



Corvinus University of Budapest
International Relations and
Political Science Doctoral School

THESIS SUMMARY

Eszteella Varga

**American-Turkish bilateral relations in the light of
the theory of regional security complexes**

Ph.D. dissertation

Thesis supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Zsolt Rostoványi

professor

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Department of International Relations

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I. Research background and justification of the research topic

The present research examines the bilateral relationship between the United States and Turkey in the early 21st century, which the author believes is of great significance and actuality. There was close cooperation between the two states during the Cold War, which changed slightly after the end of the Cold War. Despite the strategic partnership¹ between the two allies, their foreign policy stance differs on a number of issues, leading to friction on a number of issues, such as Ankara's domestic policy decisions and the resulting tensions.

Domestic political cleansing as a result of the 2016 coup attempt and the related arrest and detention of Pastor Andrew Brunson caught Washington's attention and were also echoed in President Donald Trump's tweets, so much so that the president threatened sanctions on his Turkish ally.²

In addition, the military intervention in northern Syria also provoked protests from the US side, and the intervention and

¹US President Barack Obama used the term in his 2009 speech in Istanbul.

² Donald Trump's Twitter was available at:
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?lang=hu> Downloaded on: 10th November 2019.

Turkish action against the Kurds resulted in US sanctions in October 2019, followed by a ceasefire agreement. A similarly significant conflict is the purchase of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system in 2019, which strengthens the Turkish-Russian relationship. The United States and Turkey provide NATO's two largest military forces, so it is not surprising that the purchase and deployment of a system that is incompatible with NATO and a security issue has generated serious conflict within NATO and in US-Turkish bilateral relations.

The aim of the dissertation is to analyze the development of American-Turkish bilateral relations at the beginning of the 21st century (during the period under the Turkish AKP governments) and to determine the factors shaping bilateral relations, regional and global actors and interests. It is extremely important to examine the relationship between NATO and the two states with the two largest armies, the United States and Turkey, as Turkey's role becomes increasingly important as the regional focus strengthens, while the US is re-positioning itself after the Trump presidency.

II. The methodology used

For the analysis of bilateral relations, the dissertation uses the theoretical framework of realist thinkers: in the literature review it takes into account the works of great realist thinkers such as Kissinger, Huntington, Brzezinski, and major American strategies such as Mearsheimer, Walt, Layne, and outlines the role of the US and Turkey in the world order. As a theoretical framework, the dissertation is based on the theory of the regional security complexes (RSC) of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever and the Copenhagen School.

It analyzes the relationship between the two states through a case study, taking into account the important difference between the United States being a superpower in the current world order, as well as in its own RSC, and Turkey an insulator state that also affects three surrounding RSCs (although with a more active foreign policy than a regular insulator state). In this case study, we examine the evolution of US-Turkish bilateral relations and the correctness of the hypotheses by analyzing the four selected sectors (military, economic, political, and social) through the selected RSC, the Europe-EU complex.

The research is based on the regional security complex theory (RSCT) of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever and the sectoral analysis introduced by the Copenhagen School: the American-Turkish relations are analyzed by examining different security complexes and sectoral security, respectively.

The Copenhagen School, primarily associated with Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, takes its name from the headquarters of the Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI) in Copenhagen. The theory they have developed relies fundamentally on three pillars, the conceptual pillar of security, sectors, and security complexes.³

The sectoral analysis basically focuses on the four basic sectors on the basis of which the empirical analysis can be made: the political, military, economic, and social sectors. The four sectors have measurable and non-measurable dimensions, so US-Turkish relations need to be considered in the sectoral analysis. For the four sectors, the analysis focuses on the following:

- political sector: factors challenging state sovereignty
- economic sector: (foreign) trade factors, energy security

³ Stritzel, Holger: *Security in Translation: Securitization Theory and the Localization of Threat*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014., pp. 11-14

- military sector: size of army, level of military spending, participation in joint military actions
- social sector: national identity and its preservation

In my study, accepting Buzan and Waever's theory of the RSCs and the sectors to be examined, I look at a comparison of the United States and Turkey and the evolution of their relationship. As one is a superpower, the other is an insulator state, it is not their two RSCs (because Turkey does not have one in this interpretation) but their relationship with each other (military, economic, political) that should be analyzed through the Europe (EU) case study, which is one of the three major RSCs that are critical for Turkey (Europe, Russia and the CIS and the Middle East).

This case study was chosen because the scope of the research would be stretched by an in-depth review of all three RSCs (although this direction should definitely be highlighted as an additional research opportunity), a deeper analysis and proof of hypotheses could be performed by focusing on one RSC. Among the possible case studies, the research focuses on the Europe (EU) RSC because it is the area with which both states have the oldest and closest relationship, thus allowing for a

deeper analysis and comparative analysis of the priorities of both states.

For analysis, we need to separate the securitizing actor and the reference object. In our analysis, Turkey and the United States are the two securitizing actors, and the four main sectors explained in the methodological review, the political, economic, military, and social sectors, are what we can interpret as reference objects. Within each sector, we present the behavior and relationship of the two securitizing actors in relation to the RSC under study by analyzing sub-sectors. Whereas Turkey is not only a neighbor of the Europe-EU RSC, but also a candidate for membership of the European Union, i.e. the RSC, if the accession process is successfully completed, while Europe is of paramount importance to the United States but the European RSC does not affect its own military, economic, social or political security directly, so inevitably the Turkish aspects will be the main focus of the analysis.

It should be emphasized that none of the sectors can be analyzed on its own. Although we aim to delimit the sectors within the framework of the analysis, interdependent issues define the US-Turkish-EU relations, which affect both political (international institutions, resolutions, foreign policy

processes), social (deeper or even domestic political processes), economic (foreign trade, energy sector) and military (all three entities examined are members of the same alliance, but the role, size of military spending is different, etc.). Therefore, in the analysis of each sectoral part, it is possible that different aspects of the same complex issue are analyzed.

III. Findings of the dissertation

After reviewing the great strategic and geopolitical theories, examining the former pre-Cold War world order and then the post-bipolar order, and including the place of the United States and Turkey, we need to ask the research question that is at the heart of the present research. In my research, I am primarily looking for the answer to what are the important strategic, foreign policy interests and goals that shape the relationship between the two countries, and if they differ, how does it affect the alliance system; whether the strategic partnership is sustainable even if the protection of interests in certain areas and regions conflicts and conflicting interests emerge. The development of American-Turkish relations has been less researched in the Hungarian literature, and the system of

bilateral relations, especially with regard to the applicability of the RSC theory, has not yet been elaborated.

- H1: The U.S. superpower, Turkey, is an insular state with atypical foreign policy activity, allowing both states, albeit to varying degrees, to behave like a swing power, to pursue a variable-intensity foreign policy on the Europe-EU RSC examined in the case study.

The United States and Turkey also have varying degrees of relationship with the Europe-EU RSC under study. Both, although working closely with the region under study, do not place exclusive emphasis on it and, if their interests so require, exhibit different foreign policy behaviors. Examples include the formation of a coalition of the Bush administration against the axis of evil, followed by Obama's foreign policy change vis-à-vis its allies, and Trump's presidency with an emphasis on NATO burden-sharing and the termination of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). While in the case of Turkey in the early 2000s one of the main aspirations was to achieve Turkish EU membership, since the start of accession negotiations in 2005 and their freezing, the partnership is increasingly being relegated to the background, and other

focuses of Turkish foreign policy are also coming to the fore, with a regional shift as well.

However, with the support of Turkey's accession to the EU, the US side is putting constant pressure on the EU, the most significant results of which were achieved during the Clinton presidency (second half of the 1990s). However, the US is not involved in all conflicts in Europe, as it is not part of the RSC: it is also staying away from the conflict over the Eastern Mediterranean and trying to assert its influence in a less direct way.

While the swing power behavior in the hypothesis is clearly valid for the US, as it is easier to avoid certain conflicts due to geographical distance, the hypothesis is valid for Turkey only under certain conditions and circumstances. Although in theory it is not a member of any RSC (and neither is institutionally), although it strives for it due to regional necessities and geographical proximity, it is not always able to act solely as a swing power. Furthermore, the very close economic and political integration with European states (foreign trade, FDI, refugee issues) does not allow for swing power-only behavior without harming Turkish interests.

- H2: Super-regional (Atlanticist) American influence is needed for Turkey to have its own regional dominance; it can only build its own RSC, or have more influence over the Europe-EU RSC with American support.

The United States is supporting Turkey in its membership of the European Union, and all US presidents in the 21st century have emphasized the importance of this and have sought to act as a mediator between the EU and the candidate country to speed up the accession process. Due to its geopolitical position, Turkey cannot be classified as one of the RSCs, but its economic power does not allow it to form its own RSC. It would therefore need the support of the United States (in political, economic and military terms as well).

In a military sense, independent Turkish engagement is not always successful, and Washington's even tacit consent is absolutely necessary for Ankara to successfully advance its interests. Whether in the wake of the Syrian intervention or the Libyan mission, it can be said in general that Turkish ambitions will soon be forced to back down against Washington. Other factors include populist gestures aimed primarily at the internal power base, which undermine relations with Western allies and also weaken Western support.

Based on the analysis, we can accept the correctness of the hypothesis in part, as Turkey may have influence over the EU, which may be enhanced by US support (see Clinton's lobbying for the Turkish Customs Union), but there is currently no possibility for Turkey to develop its own RSC. On the one hand, because the RSCs around it (especially the supranational, institutionalized EU) do not have free radicals, and on the other hand, because Turkey does not currently have the attractiveness to form its own RSC even with American support.

The Turkish model is no longer an attractive alternative for states of either the Middle East or the West, and Turkey itself faces a number of challenges (political, military, economic, humanitarian, energy security) so it cannot be the core of its own RSC. In addition, we have seen in the analysis that US influence is not able to resolve all conflicts either. In spite of decades of unresolved conflict and a US-backed solution proposal, the Annan Plan, the Cyprus conflict remains unresolved.

- H3: From the point of view of Turkey as a securitizing actor, the two most important reference subjects are energy security (eg the Eastern Mediterranean) and the

security of territorial integrity (Kurdish question), for which Turkey is willing to take action to defend its interest, engage into conflicts and use hard power elements.

It is clear from the above analysis that economic security, in particular energy security and energy diversity, is of paramount importance for Turkey. It is willing to exert foreign policy pressure for both the Eastern Mediterranean and energy diversity (construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, Turkish Stream), but also to use hard power tools to advance its interests.

The issue of territorial integrity is also closely linked to the issue of social security, as the issue of national unity and identity and its survival have been of decisive importance to the Turks since the end of the Ottoman Empire (but even since the Tanzimat reform era). The Kurdish minority clearly questions this, and for Turkey and the Turkish nation as a securitizing actor, the issue of nationalism (both as national identity and as territorial integrity) appears as a reference object. To protect this, the Turks are also willing to use hard power tools and are even taking action against their military ally to advance their interests.

Hypothesis H3 is accepted by the author, the selected two areas, energy security and territorial integrity, are indeed reference objects for Turkey in relation to which it acts as a securitizing actor and also allow the use of tougher tools.

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