşi bitirdik, geri dönüşümüz asla olmaz. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-altini-cizdi-isi-bitirdik-geri-donusumuz-asla-olamaz-41140421>

[Accessed 27 November 2020].

Kabasakallı, F. G., 2021. Milliyet - İlişkilerde Güven Tazelenmeli. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/dunya/iliskilerde-guven-tazelenmeli-6485086>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Kane, J., 2017. Political Leadership and Political Parties in the Age of Trump. *Social Alternatives* , 36(3), pp. 18-25.

Kasapoğlu, C., 2019. TURKISH-RUSSIAN DEFENSE COOPERATION: POLITICAL-MILITARY SCOPE, PROSPECTS AND LIMITS, Istanbul: EDAM.

Kasapoğlu, C. & Ülgen, S., 2019. TÜRKİYE-RUSYA-ABD ÜÇGENİNDE STRATEJİK SİLAH SİSTEMLERİNE DAİR TERCİHLER VE SONUÇLARI , Istanbul: EDAM.

Mearsheimer, J. J. & Walt, S. M., 2016. The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy. *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 96(6), pp. 70-83.

Oğuzlu, T., 2008. Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?. *Turkish Studies*, 9(1), pp. 3-20.

Ovalı, Ş. & Özdikmenli, İ., 2020. Ideologies and the Western Question in Turkish Foreign Policy: A Neo-classical Realist Perspective. *All Azimuth* , 9(1),

pp. 105-126.

Rathbun, B., 2008. A Rose by Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism. *Security Studies*, 17(2), pp. 294-321.

Reuters, 2019. Pentagon not considering Turkey working group on S-400 missile defense dispute. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-dispute/pentagon-not-considering-turkey-working-group-on-s-400-missile-defense-dispute-idUSKCN1RG2XD?edition-redirect=uk>

[Accessed 18 January 2021].

Reuters, 2021. U.S. secretary of state nominee Blinken says Turkey not acting like an ally. [Online]

Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-biden-blinken-turkey-int-idUSKBN29P001?taid=6007c9411a90330001f1c463&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Ripsman, N. M., Taliaferro, J. W. & Lobell, S. E., 2016. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. First Edition ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rose, G., 1998. NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND THEORIES OF FOREIGN POLICY. *World Politics*, 51(1), pp. 144-172.

Schmid, D., 2014. Turquie : le syndrome de Sèvres, ou la guerre qui n'en "nit pas. *Politique étrangère* , 1(1), pp. 199-213.

Schultz, K. A., 2018. Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy. *THE WASHINGTON QUARTERLY*, 40(4), pp. 7-28.

Schweller, R. L., 1994. Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In. *International Security*, 19(1), pp. 72-107.

Schweller, R. L., 2004. Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Theory of Underbalancing. *International Security*, 29(2), pp. 159-201.

Sever, A., 2006. The compliant ally? Turkey and the West in the Middle East 1954-58. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34(2), pp. 73-90.

Smith, D., 2019. Guardian / Donald Trump isolated as Republican allies revolt over US withdrawal from Syria. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/oct/07/trump-syria-us-troop-withdrawal-turkey>

[Accessed 27 November 2020].

Sputnik Türkiye, 2021. Sputnik Türkiye - Çavuşoğlu'ndan ABD'nin S-400 yaptırımları hakkında açıklama: Dayatmayı Türkiye kabul etmez. [Online]

Available at: <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/202104201044320794-cavusoglu-yunan-bakan-durust-ve-samimi-davranmadi/>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Teslova, E., 2019. Anadolu Agency - US allies continue buying weapons from Russia. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/us-allies-continue-buying-weapons-from-russia/1653985>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

TRT Haber, 2019. TRT Haber - Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: S-400 savunma sistemleri Türkiye'nin ihtiyacıdır. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-s-400-savunma-sistemleri-turkiyenin-ihtiyacidir-432801.html>

[Accessed 30 April 2021].

Voice of America, 2021. Voice of America - "S-400 İlişkilere En Büyük Darbeyi Vurdu". [Online]

Available at: <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/s-400-iliskilere-en-buyuk-darbeyi-vurdu/5740131.html>

[Accessed 9 May 2021].

Walt, S. M., 1985. Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power. *International Security*, Spring, 9(4), pp. 3-43.

Waltz, K. N., 1996. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IS NOT FOREIGN POLICY. *Security Studies*, 6(1), pp. 54-57.

Waltz, K. N., 2000. Structural Realism after the Cold War. *International Security*, 25(1), pp. 5-41.

Zanotti, J. & Thomas, C., 2019. Turkey: Background, U.S. Relations, and Sanctions In Brief, Washington DC: Congressional Research Service.

