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ANALYSIS

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TÜRKİYE AND THE UK: NEW MULTIDIMENSIONAL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

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Threats and conflict are closer to Europe than they have ever been in a long time. With the Russia-Ukraine War, the conflicts on the border of Europe, the developments in the Suwałki Corridor and the tension in the Balkans; it has the potential to penetrate the borders of Europe at any time. Moreover, the threats are not just at the borders. Operations and assets in distant lands where Europe's locomotive states have interests also face major threats. European states, especially France, and the EU policies and practices in general are the primary contact area in these threats in terms of protecting security, trade, and spheres of influence in Africa and Southeast Asia. The possibility of European states losing their regional influence as a result of military or political challenges is increasing. 2024 will not be different in these matters. The two countries that Europe can rely on to defend its lands and intellectual interests are located at the two geographical ends of the old continent: Türkiye and United Kingdom.

On 16 March 2021, the British Government published its vision for the UK's role in the world over the next decade. The report, called the "Integrated Review" (IR21), combined the areas of international development, national security, foreign policy and defense policy into a single strategy. IR21 was shaped by the Brexit process and the "Global Britain" model promoted by Boris Johnson, and completely ignored the EU as a partner. Previous Prime Minister Liz Truss, who briefly stayed in office after Johnson, initially considered revising the document to take a tougher stance on China. The latest update under the current Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, who adopted a more pragmatic foreign policy, largely abandons claims about a world-leading "Global Britain". Instead, the new British government is painting a picture of a UK embracing shared risks with its Western partners and facing greater geostrategic competition.

Can there be EU and NATO Rivalry in the European Security Vision?

The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU affected the capacities of the Union and its member states as well as bilateral relations. For example, this separation left France without its most similar and significant partner within the Union in terms of its capacity to conduct high-intensity operations outside its national territory. By doing so, France became the only EU country with nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, which gives greater responsibility. Moreover, the current situation comes with the pressure to use this responsibility with the powers it shares across the EU, which is seen as a risk for national politics.

London has traditionally prioritized NATO in its foreign and security policy. Moreover, Brexit has also created a pause in relations with Brussels. However, recent developments such as the UK's application to join the Military Mobility (MCC) Project which is a mission of a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) open to third parties starting July 2022, and its accession to the European Political Community (EPC) established in 2022 reflects that London desire to renew its cooperation with Brussels. Similarly, the Windsor Framework Agreement signed between the UK and the EU a year ago and the subsequent Anglo-French rapprochement are indicative of a shift in policy in favor of broader re-engagement with Europe by restoring ties at Westminster.

The UK's departure from the EU has also changed the country's interaction with the rest of the world. For example, Defense Secretary of Brexit era Gavin Williamson said, *“Those who believe that we are turning our backs on the world by leaving the European Union are moving away from the truth. We will establish new alliances, revive old ones and, above all, prove that we are one of the countries that will take action when necessary.”* In many respects, this situation served as a catalyst for deepening bilateral relations with Türkiye, especially in terms of trade and economic cooperation. Both countries decided to further strengthen their partnership, including starting talks to renegotiate the existing Türkiye-UK free trade agreement. This strengthened partnership has also opened space for advancement in many areas beyond trade, such as investment, immigration policy and defense cooperation and building on the strategic partnership outlined by the UK government in 2010.

Türkiye-Britain Rapprochement Process and New Alliance Model

Following Brexit, Türkiye and the United Kingdom signed a first free trade agreement that came into force on January 1, 2021. The agreement aimed to maintain preferential trade relations (replacing the EU-Türkiye customs union) as well as improving future bilateral relations. The announced decision to renegotiate the existing agreement came after the review found several areas for improvement, especially regarding services, data and the digital sector. If an updated deal that reduces trade barriers and tariffs is agreed, this could further deepen economic ties and encourage wider cooperation between the UK and Türkiye. Efforts are currently

continuing to update this agreement and make it more effective.

Considering economic cooperation as an important means of rapprochement, the United Kingdom, which is no longer an EU member but still Europe's leading military power, can take the initiative and cooperate closely on the integration of another non-EU country, Türkiye, into the European defense architecture.

Under the influence of the political preferences of current British Government, the role that Turkish-UK cooperation can play in European security seems to have been somewhat overlooked, as can be seen from the very brief mention of Türkiye in the last Renewed Integrated Review (IR23) prepared in the United Kingdom. However, Türkiye and the United Kingdom have had close relations for decades based on NATO membership, mutual economic interests, and security concerns. Based on the expanding relations between Türkiye and the United Kingdom, especially in the post-Brexit period, there is still room to further develop existing cooperation, especially in the fields of defense and security. The key areas of interest identified in IR23, such as the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the Caucasus, overlap with Türkiye's vital security interests. This is a significant advantage over Türkiye's relatively less positive ties especially with France, the USA and Germany. In the post-Brexit environment, the UK also aims to expand its influence among NATO allies by potentially promoting a Turkish-British alliance to balance the Franco-Greek alliance.

Security priorities are an important goal for Türkiye and the United Kingdom to combine their efforts for the benefit of both countries. Improving cooperation

with Ankara will enable London to better comply with the spirit of NATO's latest Strategic Concept of June 2022 and adhere to the principles of the UK-Türkiye strategic partnership launched in 2010. More generally, as two non-EU allies, Türkiye and the United Kingdom will help to strengthen Euro-Atlantic security and contribute to exploring uncharted territories to fill the gap in the East-West strategic direction by reinforcing the inseparable link between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific.

A strengthened partnership between the two countries can also help to deliver a more capable European defense that is complementary and interoperable with NATO. This will be achieved by bringing existing arrangements together until the launch of the strategic partnership between Türkiye and the UK, together with the long-term objectives depicted in the 2023 Renewed Integrated Review (IR23)¹. Given the expanding strategic competition affecting Euro-Atlantic security, it is time to elevate security and defense cooperation to a higher level. Both countries have a primary interest in building Europe's defense capability and avoiding frictional relations between the EU and non-EU allies within NATO.

The Role of Bilateral Relations in Türkiye's Fighter Jet Supply

With the progress in the mentioned bilateral relations, the last concrete step in security and defense cooperation came to the agenda with an agreement signed in late 2023. The joint Declaration of Intent,

¹ It is possible to list the goals as follows: shaping the international order; creating an environment of deterrence, defense and competition in all areas; aiming to maintain strategic stability by creating new frameworks to manage systemic competition and tension in a multipolar environment and building a new international security architecture; addressing

signed by British Secretary of State for Defense Grant Shapps and Turkish Minister of National Defense Yaşar Güler on 22 November 2023, aims to create a framework for joint efforts to strengthen the security and prosperity of both countries while contributing to the global economy. This agreement is seen as a step towards improving national, regional and international security.

Important decisions within the scope of this agreement include increasing cooperation between the defense industries of both countries, working in close cooperation to increase regional and international security, planning joint training exercises in the Mediterranean, and exploring security support in regions such as North Africa and the Middle East.

The timing of this agreement is also important. This closer partnership with the United Kingdom could strengthen Türkiye's bargaining power and strategic influence in its effort to acquire new American F-16s. Minister of National Defense Güler recently said that Ankara is in talks with the UK and Spain to purchase 40 Eurofighter Typhoon jets, despite Germany's objection. Despite the long delays and uncertainties in procuring new F-16 Block 70 jets from Washington, the possibility of the Eurofighter purchase through the agreement with UK is still not assured, as the export decision requires approval by the four partners in the Eurofighter consortium (the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain). Türkiye's strengthened diplomatic ties with the UK could be useful in

vulnerabilities through resilience by strengthening the economic, social, technological, environmental and infrastructural factors that leave it open to crises and hostile actors; gaining strategic advantage by developing national forces and updating tools of statecraft to preserve freedom of action and the ability to cooperate with others.

persuading Germany not to block the deal. However, the statement that Germany's reluctance is due to the limitations of the German defense industry, as well as political issues, should also be taken into consideration. Because this reason of limitation, provides an environment that can be effective for the development of the German defense vision and industry.

Apart from the new F-16s requested from the USA, the issue of F-16V modernization kits remains important because the Turkish Air Force ideally plans to use F-16Vs and Eurofighter Typhoon together. Of course, such a dilemma in inventory may lead to higher operational costs, but it will also lead to better flexibility and diversification.

In addition, providing the necessary tools and ammunition to the Turkish Air Force and increase its capabilities will support the most important actor, Türkiye, on the border of Europe and in NATO's Southern Wing, thus increasing the defense capacity of Europe and NATO. Avoiding the inclusion of F-35, F-16, Eurofighter Typhoon or any other jet of Euro-Atlantic origin in Türkiye's inventory in this process is against the spirit of alliance. Here, we can talk about the United Kingdom's intention to act in harmony with the Turkish Armed Forces within the framework of the relevant alliance protocols.

Collaboration for KAAN and Beyond

If London achieves this and the agreement covers the latest variants of basic production, then it will provide the Turkish Air Force with the interim solution until the national 5th generation KAAN (TF-X) project is put into operation.

On the other hand, Minister of National Defense Yaşar Güler said on August 14 that

Pakistan was about to sign an agreement to participate in the development of the fifth-generation fighter jet: *"Friendly and brotherly countries are also making efforts to be partners in this project. An agreement was signed with Azerbaijan. There are other countries like Pakistan that are about to sign."*

Türkiye launched the TF-X program in 2009. In October 2016, British company Rolls-Royce offered joint production to Türkiye in order to strengthen planned Turkish platforms and provide potential sales to third parties. The company's proposal envisaged a production unit in Türkiye producing helicopters, tanks and missiles, as well as engines for the TF-X. British BAE Systems, which has close ties with Türkiye thanks to the agreement signed in January 2017, is collaborating with Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) for the design of the national 5th generation KAAN fighter jet, which is planned to become operational in 2030. With the economically small amount of £100 million (about ₺3.8 billion) deal signed with Britain's BAE Systems for KAAN in 2017, the UK said it would kick off a long relationship "which they expect will pave the way for further deals" and became Türkiye's main defense provider. It is said that currently approximately 30 BAE System engineers work in KAAN's (TF-X) production unit at TAI production facilities.

Beyond this, Türkiye being a part of the TEMPEST project with the capabilities developed within the scope of the KAAN project will create multi-layered value. The Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), or TEMPEST project, under the leadership of the United Kingdom and in partnership with Italy and Japan, to develop a sixth-generation combat aircraft, is an important step in the field of air defense.

New Channels in Türkiye-Britain Common Defense Vision

The UK and Türkiye are two non-EU NATO countries with solid military capabilities, strong defense technology and industrial bases. Emphasizing the importance of the transatlantic character rather than the autonomous structuring of Europe's security architecture, both countries are at an understandable level to support each other in ensuring the security of Europe and the Atlantic by identifying and combating common threats and ensuring the expansion of the security environment through cooperation with third parties. One of the cores of this common mindset is their stance on the Eurofighter Typhoon negotiations. London is more open to foreign agreements in its defense strategy and trade regarding defense products than other continental European countries. A new partnership between Türkiye and the United Kingdom could be designed to integrate both countries' hard and soft power assets and capabilities, resulting in a bilateral capability that can be made available to NATO by mutual consent. This will certainly strengthen European defense and help to expand the security belt of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Britain is seen by NATO circles and European defense authorities as a pioneer in establishing security, especially against the Russian threat. London's resistance to Russia extends not only to the European continent, but also to Africa, where its influence is thought to be increasing. On the other hand, Türkiye is one of the few NATO countries that can combat Russia's activities on the continent such as in Libya. Such a Türkiye-UK partnership in Africa has the potential to greatly affect the balance of power in the continent by increasing the

responsibility of the USA's AFRICOM and reducing the French influence.

Increasing Threats and the Role of the New Türkiye-UK Alliance in Europe's Security

In the face of an increasingly complex and challenging security environment, it is time to develop an inclusive approach to European security that transcends the boundaries of existing institutions such as NATO and the EU. In this context, deepening Türkiye-UK defense cooperation could facilitate the integration of non-EU countries into European security. If this is achieved, renewed alignment between Türkiye and the UK can create an important partnership that the EU and its member states can also benefit in terms of meeting the geopolitical challenges ahead. The importance of these three Euro-Atlantic powers forming a strategic triangle to meet the significance of today's challenges is undeniable.

In this new era, where even unpredictable and distant issues are interconnected and risks and threats increase, it is the common interest of both countries to increase the level of cooperation in the fields of security and defense with a new approach. Beyond outdated frameworks, there is ample room for maneuver to achieve this on a bilateral basis. The persistent challenges prevalent in today's global security make it important than ever for Türkiye and the UK to explore new ways to safely overcome the difficult times ahead.

Given the current global systemic competition between major powers and Türkiye's willingness to develop ties both on a regional basis and with its allies, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the strategic partnership between Türkiye

and the UK on a renewed and forward-looking basis. Moreover, in a polycentric global system structuring beyond existing alliances and unions, the strategic rapprochement of the two countries may bring a situation-specific structuring.



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