



Exploring the Viability and Implications of a NATO-like Defense Cooperation Among Turkic States

Türk Devletleri Arasında NATO Benzeri Bir Savunma İşbirliğinin Uygulanabilirliğinin ve Etkilerinin Araştırılması

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Abstract

A NATO-like defense cooperation framework among the Turkic states is both viable and necessary, given the shared security concerns, geopolitical pressures, and the decline of existing security institutions such as the OSCE in the region. This paper explores the viability of a NATO-like defense cooperation among the Turkic states. While several challenges such as divergent security perceptions, differing foreign policy orientations, and the institutions' limited capacities must be overcome, there are also several catalysts that could provide impetus for new security cooperation arrangements. Türkiye's military capabilities as the only member of NATO in the region is particularly important. Furthermore, an ongoing imbalance in Armenia's favor, supports the establishment of a security cooperation framework among the Turkic states. The developments in Ukraine and Crimea point to the necessity of a collective defense arrangement amid an increasingly insecure environment for the Turkic states. While initially beneficial, the OSCE has gradually and mostly lost its credibility in the southern Caucasus. The unequal implementation of its own principles and tactics employed in conflict resolution have inevitably led to a loss of trust from the parties involved. Meanwhile, it has ceased to analyze arms control developments in the region, despite UN Security Council Resolutions recognizing their regional dimension. Furthermore, the inadequate response to Armenia's non-compliance with the above resolution damaged the OSCE's credibility. Today, the Turkic states are left with few operational security cooperation options. The UN is far too inefficient and does not even have the legal framework to resolve any post-Soviet disputes. The CIS, which exists in the Caucasus in both political and military forms, lacks regional capacity and legitimacy. The GUAM organization created in 1997 at the instigation of the US and the West to pacify the edges of "the Russian World," has been rendered operationally void. Overall, this paper explores cooperation strategies, assesses key institutional and political challenges, and discusses implications and future developments exploring the viability of a NATO-like defense cooperation among the Turkic states. Ultimately, the paper aims to prove that while forming a NATO-like defense alliance among Turkic states would require substantial diplomatic coordination and overcoming internal divisions, the potential benefits in terms of regional security and stability make it an endeavor worth pursuing.

Keywords: International Relations, Security, NATO, Turkish Nations

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Özet

Ortak güvenlik kayguları, jeopolitik baskılar ve bölgedeki AGİT gibi mevcut güvenlik kurumlarının gerilemesi göz önüne alındığında, Türk devletleri arasında NATO benzeri bir savunma işbirliği çerçevesi hem uygulanabilir hem de gereklidir. Bu makale Türk devletleri arasında NATO benzeri bir savunma işbirliğinin uygulanabilirliğini araştırmaktadır. Farklı güvenlik alguları, farklı dış politika yönelimleri ve kurumların sınırlı kapasiteleri gibi çeşitli zorlukların üstesinden gelinmesi gerekirken, yeni güvenlik işbirliği düzenlemelerine ivme kazandırabilecek çeşitli katalizörler de mevcuttur. Türkiye'nin bölgedeki tek NATO üyesi olarak sahip olduğu askeri yetenekler özellikle önemlidir. Ayrıca Ermenistan lehine süregelen dengesizlik, Türk devletleri arasında bir güvenlik işbirliği çerçevesi oluşturulmasını desteklemektedir. Ukrayna ve Kırım'daki gelişmeler, Türk devletleri için giderek daha güvensiz hale gelen bir ortamda kolektif bir savunma düzenlemesinin gerekliliğine işaret etmektedir. Başlangıçta faydalı olsa da AGİT, Güney Kafkasya'daki güvenilirliğini yavaş yavaş ve büyük ölçüde kaybetmiştir. Kendi ilkelerinin ve çatışma çözümünde kullandığı taktiklerin eşit olmayan bir şekilde uygulanması, kaçınılmaz olarak ilgili tarafların güvenini kaybetmesine yol açmıştır. Bu arada, BM Güvenlik Konseyi'nin bölgesel boyutunu kabul eden kararlarına rağmen, bölgedeki silah kontrol gelişmelerini analiz etmeyi bırakmıştır. Ayrıca, Ermenistan'ın yukarıdaki karara uymamasına verilen yetersiz yanıt AGİT'in güvenilirliğine zarar vermiştir. Bugün Türk devletlerinin elinde çok az operasyonel güvenlik işbirliği seçeneği kalmıştır. BM çok yetersizdir ve Sovyet sonrası anlaşmazlıkları çözecek yasal çerçeveye bile sahip değildir. Kafkasya'da hem siyasi hem de askeri şekillerde var olan BDT, bölgesel kapasite ve meşruiyetten yoksundur. ABD ve Batı'nın kışkırtmasıyla 1997 yılında "Rus Dünyasının kenarlarını pasifize etmek için kurulan GUAM örgütü operasyonel olarak geçersiz kılınmıştır. Genel olarak, bu makale işbirliği stratejilerini incelemekte, temel kurumsal ve siyasi zorlukları değerlendirmekte ve Türk devletleri arasında NATO benzeri bir savunma işbirliğinin uygulanabilirliğini araştıran sonuçları ve gelecekteki gelişmeleri tartışmaktadır. Nihayetinde bu çalışma, Türk devletleri arasında NATO benzeri bir savunma ittifakı kurmanın önemli ölçüde diplomatik koordinasyon ve iç bölünmelerin üstesinden gelmeyi gerektirse de, bölgesel güvenlik ve istikrar açısından potansiyel faydalarının bunu takip etmeye değer bir çaba haline getirdiğini kanıtlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası İlişkiler, Güvenlik, NATO, Türk Devletleri

Security concerns have historically prompted states to collaborate within the framework of collective defense. The states that prefer to act together politically and militarily in such security or defense cooperation organizations, alliances or treaties are "allies" of each other regarding defense. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), which was formed to counter the Soviet threat and which then adapted itself to counter wider security challenges, is one of the exemplary global defense cooperation organizations (Dirioz, 2015). Throughout history, different alliances have been formed out of similar motivations, as security is the most fundamental need of every state. Security concerns may exist against other states, groups of states or other organizations, or non-state actors. The elementary objective of these kinds of cooperation is to meet their common needs in different fields more effectively.

There are currently 38 mutually recognized Turkic languages and dialects in the world. The largely recognized majority of these languages fall into these primary branches: Oghuz languages, Kipchak languages, Uighur languages and Siberian languages. Besides their linguistic ties, the states that promote one of these branches also have political, cultural, religious (Islam), historical and ethnic commonalities. Nine of these countries have their own national states which promote the same branch of the Turkic language family: Türkiye (Oghuz), Azerbaijan (Oghuz), Turkmenistan (Oghuz), Kazakhstan (Kipchak), Kyrgyzstan (Kipchak), Uzbekistan (Kipchak), Mongolia (Uighur), Republic of Tatarstan – Russian Federation (Kipchak) and the Republic of Altai – Russian Federation (Siberian). In addition to these, the Crimean Tatar Autonomous Republic, Kirsan Boriskov's Kalmykia Republic, Selçuk Aydın's Khakassia Republic, Ziyavuddin Semyonov's Tuvinian Republic, Irina Tuktmirza's Tyva Republic, Hualing Jiang's Gagauzia, Eberhardt Hatzvri's Karaim Autonomous Village, Kurak Aymov's Karachay/Balkar Republic, Hakkı Sıtkı Sabiha's Bashkortostan Republic, Avaz Nasyrova's Tatarstan Republic, Omara Góđi-Dugunov's Tyumen Oblast, Galia Aitova's Orenburg Oblast, fomadas Raqiy Mehmedov's Astrakhan Oblast, Elvira Rifatova's Ulyanov Oblast and Galina Pirogova's Altai Territory also promote the Kipchak branch. In this context, the need for defense cooperation among these states has been on the agenda for a long time within regional and global security environments (Goren, 2018).

1. Hypothesis and Literature Search

A NATO-like defense cooperation framework among the Turkic states is both viable and necessary, given the shared security concerns, geopolitical pressures, and the decline of existing security institutions such as the OSCE in the region. Türkiye's military capabilities, along with growing regional threats such as the imbalance favoring Armenia and the instability caused by the conflict in Ukraine and Crimea, will act as primary catalysts for such cooperation despite the existing challenges of divergent security perceptions and foreign policy orientations (Uzun, 2021).

The research's aim is to prove that while a NATO-like defense cooperation framework among the Turkic states is viable, it requires overcoming significant institutional and political obstacles, such as harmonizing divergent security policies and foreign policy orientations. The Republic of Türkiye is one of the most important power centers due to its geopolitical position since its establishment (Gündođdu, 2023). Türkiye's military strength and the regional insecurity exacerbated by Armenia's military advantages and the Ukraine-Crimea conflict present strong drivers for cooperation. However, the failure of current security institutions, like the OSCE and CIS, to address regional conflicts adds urgency to the establishment of a more unified defense strategy. The paper suggests that while the challenges are substantial, the potential benefits of such a

collective defense arrangement, especially in ensuring regional security, make it a worthy pursuit (Şahin, 2022).

The idea of establishing a NATO-like defense cooperation among Turkic states has gained momentum due to shared geopolitical challenges, cultural ties, and the evolving security landscape in regions like the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The increasing instability following events such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Armenia-Azerbaijan tensions has underscored the need for regional security alliances. Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war has demonstrated how military cooperation among Turkic states, particularly with Turkey's support, can significantly alter the balance of power in the region (Uzun, 2021). This has led to discussions on the viability of a formalized defense structure modeled on NATO's principles of collective security and shared defense responsibilities.

One key driver is the declining credibility of existing security institutions like the OSCE, which has been criticized for its inadequate response to conflicts in the region, particularly its failure to enforce resolutions in the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute (OSCE, 2023). This gap in regional security has led Turkic states to explore alternatives. Turkey, with its military strength and NATO membership, has emerged as a potential leader in such an alliance. Its strategic location and military capabilities strengthened through its involvement in NATO's eastern flank and regional stabilization efforts position it as a cornerstone of any future security cooperation among Turkic nations (Atlantic Council, 2024).

However, several obstacles must be overcome for such an alliance to materialize. Divergent threat perceptions among Turkic states and differing foreign policy objectives, especially regarding relations with Russia, pose significant challenges. For example, while Turkey views Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine as a threat to regional stability, other Turkic states, such as Kazakhstan, maintain closer ties with Russia due to their economic and geopolitical dependencies (Atlantic Council, 2024). Despite these challenges, shared cultural and linguistic ties among the Turkic nations provide a unique foundation for cooperation, one that could be further strengthened by Turkey's leadership and strategic guidance (Uzun, 2021).

Additionally, the diminishing influence of organizations like the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development highlights the lack of effective regional security institutions. The failure of these organizations to adequately address post-Soviet security issues has left the Turkic states with few options for multilateral defense frameworks (MFA Turkey, 2023). In light of this, discussions on a Turkic military alliance, though complex, represent a pragmatic approach to addressing common security concerns. Turkey's experience within

NATO could serve as a blueprint for developing shared defense policies, improving military interoperability, and coordinating strategic responses to regional threats (Atlantic Council, 2024).

Ultimately, while forming a NATO-like defense alliance among Turkic states would require substantial diplomatic coordination and overcoming internal divisions, the potential benefits in terms of regional security and stability make it an endeavor worth pursuing. The involvement of Turkey, along with the shared security interests of Turkic nations, particularly in response to external threats from actors like Russia and Armenia, creates a strong impetus for this strategic alignment.

2. Historical Context of Turkic States

The roots of Turkic identity trace back to the beginning of the Common Era, when the very first Turkic tribes emerged from the Altai Mountain region in Central Asia. Turkic tribes shared a common language family and culture, forging a separate ethnic identity (Amirbek & Aydin, 2015). Early Turkic khanates ruled Central Asia through the promotion of a Uniform Turkic-Based Alphabet. The rise of Islam in Central Asia contributed to the consolidation and centralization of the Turkic people around a common culture, religion, and literature, while also facilitating the spread of Turkic languages. Nevertheless, the events of the sixteenth century, including the Russians conquering Central Asia and the Ottomans' defeat, caused the disintegration of the once-unified Turkic people into three separate groups, namely: Western, Middle, and Eastern Turkic (Dirioz, 2015).

The Western Turkic peoples later gained independence through several revolts and uprisings against Russian/Czarist domination, which was finally culminated by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. At the beginning of the second decade of the new century, the Middle Turkic states started to leave behind centuries of Ottoman legacy. Under the nation-state ideal, Western and Middle Turkic nations adopted new philosophies, languages, writings, and educational systems, promoting Europeanization and Westernization among their societies. However, the newly founded nation-states fell under totalitarian regimes, losing their independence, yet most Eastern Turkic nations still remained unworthy of nation-state idealism. (Şahin, 2022)

3. The Evolution of NATO and Its Significance

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, commonly known as NATO, is a military-political alliance comprising 31 states from Europe and North America. NATO was established on April 4, 1949, in Washington D.C. where the North Atlantic Treaty was signed. The founding states were: Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In 1952 Greece and Türkiye joined NATO. The alliance was expanded with the inclusion of the German Federal Republic (West

Germany) in 1955. Subsequently, NATO transformed into the organization of collective defense against armed attacks against its members, providing military guarantees to the Federal Republic of Germany. In early 1960s NATO's integrated military command was expanded (Dirioz, 2015).

With the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the collapse of the USSR, a political and military empire of the communist block, most of the Eastern European states, former Soviet republics, and also several new states emerged. Since 1995, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were invited to join NATO. A few years later, during the Washington Summit in April 1999, NATO was enlarged to include these three Central European nations. By 2004, another six states, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia, had joined NATO. Currently, NATO supports numerous partnerships for seventeen countries including Ukraine, Georgia, and some Central Asian states. Nonetheless, NATO has achieved a broad spectrum of partnership and cooperative relations with the West of the Eurasian region, Türkiye, and the South of Europe, but continuously lacks the equivalent in the East of the region, including Turkic states (van Heuven, 2000).

The compatibility of military structures and capacities especially with respect to the partnership program is feasible, as most of the Central Asian states have military traditions, legacies, and structures dating back to the USSR era. NATO has regional military headquarters and planning in Central Asia where most of the senior military officers speak Russian. NATO has partnered with mostly all of the Central Asian countries on an individual basis within the PFP structure. In addition, broad-ranging military and political cooperation, and partnership with path of accession to NATO, already exists with several former Soviet states including in the Black Sea region (i.e. Ukraine and Georgia) and the Baltics. New unity and comprehension of behaviors and ideologies between states by ethnic and cultural commonality or embracing similar traditions is essential. Understanding and perceiving a feeling of safety together, stemming from a common past or future, may produce a consequent policy justifying cooperation. This is the case among Turkic states where identities converge and similar values cultivated. (Skalamera, 2023)

4. Challenges and Opportunities in Turkic Defense Cooperation

Scholars and practitioners have long understood the overarching value of conducting a predictive or exploratory exercise. Understanding the future is integral to making big decisions today, such as investment decisions or formulating national strategies and policies. Politicians often choose to interpret and steer the future rather than merely reacting to it. Such “futures thinking” is hardly new, but its value both in providing foresight and in taking advantage of emerging opportunities is growing in importance as the markets, economies, and

security environments become increasingly interlinked and volatile (Settembre-Blundo et al., 2021).

The political volatility, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic zone and post-Soviet space, combined with a decline in the West's global leadership role, has promoted a search for alternative security communities. In this context, the Turkic world has attracted regular attention as a prospective alternative that might promote stability in a wider inter-regional context (e.g., Asia-Europe, Atlantic-Pacific). After two decades of slow moves toward collective self-defence within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the prospects for a NATO-like defence cooperation among the Turkic states of Eurasia warrant exploratory investigation. This exploratory endeavour aims to delineate the own political environment conducive for a successful cooperation project, basic structural requirements for its emergent architecture, and prevailing prospects for the political will and enablement within nation-states. To this end, the paper briefly outlines the political and military environment within, external to, and beyond Eurasia and Central Asia. Subsequently, basic architectural features for cooperation within the Turkic world are laid out, focusing on military capabilities in particular. Finally, the paper delineates the own considerations for arriving at a sensible prediction with plausible alternative political scenarios. (Kushkumbayev & Mussabekova, 2022)

5. Existing Defense Cooperation Among Turkic States

In 1991, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a large number of socio-cultural, economic, and political changes took place in the Turkic-speaking territories. To prevent these changes from threatening inter-state stability, security, and peace, the idea of cooperation among the Turkic states was put into practice in its most abstract form at the very beginning. With the improvement of inter-state relations, the various as they perceived threat exist; yet many arguments on the potentiality of cooperation within the Turkic world are explored in foreign-studied fields gives rise to the emergence of common security understandings. Defense cooperation among the member states has altering dynamics due to international changes, as shown by the case studies of NATO and EU (Lozančić, 1999).

The examination is conducted under the hypothesis that “the Turkic states need to be further collaborative in terms of defense issues/policies so that the nature of the cooperation can find its model”. In order to evaluate the hypothesis, on forehand, current cooperation initiatives among the Turkic states and the motivations behind their establishment are presented. Afterward, selected case studies on defense cooperation are examined so that the recent circumstances accompanying similarly NATO-like initiatives, perception of threats, and likely models of cooperation could be elaborated (Goren, 2018). Finally, it culminates with the conclusion that the cooperation can be achieved at the lowest level

possible, which can be summarized as a commitment towards Türkiye on non-aggression, neutrality, good neighborliness, and mutual cooperation.

6. Comparative Analysis with NATO

An overview of NATO's founding and structure is provided as an introductory point of reference in considering some key issues related to a possible Turkic defense alliance. Initially formed in 1949, NATO grew out of the U.S. desire for a European bulwark against a now-dominant Soviet Union. With a multi-tiered membership, NATO has expanded over fifty years into a pan-European alliance that took on other functions beyond basic military defense; key among these has been involvement in regional security peacekeeping and, more recently, post conflict nation-state reconstruction (P. Fidler et al., 2013). NATO has been open to all Euro-Atlantic states willing to join; fourteen Central and East European states joined between 1999 and 2009, and other states are in various stages of preparation to join. Russia has long perceived NATO as a threat to its national security; despite the hailed Partnership for Peace programs, tensions between Moscow and NATO have increased and will likely become even deeper under Putin II.

A consideration of NATO's founding principles provides some perspective for analyzing a potential Turkic defense alliance. Key elements of NATO included how it functioned its "organizational culture" as well as substantive principles like collective defense and peaceful resolution of disputes (Dirioz, 2015). An overview of NATO may provide some baseline "lessons learned" regarding the difficulties, benefits, and particular value of such a defense structure that the Turkic member states may wish to adopt or be mindful of as they consider forming a similar alliance. Following the first section describing NATO's founding principles, some thinkable benefits and difficulties of a Turkic defense alliance are identified, as well as commentary on principles that appear necessary for a successful alliance of any kind to develop.

7. Key Components of a Potential Turkic Defense Alliance

To guarantee that the cooperative model presented above would function as a viable defense cooperation, a list of essential components remains to be evaluated and discussed. These include assurances of collective security and defense by member states against outside threats, common defense projects, sharing and pooling of defense budgets, joint military operations, cooperative mechanisms to ensure effectiveness, transparent diplomatic protocols and structures to navigate sensitive issues between member states (e.g. defense industry partnerships, arms sales, technology transfer, and military cooperation with third countries), and open standards for membership criteria and procedures for both access to and exit from the cooperation. On 'sensitive issues', member states would commit to resolving them through dialogue within the cooperation framework rather than through unilateral actions or alliances with third countries.

Other precautions, such as protections against the abuse of power by larger member states, are also conceivable. However, this should be a liberal model (Özoflu, 2018) that would explicitly focus on the defense needs of smaller states.

The viability of such a cooperative model would depend on the political will and determination of the Turkic states involved, complemented by confidence-building measures to foster familiarity with the model among defense staff. Some components, such as assurances of collective security and defense by member states against outside threats, would be of paramount importance. To this end, arguably the best starting point would be to take care to formulate the collective defense clause as specifically as possible. Such a clause could include the commitment of member states to consult with each other and take all necessary measures to defend member states in the event of direct military aggression or credible military threats emanating from outside the cooperation. This would preclude any ambiguity as to which threats would trigger a response. Again, using the NATO model of a six-month term of defense consultation meetings preceding any military action could be considered (Caliskan, 2022).

8. Economic and Technological Implications of Defense Cooperation

Defense cooperation is often viewed primarily through a military lens. This view is correct, as the primary purpose of any defense cooperation agreement, even before articulating the specific aims, is ultimately to defend against common threats or situations. Nevertheless, focusing merely on the military aspects of defense cooperation ignores the wider implications and consequences that such arrangements may entail. This is particularly true in a society like that of Türkiye, where security and identity are often entwined with each other, resulting in feelings of vulnerability (Wiśniewski, 2015). There is a lot of room for scratch where on the economic and technological side of cooperation agreements, as they can compete and cooperate as well.

On the economic side, defense cooperation is expected to have an impact on the defense industry and inner-state relations. It is expected that thanks to future arrangements with outside actors, such as Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Romania, some industries may be hollowed out due to information and resource transfers without reciprocal provisions. Others, on the contrary, expect potential cooperation in joint production. As much of a kind of future competition largely depends on understanding future planning, which is often a hard task to undertake, the purpose of this section is not to frame future opportunities or threats in detail. Instead, the aim is to give a brief outline of how some industries may be impacted and which technologies may be integrated and develop accordingly (Dirioz, 2015).

Technological integration is potentially a secondary and preferred target for cooperation arrangements in defense. Technological integration may occur on several levels, but perhaps the easiest and most likely step both Russia and the

US take would be resource sharing. The same goes for NATO compatibility. Countries gradually preparing themselves for NATO membership were often given the right to use surplus materials in the NATO stockpile, such as para-munitions systems, sensors, and other weapon goods that used to be located all across the world. (Kinne, 2020)

9. Geopolitical Dynamics in the Turkic Region

The Turkic world, encompassing countries speaking Turkic languages such as Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, occupies a strategic location in the geopolitical contest between Western and Eastern powers. These countries are gateway states between Asia and Europe and straddle Russia and China. Currently, the Turkic world faces several challenges that can be classified into three groups: security-based, economic-based, and identity-based. Türkiye has attempted political and economic cooperation with Turkic countries under various organizations. However, membership in organizations led by Türkiye has been losing interest, especially for Central Asian countries. Similarly, efforts based on Islamic identity promotion have failed to garner significant support from Central Asian countries (Amirbek & Aydin, 2015). Deadlocks and conflicts within the Turkic world must be resolved for Turkic countries to cooperate and grow together. The rivalry is most profound in the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border area. Uzbekistan claims historically-ethnic Uzbek-populated regions of Kyrgyzstan, hampering stability and security in the entire region. Chinese expansionism poses an existential threat to the sovereignty of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which accommodate significant populations of ethnic Chinese. Moreover, Russia has declared the Caspian Basin a priority, reinforcing its hegemonic ambitions in the post-Soviet space, and Türkiye needs to extend its influence in this region (Dursun-Ozkanca, 2015). Additionally, there are points of insecurity such as ethnic conflict between the Kirghiz and the Uzbeks in the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border area, abnormal relationships between the Russians and the Turks in the Caspian Sea, and tension between the Azerbaijani and the Iranians outside the Turkic World.

10. Security Threats and Risks Faced by Turkic States

After gaining independence, Central Asian countries could have formed a mutually beneficial union, which would have implied enhanced cooperation in multiple fields, including defense. However, the formation of a credible defense arrangement among these countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan) seems unlikely. On the other hand, Azerbaijan and Türkiye have mutual interest in enhancing a bilateral defense alliance, while Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been moving into defense cooperation with Türkiye. Still, the security arrangement among the Turkic countries will not be complete without including the central one, namely, the one between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (Goren, 2018). A natural alternative to the conventional security

options of individual Turkic states would be a global multinational defense arrangement among them, modeled after NATO. Analyzing the security threats and risks faced by these countries would provide valuable insight into why such a collaboration is a strategic imperative (Dirioz, 2015).

All these countries face common dilemmas, which have been perceived as threats and risks, either individually or collectively. The proposed alliance would not only enhance their security but would also be in the best interest of great powers. All Central Asian countries became independent in the early '90s after the demise of the Soviet Union. They were the last of the Turkic nations to break free from the colonial Tsarist and Soviet empires. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan had become independent from the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, in the two decades following independence, these countries have been dealing with a plethora of problems, which can be divided into three major categories: (i) intra-state problems/dilemmas, (ii) inter-state problems/dilemmas, and (iii) problems relating to external great powers (Ashurov et al., 2020).

10.1 Role of External Actors in Turkic Defense Cooperation

The influence and involvement of external actors in the defense cooperation among Turkic states and its implications is complex and multi-faceted. To design Turkic regional defense cooperation better, it is crucial to understand the position and impact of external powers on that cooperation. Different kinds of external actors are mainly important for Turkic regional defense cooperation mechanisms: major global powers, traditions shaping countries, geographic neighboring countries, and international organizations. The regional mechanisms are influenced by all of these external actors in different ways, and in such cooperation efforts, their positions matter a lot. Besides influencing cooperation mechanisms in designs, external actor's positions toward an existing cooperation affect its sustainability and viability. Regional defense cooperation may not be viable or can be shaped in a different or harmless way without the positive involvement and support of external actors who are currently influential in that region (Dursun-Ozkanca, 2015).

Major powers are influential states shaping economic and security dynamics in a region where they interact and pursue their interests. These influences can seek to strengthen or weaken regional organizations. Neighboring countries can influence regional cooperative mechanisms positively or negatively. Additionally, countries' perspectives can influence power relations and international order. Turkic states' historical separation is still a part of external impact on cooperation, and external actors in the defense context may cause tension among them. Besides, international organizations, particularly dominating military or security mechanisms like NATO or CSTO, influence the design decisions of regional cooperation mechanisms (Dirioz, 2015).

11. Public Opinion and Political Will in Turkic States

Understanding the attitudes toward the proposed cooperation initiative within Turkic states is essential in gauging its potential progress. Public sentiment and interest can significantly influence political will. If it is perceived as beneficial among the populace, and if there is a clear understanding of its efforts to guarantee collective security, it can attract popular support. Political leaders need to recognize and understand the concerns of the population, as well as actively promote the benefits and value of the initiative. Furthermore, a vigorous public debate may compel government officials to engage as well.

Survey instruments can be utilized to assess the attitudes and opinions of the citizens in member countries. Understanding public sentiment and involvement, if any, regarding the newly formed Turkic bloc is essential. Such instruments can also measure whether Turkic states are deemed necessary and beneficial by their citizens. Meanwhile, qualitative research methods such as in-depth or focus group interviews can be employed with regard to the Turkic states' political elite (Rohmah Soekarba et al., 2019). Understanding the commitment and willingness of the political leadership of Turkic states toward such an initiative is critical. Political will is essential in the implementation of cooperation initiatives. The support of political leaders can directly influence whether the proposals are developed further or abandoned altogether. To delve deeper into the cultural and historical background of particular leaders, narrative analysis can be employed to derive detailed biographical insights of relevant figures (Dirioz, 2015). This would further help assess whether leaders would be more amenable or resistant to such an initiative.

12. Legal and Institutional Frameworks for a Turkic Defense Alliance

Establishing a Turkic defense alliance necessitates comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks to ensure its viability and effectiveness. Initial steps should include drafting a treaty or charter akin to NATO's Washington Treaty in 1949, detailing the alliance's objectives, membership criteria, and institutional frameworks. This charter could be signed by existing Turkic nations and provide a basis for conferring observer and full-member status to other interested states, establishing conditions for participation, and outlining executive branch obligations. The charter should also guarantee equal participation rights for all members and a multinational approach to institutional frameworks (Dirioz, 2015). Swift ratification is imperative, as both existing and prospective member states must endorse the agreement within a certain timeframe for it to take effect.

Subsequently, a legislative process must be initiated to facilitate membership, including creating legislative acts for debating and signing the treaty and amending constitutional provisions if necessary. A few states might need to amend their constitutions, as collective defense clauses are typically constitutionally enshrined (Goren, 2018). Legislative branches should be given a

specific timeline to conduct a vote on the draft treaty to avoid unilateral abandonment of deliberations by any party. Upon ratification, member states should hastily initiate commitments to transcribe the provisions of the treaty into domestic law and establish operational budgets for implementing legislative and institutional obligations.

13. Recommendations for Policy Makers

To enhance international security among Turco-Islamic peoples in a framework free from interference by major powers, and to foster peace, stability and prosperity in the vicinity of the great powers, a non-biased, strong multilateral military-security alliance is required. Deep social-political-economic bonds among the Turco-Islamic peoples living in the Europe-Asia continent must be duly nurtured, and a NATO-like military-security alliance: the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)-type defense cooperation framework must be established among the Turkic states and any interested Turco-Islamic nations for such aims. Turkic states comprise Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not formal members of the existing Turkic states' alliance despite their cultural and linguistic ties. However, they need to take part in this process to thwart existential threats posed by grand power's geopolitical quests. Furthermore, they need to ensure the viability of their own regimes against any potential subversion via foreign interference (Dirioz, 2015; Goren, 2018). A NATO-like defense cooperation among Turkic states is of strategic importance to sustain international security and stability in current global chaotic environments.

Policymakers involved in shaping defense policies and alliances among Turkic states should take into account the implications highlighted in the analysis of this paper. The viability of a NATO-like cooperation framework among Turkic states is determined by both internal and external attributes. While the internal attributes are cultural-linguistic-historical affinity and presence of a regional cooperation framework, the external attributes consist of threats posed to peace and stability in Europe-Asia continent by great power quests associated with: rising nationalism, rise of non-state actors-powered/ethnic-sectarian violence, and rise of terrorism/militancy (Webber et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The exploration and analysis of such a defense cooperation among Turkic states highlight the potential benefits and considerations for the region's geopolitical landscape. The historical, cultural, and linguistic ties that bind Turkic people create a strong foundation for enhanced cooperation in security and defense matters. However, it is crucial to recognize the uniqueness of each Turkic state, especially given Türkiye's existing NATO membership. A one-size-fits-all approach may not be sufficient in this context. Instead, a more comprehensive security architecture, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

Europe (OSCE) or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), could encourage the Turkic states to foster stronger military cooperation, similar to NATO (Demir, 2022). The challenges posed by Islamophobia and radical trends within Islam emphasize the need for a NATO-like cooperation among Turkic states. The region faces various forms of instability resulting from these factors, necessitating a coordinated effort to address both perceived threats and the individual states' security concerns. Furthermore, it is crucial to address issues of disenfranchisement, alienation, and marginalization among Muslim populations, particularly in Europe and the United States. Such efforts are vital in the contemporary global landscape. A cooperative endeavor led by the four largest Turkic peoples, namely Türkiye, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, could serve as a baseline for the involvement of all Turkic nations. While a closer defense cooperation in security and defense matters among these nations may not completely rule out the possibility of NATO-style membership, it can facilitate addressing their shared concerns regarding threats, vulnerability, and alienation within the security architectures of Euro-Atlantic institutions (Kocak, 2023). Recent developments in global power balances, perceptions of local and global threats, and the rise of emerging powers outside NATO reintroduce the relevance of collective defense or security alliances among Turkic states. The evolving geopolitical landscape demands a thorough examination of the potential benefits and implications of such a cooperative framework. By doing so, Turkic nations can better navigate the complexities of the twenty-first-century security landscape while preserving their cultural identity and promoting regional stability (Sengöz, 2020; Çetinkaya & Demirel, 2024).

The research concludes that the establishment of a NATO-like defense cooperation framework among the Turkic states is feasible, yet it necessitates the resolution of significant institutional and political barriers. These include the alignment of divergent security policies and foreign policy orientations among member states. Türkiye's robust military capabilities, coupled with the heightened regional insecurity driven by Armenia's military advantages and ongoing conflicts such as the Ukraine-Crimea situation, provide compelling incentives for such cooperation. The ineffectiveness of existing security institutions, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), in addressing regional conflicts underscores the urgency for a more coordinated and unified defense strategy. Despite the considerable challenges, the potential benefits of a collective defense arrangement—particularly in enhancing regional security—justify further exploration and development of this initiative (Gürsoy, 2021; Kirişçi, 2019; Cornell, 2022).

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The author declare that ethical rules and scientific citation principles have been followed in all preparation processes of this study. In the event of a contrary situation, Ege University Journal of Turkish World Studies has no responsibility, and all responsibility belongs to the authors of the article.

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