BAYRAKTAR DIPLOMACY

An analysis of the role of drones as a remote warfare tactic in foreign policy

The case of Turkey's military campaigns in northern Syria, 2015-2023

Anne Pol

BAYRAKTAR DIPLOMACY:

An analysis of the role of drones as a remote warfare tactic in foreign policy

The case of Turkey's military campaigns in northern Syria, 2015-2023

A Master Thesis in Human Geography
By Anne Pol
S1081550
Specialization: Conflicts, Territories, and Identities
Supervised by Dr. Haley Swedlund
Radboud University Nijmegen

29 September 2023
Word count: 29.501

Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

Source image front page: Kenyette, P. (2022). *Burkina Faso buys 5 Bayraktar TB2 drones from Turkey* [Photograph]. Military Africa. https://www.military.africa/2022/09/burkina-faso-buys-5-bayraktar-tb2-drones-from-turkey/

Abstract

Over the past decade, Turkey's drone capabilities have grown rapidly and they are playing an increasingly important role in its approach to Syria. Turkey has conducted several cross-border military operations and a drone-campaign in Syria, with numerous social and economic consequences on the ground. This thesis examines the role of remote warfare practices in the evolution of Turkish foreign policy towards northern Syria between 2015 and 2023. It moves beyond a Western perspective on remote warfare to an expanded understanding of its implementation around the world. Using practice theory, this thesis examines the remote character of Turkey's military operations in Syria through expert interviews. This thesis develops the concept of *strategic practice* by focusing on the relationships between its three components, objectives, tactics, and benefits. It does so by examining how increasing drone capabilities affect the goals pursued and benefits derived in Turkey's remote operations in Syria. However, the results of this research are inconclusive. This is due to the wide range of opinions among the experts interviewed. Nevertheless, this thesis shows that drones play a dominant role in Turkish foreign policy towards Syria and recommends practice theory for future research on the relationship between remote tactics and foreign policy.

Contents

Abstract.....2
List of figures and tables.....5
List of abbreviations.....6
Introduction.....7
1. Theoretical framework.....12
Foreign policy.....12
Remote warfare.....13
Practice theory.....16
Ontological and epistemological assumptions.....18
Remote warfare practices.....22
Remote warfare as a strategic practice.....24
2. Methodology.....27
Research questions.....27
Research design.....29
Ethical considerations.....32
Limitations.....33
3. Descriptive Analysis: The evolution of Turkish foreign policy and drone policy.....36
The evolution of Turkish foreign policy.....36
The Islamist agenda.....37
Shift towards nationalism.....37
The militarization of Turkish foreign policy and the quest for strategic autonomy.....39
An executive presidency and current foreign policy decision-making.....39
The evolution of Turkey's drone policy.....42
Drone Power Turkey.....42
4. Empirical Analysis: Turkish remote practices in Syria.....45
Strategic objectives of Turkey's engagement in Syria.....45
Safe zone.....46
Syrian refugees.....46
Counter-terrorism.....47
Remote tactical practices in the military activities of Turkey in Syria.....49
Cross-border military operations.....49
Targeted killing campaign.....51

Drone strikes: where, what, and who? 51
Intelligence 52
Periodic trends 53
Other trends: retaliation, ISIS, and civilian harm 54
The benefits of Turkey's remote practices in northern Syria 55
Drones as an alternative to ground operations 55
Beneficial characteristics of drones 57
Geographical benefits 58
Psychological effects 58
Messaging and propaganda 59
Experts on the influence of Turkey's drone capabilities on its foreign policy 61
5. Discussion and Conclusion 66
Findings 66
Remote warfare and practice theory 68
Recommendations for further research 70
Concluding remarks and recommendations for praxis 71
Bibliography 74
Appendix 1: Interview guide 93
Appendix 2: Questions interview 15 in Turkish 95
Appendix 3: Questions interview 16 written format 96

List of figures and tables

Table 1.1 The Hollis matrix……………………………………………………………………………………………………19

Figure 1.2 The ontological spectrum of practice theories……………………………………………………………22

Figure 3.1 The entities and structures involved in Turkish foreign policy decision-making…………………40

Figure 4.1 Areas of influence in Syria, June 2022……………………………………………………………………50

Figure 4.2 Geographical distribution of Turkish drone strikes in northeastern Syria in 2022………………52

List of abbreviations

AANES Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

AKP Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)*

ATGM Anti-tank guided missile

EU European Union

FPA Foreign policy analysis

GoS Government of Syria

HTS Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

IDP Internally displaced person

ISIS Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

ISTAR Intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance

MFA Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MIT Turkish National Intelligence Organization (*Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı*)

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

PKK Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*)

PYD Kurdish Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*)

RIC Rojava Information Center

SAA Syrian Arab Army

SDF Syrian Democratic Forces

SSB Defense Industry Agency (*Savunma Sanayii Başkanlığı)*

SNA Syrian National Army

TAF Turkish Armed Forces

TAI Turkish Aerospace Industries

TFP Turkish foreign policy

UAV Uncrewed aerial vehicle

UK United Kingdom

UN United Nations

US United States

YPG Kurdish People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*)

YPJ Women's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Jin*)

Introduction

> [T]he society here is very connected. People have large families and people know each other very well, and therefore everyone knows someone who has been killed in a drone strike or hurt in a drone strike. The big familial connection and the kind of society connectedness here means that the pain and the hurt and death of the people is felt quite deeply. And I think this also adds to a real desire for a peaceful and stable life. You really feel that talking to civilians here.
>
> Interview Amy, May 2023.[1]

Amy is one of the few Western journalists still working in northeastern Syria, which has been the site of a Turkish drone strike campaign for several years. She sees with her own eyes the impact of these strikes on the local population and paints a stark picture. The so-called ‘precision’ of Turkish drones would supposedly mean that only military targets are hit, but as Amy tells, this is not the case. Civilian casualties and the destruction of infrastructure and private property have become part of daily life in northeastern Syria. While Turkish drones are praised internationally for being both cheap and effective at ‘neutralizing’ targets, we hear very few accounts about the realities of Turkish drone strikes on the ground.

In August 2016, the Turkish Armed Forces (hereafter TAF) launched a cross-border military operation into northern Syria, dubbed Operation Euphrates Shield. After artillery fire and jets cleared the ground, tanks and trucks carrying Turkish-backed Syrian rebels entered Jarablus, a city in the Aleppo governorate that was then under Islamic State (hereafter ISIS) control (BBC News, 2016). At the start of the operation, President Erdoĝan said it was aimed at ISIS and Kurdish “terror groups that threaten our country in northern Syria” (AFP News, 2016). By March 2017, the TAF had captured more than 2,000 square kilometers in northern Syria between the village of Azaz in the west and the Euphrates River in the east and the operation was declared ‘successfully completed’ (Al Jazeera, 2017; Hürriyet Daily News, 2017; Sönmez, 2017). Euphrates Shield was the first of several Turkish military operations in northern Syria that led to the Turkish occupation of various areas in northern Syria.

As Turkey’s military operations in northern Syria progressed, uncrewed aerial vehicles (hereafter UAVs), better known as drones, began to play an increasingly important role in each operation. Their use by the TAF in Syria has increased significantly over the years, initially serving as close air support for troops on the ground and eventually evolving into a targeted killing campaign in northeastern Syria from 2020 to the time of writing (Conflict Armament Research, 2022; Rojava Information Center, 2023). In this campaign, Turkey tracks and targets key figures and members of the main Kurdish political party in northern Syria, the

1 For privacy and security reasons, the names of the participants used in this thesis are fictitious. Their real names are known only to the author of this thesis.

PYD, and its military wings, the YPG and the all-female YPJ. Public places and infrastructure are frequently targeted, and civilian casualties are not uncommon in this campaign (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Rojava Information Center, 2023; Zaman, 2023b). The reason for Ankara's hostility towards the area stems from its perception that the PYD, YPG, and YPJ are closely linked to the PKK, Turkey's archenemy and a designated terrorist group by Turkey, the US, and the EU. To ensure its national security, Ankara has devoted itself to countering the dominance of the PYD/YPG/YPJ on its border. To this end, Ankara has largely relied on its extensive arsenal of drones in combination with local forces on the ground (Farooq, 2019; Gurcan, 2021; Hofman, 2020; Pol & Zwijnenburg, 2022; Siccardi, 2021; Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

In doing so, Turkey's efforts in northern Syria fit into a broader and modern trend of waging war from a distance, known as *remote warfare*. This kind of warfare is characterized by an emphasis on risk avoidance, typically achieved by moving away from traditional boots on the ground deployments. Instead of boots on the ground, armies engaged in remote warfare use aerial weapons (drones and jets) and other modern precise weaponry to minimize civilian casualties and risks to their own men and women, local proxy forces, and/or private military companies (Watts & Biegon, 2017). Research on such distancing from the battlefield has been conducted primarily in the context of interventionist wars waged by Western states.

But, when it comes to the use of military drones in remote warfare, a new type of player has emerged. While the US, Israel, and the UK once dominated drone warfare, non-Western states have been catching up over the past decade. For example, a growing demand for military drones among African countries has led to their rapid proliferation across the continent. Ethiopia has used imported surveillance and armed drones against militants of the Tigray's People Liberation Front since 2019 (Bearak et al., 2022; Walsh, 2021). Nigeria has done the same in its war against Boko Haram, in addition to domestically produced drones (Kurpershoek et al., 2021). Moreover, Libya has often been described as the world's largest drone war theater, with all sides in the conflict using various types of drones (France24, 2019). These are just a few examples of the exponential growth we have seen in the number of non-Western countries that have begun to use drones in a military context, culminating in an unprecedented global scale of military drone use.

In addition to a growing list of countries around the world acquiring, possessing, and deploying military drones, some states have established themselves as true drone powers over the past decade. Turkey, Iran, China, and Russia produce their drone arsenals domestically and export them to numerous other states and non-state actors. Their drones have played a leading role in the outcome of several conflicts (China Power Team, 2020; Pol & Zwijnenburg, 2022; Soliman, 2022). A recent example of this is the celebrated use of the Turkish Bayrakter TB2 drone during the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which was hailed as the savior of Ukraine in the early months of the conflict (Ali, 2022; Güney, 2022; Karadsheh & Sariyuce, 2022; Philipps & Schmitt, 2022). The same thing happened a few years earlier in the 2020 Nagorno-

Karabakh war, where Azerbaijan's victory was largely attributed to the supply of Turkish UAVs (Detsch, 2021; Dixon, 2020; Kınık & Çelik, 2021). These emerging, non-Western drone powers have ushered in a new era of remote warfare in which the US is no longer in the driver's seat.

Therefore, the academic debate on remote warfare requires further research into the changing landscape in which this type of warfare takes place. An important aspect of this is how the specific ways in which emerging states engage in remote military activities affect the dynamics of the remote warfare landscape. This thesis focuses on the foreign policy behavior of such a newcomer to the game with one of the most remarkable drone capabilities currently in the world: Turkey. More specifically, in this thesis I focus on how Turkey's rapidly expanded drone capabilities influence its foreign policy towards northern Syria, as interpreted by experts on Turkey's foreign policy (hereafter TFP) and drone policy. In doing so, I aim to counterbalance the Western-dominated focus of the current scholarly debate on remote warfare and highlight the reality of remote warfare in non-Western practice. This thesis presents a case study of this new reality and the ways in which Turkey is challenging the boundaries of our current understanding of remote warfare.

In order to unravel the dynamics of Turkey's approach to remote warfare, this thesis uses practice theory. I analyze the remote character of the Turkish remote military operations in Syria by applying the notion of *strategic practice* as discussed by Stoddard and Toltica (2021) and by examining their objectives, tactics, and benefits. Viewing remote warfare as a set of practices allows for an analysis of the recurring patterns and differences in its implementation, which is consistent with current literature that emphasizes the ever-changing but regulated character of military practice (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015). Theoretically, this thesis contributes to the de-essentialization of the remote warfare concept (i.e., there is no single mode of remote warfare. Stoddard & Toltica, 2021). It does so by examining the dynamics of Turkey's approach to remote warfare in northern Syria and how striking aspects of this case study differ from the current academic knowledge base of Western practices.

Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the development of the strategic practice analytical framework by examining the relationship between its components of objectives, tactics, and benefits. It does so by focusing on the implications of a sharp increase in drone capabilities, as a remote tactic, for the corresponding objectives and benefits of a strategic practice. In doing so, this thesis explores the so-called intra-dynamics of a strategic practice. Ultimately, using the strategic practice approach allows me to understand the role of remote tactics in a state's foreign policy and to relate this particular behavior to the larger debate about remote warfare.

The research has the following objectives. First, in a broad sense, this thesis aims to construct knowledge about the dynamics by which non-Western drone powers engage in drone warfare. More

specifically, it seeks to deepen our understanding of Turkey's remote practices in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict as it plays out in northern Syria. Second, I aim to explore how a significant change in remote tactics affects the other elements of a strategic practice, and thus a country's foreign policy. In doing so, this thesis seeks to identify the foreign policy implications of Turkey's rapidly expanding drone capabilities. In order to achieve these objectives, the following research question serves to guide this thesis:

How has Turkey's increased drone capabilities influenced its foreign policy towards northern Syria from 2015 to May 2023?

Answering the research question is both scientifically and socially relevant. On an academic level, this thesis contributes to the remote warfare debate by moving beyond the academic portrayal of remote military operations as a Western affair and by exploring the remote military approach of a major non-Western drone power. In doing so, I follow recent calls from scholars to expand the scope of our case studies of remote warfare to include non-Western and less democratic states (McKay, 2021; Stoddard & Toltica, 2021). Furthermore, this research contributes to practice theory by making a first attempt to shed light on the relationships between the different elements of strategic practices, based on the framework set out by Stoddard and Toltica (Toltica, 2021). It thereby contributes to our understanding of strategic practices as an analytical framework for the study of remote warfare. In addition, by expanding the scope of remote warfare case studies, this thesis contributes to both practice theory and the remote warfare debate by analyzing how *change* and *continuity* are manifested in the implementation of remote warfare.

Next, at the societal level, the study of these contemporary forms of remote violence perpetrated by emerging actors is relevant because they have societal implications that we may not have seen before. Military drones have far-reaching consequences for civilians, societies, and international relations, so it is of societal importance to understand how they are affected by new drone powers like Turkey (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Zaman, 2023b). This is especially true because remote warfare in general, and drones in particular, are here to stay. The use of military drones by states and non-state actors is likely to increase over time, making it even more important for future generations to study their societal implications (Elie, 2002; McKay, 2021; Zwijnenburg & Postma, 2019). In addition, the Turkish incursions into northern Syria have drawn international condemnation and are considered by some to be illegal warfare (Al Jazeera, 2022; Brzozowski, 2019; Christofis, 2022; Kowalczewska & Łubiński, 2022; Wilgenburg, 2021). In light of Resolution 2254 of the United Nations, in which the international community committed itself to achieving stability and lasting peace in Syria, it is necessary to challenge Turkey's destabilizing military actions in the war-torn country. By shining a spotlight on Turkey's drone attacks and invasions in northern Syria, this thesis makes a small contribution to the international community's goal of securing peace in Syria (Rojava Information Center, 2023; Security Council, 2015). Finally, the remote character of these wars means that they are often fought in the shadows, out of the public eye. This leads to difficulties in terms of responsibility,

accountability, and open democratic debates about the wars being waged. In this thesis, I counterbalance this reality by foregrounding the (violent) practices of distant wars (Demmers & Gould, 2018; McKay, 2021; Waldman, 2018; Watson & McKay, 2021).

The research question is unpacked in four chapters. The first chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the research. I discuss the theoretical notions of foreign policy and foreign policy analysis (hereafter FPA), the remote warfare debate, and the practices approach, especially remote strategic practices. In chapter two, I provide an overview of the methodological approach taken in this research. Specifically, I describe the sub-questions that arise from the research question, the research design, the research techniques, and the ethical considerations and limitations involved. The third chapter presents the descriptive analysis of the research. Here I present the case study and the context in which Turkey's remote warfare activities in northern Syria have developed. The fourth chapter then presents the results of the expert interviews conducted, outlining and analyzing Turkey's remote military practices in northern Syria and the experts' interpretation of the influence of Turkey's drone capabilities on its foreign policy towards northern Syria. The final chapter will summarize the research findings, resulting in an answer to the research question and a critical reflection on the research conducted. Finally, I relate these findings to the academic debate and make recommendations for the further development of this area of research.

1. Theoretical framework

> [R]ather than focus on remote warfare as a distinct category of war, it is more useful to explore "remoteness" in warfare as a set of *practices* that share a common core – a desire to achieve military outcomes without large ground deployments – but that vary in implementation between cases.
>
> Stoddard and Toltica (2021, p. 448).

This thesis is concerned with remote warfare as a specific type of foreign policy behavior and how the execution of remote violence can be understood with the aid of practice theory. Specifically, it is interested in whether increasing drone capabilities as a remote *tactic* influences the larger remote practices of a state in terms of *objectives* and *benefits*. Interpreting remote warfare practices as patterned performances that exhibit regularities over time, this thesis is framed by the practices approach. The practices approach provides a framework for exploring how remote violence is structured and how it becomes socially meaningful. It also allows for an exploration of the tension between the dynamic and fluid character of war, on the one hand, and the regulated patterns and routines identifiable in military practices, on the other. In other words, it is in line with current literature that emphasizes both the changeable and the continuous character of warfare.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I introduce and conceptualize the notion of 'foreign policy' and how it should be analyzed. Next, I discuss how warfare and violence have become spatially remote and how states engage in remote warfare. I then explain what *practices* are, how practices are interpreted by pragmatist scholars, and what ontological and epistemological assumptions underlie practice theory. Finally, I explore how the concept of strategic practice can be used to understand remote warfare and explain why this contributes to the development of practice theory. But first, what is the concept of *foreign policy*?

Foreign policy

Foreign policy is an often-used 'catch-all' term, and it is therefore important to clarify what exactly is meant by it. The vast literature on foreign policy counts a variety of interpretations of the term. Kaarbo et al. (2012, p. 2) describe the two aspects of the notion, 'foreign' and 'policy', as follows: "foreign is meant to apply to policy towards the world outside states' territorial borders. […] If the primary target lies outside the countries' borders, it is considered foreign policy. […] Policy can include observable behaviors by countries typically thought of as the product of governments, and thus governments are the 'actors'." Thus, the

behavior of governments directed at areas outside a country's territory can be considered foreign policy. Fatih Tayfur (1994, p. 117) provides a concrete definition of foreign policy, which serves as the working definition in this thesis: '[...] foreign policy is an official activity formulated and implemented by the authorised agents of sovereign states as orientations, plans, commitments and actions which are directed towards the external environment of the states.'

We now know what is meant by foreign policy, but what exactly is to be explained or understood when analyzing it? What is the so-called *explanandum*? According to Hudson and Day (2020, p. 3), "all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in *human decision makers acting singly or in groups*." From this perspective, foreign policy behavior can be viewed as a consequence of decision-making processes. This means that these decision-making processes are an important focus of a FPA. Hudson and Day emphasize that it is human beings who make these foreign policy decisions, not 'states' as an abstract concept or as unitary rational actors. Nor are these human decision-makers equivalent to a state. This is consistent with Snyder's et al.'s (2002) interpretation of foreign policy: "We adhere to the nation-state as the fundamental level of analysis, yet we have discarded the state as a metaphysical abstraction. By emphasizing decision-making as a central focus, we have provided a way of organizing the determinants of action around those officials who act for the political society" (2002, p. 75). The *explanandum* of a FPA will then be the decisions made by human decision-makers, especially political officials, that have consequences for the external environment of a (nation)state (Hudson & Day, 2020).

When analyzing foreign policy decisions made by human decision-makers, it is important to consider the entire process of arriving at one or a range of decision. Often, foreign policy does not involve a single decision, but rather a constellation of decisions related to a specific situation, which may include action, inaction, or even no decision. In the words of Brighi and Hill, "[f]oreign policy decisions should be seen primarily as heightened moments of commitment in a perpetual process of action, reaction, and further action at many different levels and involving a range of different actions" (2016, p. 166). In addition, decisions may change over time, making it even more useful to examine a range of decisions. Finally, when analyzing a decision constellation, the process of decision making is also of interest, i.e. the stages of "problem recognition, framing and, perceptions to more advanced stages of goal prioritization, contingency planning, and option assessment" (Hudson & Day, 2020, p. 4). Thus, the analysis of foreign policy should include the process of decision making that leads to a constellation of decisions over time. In the following, I will discuss a specific type of foreign policy behavior, namely that of remote warfare.

Remote warfare

A new paradigm of warfare has emerged and currently dominates the way states wage war. Whether this paradigm is called 'liquid warfare' (Demmers & Gould, 2018), 'surrogate warfare' (Krieg & Rickli, 2018),

‘vicarious warfare’ (Waldman, 2018), or simply ‘remote warfare’ (Watts & Biegon, 2017), the core of this type of warfare boils down to "a shift away from ‘boots on the ground’ deployments towards light-footprint military interventions" (Demmers & Gould, 2018, p. 365). In other words, threats are being countered by states at a distance, with military personnel miles away from the conflict zone (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021; Watson & McKay, 2021, p. 7).

These remote, often interventionist wars typically involve a combination of two factors, namely the conduct of drone and air strikes from above, and the cooperation between states and private military companies, special forces, private contractors, military-to-military (M2M) training teams, and local forces on the ground. The latter factor allows states to outsource risks and responsibilities to these proxy actors rather than to their own military. States are herein motivated by risk aversion and they can achieve their foreign policy goals without incurring high economic or human costs. While these wars may be remote for the states involved in them, allowing them to avoid risks, they are ever closer for the proxies who fight them on their behalf. This shows that the concept of remote warfare is derived from a state-centered perspective (Krieg, 2016; Krieg & Rickli, 2018; Waldman, 2018; Watson & McKay, 2021; Watts & Biegon, 2017).

Fighting a war primarily from the air and through proxies is not an entirely new phenomenon, but the current fashion of remote warfare seems to show a shift in characteristics. The Vietnam War is often cited as an example of how wars were fought from afar through air strikes and proxies during the Cold War, before drones and other remote weapons entered the battlefield (Archambault, 2021; Bonds, 2019; Groh, 2019; Stoddard & Toltica, 2021; Walker, 2018). Waldman (2018, p. 181) argues that although remote warfare is "rooted in long-standing traditions of military practice, [it] is sufficiently novel as to be identifiable as a distinct phenomenon." The remoteness of contemporary warfare is a "continuation of earlier trends but also powerfully integrates existing forms of practice with quantitatively and qualitatively enhanced and extended versions that were emerging in intervening years, [...] shaped by experiences in the first decade of the ‘9/11 wars’" (ibid., p. 185). In other words, the phenomenon of remote warfare as a ‘new way of war’ is characterized by the heavy reliance of states around the world on improved remote warfare tactics (Watson & McKay, 2021, p. 13).

A novel feature of remote warfare is the use of new remote technologies. These remote technologies are capable of 24/7 surveillance and ‘pinpoint’ targeting, in contrast to the excessive use of indiscriminate aerial bombings during the Vietnam War (Bonds, 2019, p. 441; Chamayou, 2015, p. 37-45). Armed and ISTAR (hereafter Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) drones, guided bombs and other modern precision weapons have enabled armies to engage in so-called ‘leadership decapitation’ and in ‘targeted killings’ in counter-terrorism operations. These two terms are often used interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. Targeted killings refer to the "operationally successful attacks against any level of militant" (Abrahms & Mierau, 2017, p. 831). Leadership decapitation is a specific

type of targeted killing and refers to successful attacks against leaders. Drones are the preferred method for both types of operations (Jaeger & Paserman, 2009; Johnston, 2012). These new technologies that have helped shift the focus of warfare from the conquest of territory to the elimination of individuals and elements that threaten the West and its way of life (Waldman, 2018).

Overall, scholars agree that it is not the *nature* but the *character* of warfare that has changed, following the Clausewitzian distinction (Holmqvist-Jonsäter, 2010, p. 3). In other words, the way wars are fought has changed, but their *essence* has not. Contemporary remote wars have been temporally and spatially reconfigured, with blurred geographic boundaries delineating conflict zones and legal experts groping in the gray areas of the legal frameworks that define these conflicts (Banasik, 2016; Demmers & Gould, 2018; Ehrhart, 2017; Gregory, 2011b; Watson & McKay, 2021).

But beyond its novelty, what makes it worthwhile to study the remoteness of this contemporary form of warfare? First, today's remote wars have a poor record in terms of transparency and accountability. Remote military operations are almost always shrouded in secrecy and largely inaccessible to the general public. This leads to a lack of oversight, democratic control and accountability (Demmers & Gould, 2018; Waldman, 2018; Watson & McKay, 2021). Since states do not show their hand, it is up to civil society and scholars to investigate what is going on when states fight remote wars on our behalf. Investigating these issues raises awareness of the problems of remote warfare and can counterbalance the remoteness and secrecy of the violence perpetrated in today's remote wars (McKay, 2021, p. 241).

Second, discussions of remote warfare are heavily grounded in the 'precision discourse'. Remotely controlled weapons are portrayed as precise, surgical, scrupulous, neutral, or humane based on their ability to strike specific individuals in targeted killings and while minimizing harm to civilians (Bonds, 2019; Espinoza, 2018; Gregory, 2011a). As Espinoza (2018, p. 378) explains, "These technologies – so the argument goes – are not only a solution, but an *ethical* solution since they allow for more accurate targeting that reduces 'collateral damage'." By portraying remote weaponry as such, these arguments contribute to the legitimization of remote military violence (Bonds, 2019, p. 441). Since it is the killing of human life that is legitimized by this discourse, it is important to continue to question whether remote warfare, and especially remote technologies, are in fact as precise, humane, and ethical as we are told they are (Watson & McKay, 2021, p. 14-15).

To adequately address these two arguments, academia must examine how remote warfare is conducted, its drivers, consequences, and effects (both local and international), and by whom. However, I observe a gap in the empirical foundation on which studies of remote warfare are based in terms of 'who' engages in remote warfare and how they conduct such wars. The remote warfare debate has primarily revolved around US and UK remote operations (Adelman & Kieran, 2018; Demmers & Gould, 2018;

Waldman, 2018; Walker, 2018; Watts & Biegon, 2017, 2021). Scholars have for long regarded remote warfare as a 'Western' way of war and the US as the protagonist of this paradigm. For example, Demmers and Gould (2018, p. 365) call it "Western state-led operations," and Watts and Biegon (2017, p. 4) refer to remote warfare as a "trend within many Western states." While this interpretation of remote warfare as a Western affair has long been accurate, it is no longer the case. The rapid proliferation of military drones around the world and the rise of new drone powers challenge us to revise our understanding of remote warfare.

This thesis will follow the recent call of scholars to include non-Western and less democratic states in our views of remote warfare (McKay, 2021; Stoddard & Toltica, 2021). McKay (McKay, 2021, p. 241) calls for an expansion of

> *the scope of the case studies to explore non-Western approaches to remote warfare. [...] [A] comparison between democratic and less democratic states' experiences of remote warfare would be a worthwhile pursuit. It may help researchers to understand the differences and similarities between how states use remote approaches.*

Such a broadening of the scope of our case studies coincides with an increase in interventions by regional powers in their neighboring states, while at the same time the West is "losing its appetite for intervention" (Leonard, 2016). Despite the heavy reliance on remote tactics by states around the world, this global scale is not equally reflected in scholarship. As a result, the field of remote warfare is currently under-researched (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021, p. 450). My aim then is to contribute to our understanding of remote warfare by exploring the remote patterns and practices of Turkey: a yearning regional power occupying a crucial position between the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia (geographically and ideologically), and a drone power (Cagaptay, 2020, p. 2).

Practice theory

In the previous section, it was discussed that remote warfare is not a separate category of warfare with a new nature. Instead, the way wars are fought has changed, leading to shifts in the characteristics of contemporary warfare. To examine the remoteness of modern warfare, I will consider it as a set of political and military *practices* (Adler & Pouliot, 2011; Bueger & Gadinger, 2015; Stoddard & Toltica, 2021). In what follows, I will explain what *practices* are, what ontological and epistemological assumptions underlie practice theories, and how this conceptual approach can be used to make sense of remote warfare.

Practice theory as a social theory builds on the work of scholars such as Bourdieu (1977, 1990), Butler (1999), late Foucault (2008), Garfinkel (1967), Giddens (1979, 1984), Latour (1993, 2005), and Taylor (1985, 1989, 1993). Practices as a conceptual tool within the discipline of International Relations (IR)

departs from a “theoretical approach comprising a fairly vast array of analytical frameworks that *privilege practice* as a key entry point to the study of world politics” (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 5). Practices can be defined as “[c]ompetent performances. More precisely, practices are socially meaningful patterns of actions which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world” (ibid., p. 6). Let us first break the notion of practices up into smaller pieces, before turning to its implications.

First, a practice is a *performance*, or in other words, it is a process of doing something. For example, it expresses preferences or beliefs, and it instantiates discourse or institutions. In doing so, performing practices constitutes the so-called ‘flow of history’ (Adler & Pouliot, 2011; Butler, 1999; Goffman, 1956; Jackson & Nexon, 1999). Second, a practice is *patterned*, meaning that it “generally exhibits certain regularities over time and space” (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 7). Practices are repeated and reproduce similar behaviors and actions, and *iteration* is therefore one of the key characteristics of practices. Practices, however, are not merely iterative, as Adler and Pouliot (ibid.) note: “there is always wiggle room for agency even in repetition.” Stripped to their core, practices are ultimately enacted by individual agents, and practices provide those agents with a framework by which they know who they are and how they should act (ibid., p. 15).

Third, practices are more or less *socially competent*. Practices take place in socially organized contexts that give them meaning and structure their interaction. They derive their competence from the structured dimensions in which they occur, in which other (groups of) individuals interpret the performance of practices in the same way. This shared interpretation of performances contributes to the competence and effectiveness of the individuals engaged in these practices. In other words, competence is attributed to practices through social relations and social recognition (Goffman, 1956).

Fourth, practices are grounded in *background knowledge*, “which it embodies, enacts, and reifies all at once” (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 8). Such background knowledge may include historical, contextual, cultural, and procedural information that provides the foundation for individuals to engage in and understand how to effectively perform a particular practice. Individuals are part of communities of practice, and in these communities, background knowledge is diffused among the agents, leading them to act in coordination and towards practices that make sense. However, as Adler and Bernstein (2005, p. 296) clarify, this does not mean that background knowledge creates “uniformity of a group or community, but organize[s] their differences around pervasive understandings of reality”.

Finally, practices involve both the *discursive* and the *material worlds*. On the one hand, people use language, communication, and discourse to distinguish between practice and behavior (the performance of an act without meaning). Language is the “conduit of meaning, which turns practices into the location and

engine of social action, but it is itself an enactment or doing in the form of 'discursive practices' (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 8). At the same time, these discursive practices rely heavily on material artifacts and influence the physical environment in which they are enacted in, as well as the ideas of individuals and collectives (Adler & Pouliot, 2011; Foucault, 1980; Latour, 2005; Reckwitz, 2002; Swidler, 2001).

Within the school of practice theory, the 'pragmatist' tradition emphasizes the dynamic nature of practices (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 456). According to pragmatists, practices are contingent, meaning that despite their repetitive patterns, they are constantly changing, and shifting: "Practices are dispersed, dynamic, and continuously rearranging in ceaseless movement. But they are also reproducing, organized, and structured clusters" (Schatzki, 2002, p. 101). Practices thus have a 'dual nature', as scholars in the pragmatist tradition emphasize, in which there is constant tension and interaction between the emergent and the reproductive aspects of practices.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions

What does this seemingly contradictory constellation of repetition and change mean for the ontological stance on war of pragmatist practice theory? To answer this question, we must first understand what ontology means. Ontology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the crux of what the world is made of and how it affects people. The classic ontological divide in the social sciences is that between structures and agents as the primary foundations of human action. To fully understand how practice theory is useful in the study of remote warfare, and as a matter of background knowledge, I will turn to these concepts below.

Structuralism, on the one hand, understands action in terms of the social structures that surround people. Individual behavior is determined and constrained by certain structures, such as the institutions that hold power (Demmers, 2017, p. 15). On the other hand, individualism sees agency as the source of human action: "the elementary unit of social life is the individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals" (Elster, 1989, cited in Demmers, 2017, p. 15). The notions of structure and agency are interrelated, and it is widely acknowledged that "we cannot account fully for the one without invoking the other" (Carlsnaes, 1992, p. 245). The central question of ontology, then, is whether structure determines agency or whether agency informs structure (Demmers, 2017, p. 15).

Structuralism and individualism relate to two epistemological stances, namely a positivist and an interpretative epistemology. Epistemological theories are concerned with what knowledge is and how humans can acquire knowledge. Positivist epistemologists argue that human action is subject to patterns, rules, and causal laws. According to them, human behavior is predictable and we can understand human behavior by creating general explanations. To gain knowledge, then, we should study how individuals behave (Carlsnaes, 1992; Hollis, 1994).

In contrast, interpretative scholars argue that we should not concern ourselves with the causes of human action. Instead, we should examine the meaning of actions to understand what knowledge is. The meaning of actions is historically and culturally specific and is derived from our shared rules and ideas of social life. Therefore, knowledge can only be acquired by studying the contexts of actions in which their meaning is created. Only then can we make sense of actions (Demmers, 2017, p. 15-17).

The different streams of ontology and epistemology can all be combined and lead to different theoretical positions, which Hollis (1994, in Demmers, 2017, p. 16) has mapped in a matrix (see table 1.1). Positivist structuralism does not fare well in academia today because it leads to a view of society that functions as an objective whole, prior to and external to human action. The combination of positivist epistemological thinking with individualism is often associated with behaviorism and the homo economicus, where it does not matter what people say, but it is their behavior that should be studied. When an interpretative epistemology is combined with structuralism, social structures are understood as sets of rules of meaning. These rules tell people how to behave socially, and actors in this paradigm are mere rule-followers (homo sociologicus). Interpretative individualism, on the other hand, sees actors as having agency while being firmly embedded in society (Carlsnaes, 1992; Demmers, 2017; Reckwitz, 2002).

Epistemology	*Positivist / explaining*	*Interpretative / understanding*
Ontology		
Structuralism	Society is an objective entity external to human action. Social structures are like systems.	People are told how to act socially by social structures that function as 'tules of meaning'. Actors follow these rules.
Individualism	Actors are 'self-contained units,' they initiate actions and change according to certain laws (e.g. utility maximization).	Actors can initiate change, have agency and are capable of self-reflection, but they are also firmly embedded in society and its social structures.

Table 1.1 The Hollis matrix (Hollis, 1994, in Demmers, 2017, p. 16).

How can practice theorists be categorized according to this matrix? Practice theorists understand human actions and their meanings from both structuralist and individualist perspectives, making them remarkably difficult to categorize. Regarding individualism and structuralism, Reckwitz (2002, p. 256) identifies individuals as the bearers of practice and "[a]s carriers of practice, they are neither autonomous nor the judgmental dopes who conform to norms. They understand the world and themselves, and use know-how and motivational knowledge, according to the particular practice." Practice theory does not

seem to comply with a static or essentialist view of either agency or structure. Instead, practice theorists emphasize the importance of dynamic processes and mutual relations:

> *The focus is neither on the internal (inside the head of actors), nor on the external (in some form of structure). Instead, scholars see practice as ontologically in between the inside and the outside. They identify the social in the mind (since individuals are carriers of practices), but also in symbolic structures (since practices form more or less extra-subjective structures and patterns of action).*
>
> Bueger & Gadinger (2015, p. 451).

Such a stance can be identified as a relational ontology, in which relationships take precedence over separation, process over static, and activity over passivity. Both agency and structures have their place herein and influence each other (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015; Guillaume, 2007; Jackson & Nexon, 1999).

In terms of epistemology, practice theorists foreground an understanding of shared or collective knowledge as practical knowledge. Their objects of study are "concrete situations of life in which actors perform a common practice and thus create and maintain social orderliness. [...] Their actual activities and practical enactments in concrete situations matter" (ibid., p. 451). Thus, the site of the social is understood to be in practical or everyday activities, making these the most worthwhile element of study.

Simultaneously, practice theory is concerned with the meaning of these actions, which is part of shared or collective knowledge. Reckwitz (2002, p. 244-245) places practice theory within the larger framework of 'cultural theories' in which actions are understood and explained in terms of "symbolic structures of meaning." Studying practices is therefore not only about the content of practical activities, but also about the structures of meaning that underlie these activities, which add up to a "performative understanding of the world" that is constantly 'becoming' (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 453).

When combined with Hollis' matrix, practice theory seems to align most closely with the lower right quadrant, but even this is not satisfactory for two reasons. First, the problem with the four options shown in the Hollow Matrix is that they lead to 'upward conflation' or 'downward conflation', as Archer argues (1996, p. 97f). She argues that to reduce the explanation of either actors or structures to the other is to exclude any *reciprocal interplay* between the two components: "Consequently, the dependent element is robbed of the capacity to exploit or to influence the determining element, for it lacked the autonomy or independence to do so" (ibid.). This is precisely why the interpretative individualist quadrant in the Hollow Matrix is also unsatisfactory for practice theories. By understanding human action in terms of both structuralism and individualism, practice theorists leave room for this interplay or two-way influence between agency and structures.

Second, Carlsnaes (1992, p. 249-250) argues that to understand the agency-structure relationship as one in which one component is explained in terms of the other is to place the independent variable on a pedestal on which it cannot be problematized. In contrast, practice scholars go beyond such causal reduction by emphasizing the interconnectedness of actors and structures. Within the school of practice theory, both components are constantly called upon for their theoretical justification, thereby avoiding this problem associated with the agency-structure dilemma. In doing so, practice scholars have found a way out of the impasse that has dominated the debate within social theory on agency and structure.

Adler and Pouliot (2011, p. 21-22) argue for a pluralistic approach that can accommodate the unique ontological perspectives of practice theorists. Such an approach allows for a broad ontology that "blends material and ideational factors, as well as structure and agency, into social doing" (ibid., p. 12). In this way, practice theorists can "move beyond a number of entrenched dichotomies in social theorizing" (ibid., p. 13), such as structuralism versus individualism. It is precisely their allowance for a broad ontology and their fine balancing at the intersection of individualism and structuralism that allows practice theorists to overcome the two problems of the classic agent-structure dilemma discussed above.

Instead of a matrix, Adler and Pouliot (ibid., p. 22) suggest using a spectrum in which different theoretical perspectives of practice theorists can be mapped (see figure 1.2). Such a spectrum can do more justice to the nuances in the assumptions underlying their theories than a matrix that fits the theories into predefined boxes. In this spectrum, practice theories can be identified according to the degree to which they emphasize structure, agency, materiality, and meaningfulness (ibid., p. 17). It is within such a spectrum that the multiplicity of practice theories can be more satisfactorily placed, providing greater depth and flexibility in the analysis of these theories.

In sum, practice theory is able to provide an ontological account of social change in which both structures and agency have their place. Since neither structures nor agency remain constant over time, social theories must be able to account for more than just specific changes in these matters. Instead, social theories should be able to account for social change as a whole, which is an inherently dynamic phenomenon (Cerny, 1990, p. 4). In this respect, "neither [structures nor agency] 'determines' the other but [they] are both, in the final analysis, independent variables in an inextricably intertwined temporal process" (Carlsnaes, 1992, p. 246). Practice theory addresses this need for a dynamic and integrated synthesis of individual and structural factors in accounting for social change.

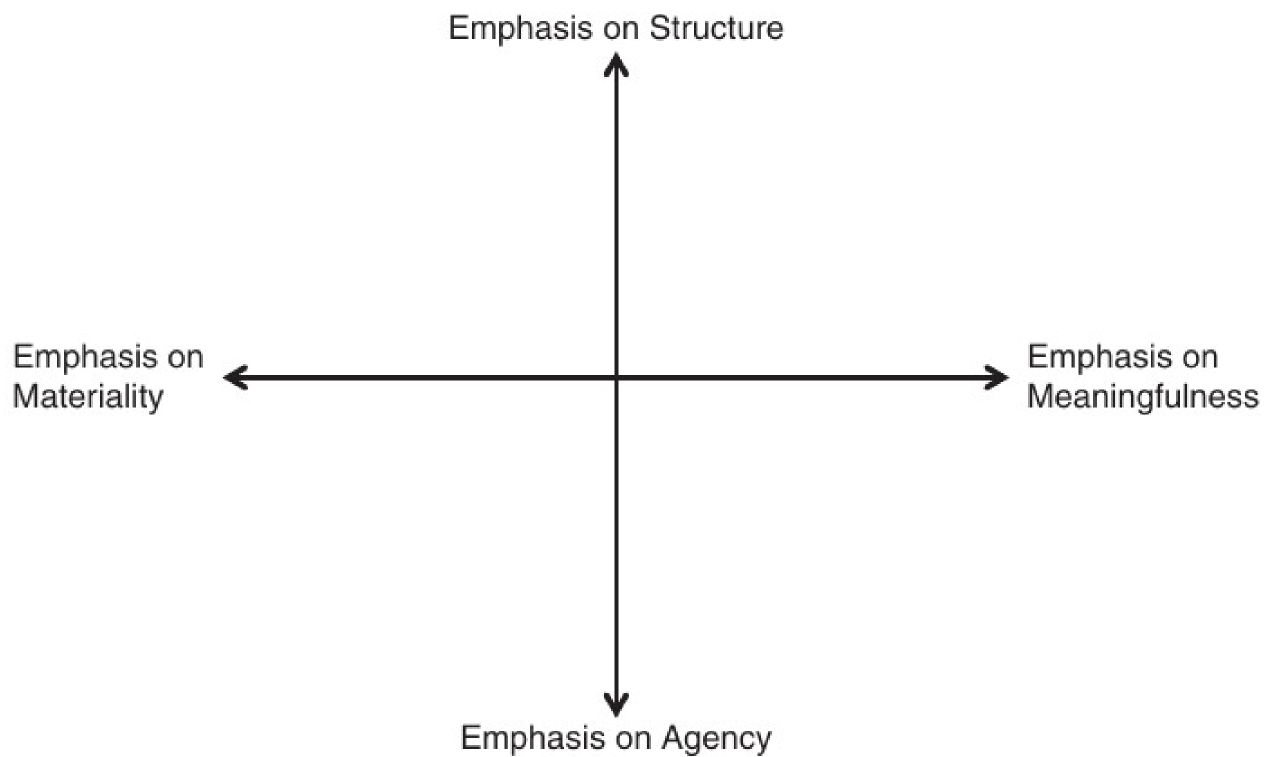

Figure 1.2: The ontological spectrum of practice theories .

Remote warfare practices

In the field of conflict studies, ontology and epistemology apply to the questions of what war is and how to analyze it. In this section, I will argue for an understanding of remote warfare as a practice. Next, I will discuss why the practices approach is useful for understanding and analyzing remote warfare. In short, applying practice theory to the concept of remote warfare will allow for the identification of patterns over time between different case studies, an ontological understanding of this contemporary mode of violence through change and continuity, and, ultimately, the de-essentialization of the concept of remote warfare.

Applying the practices approach to remote warfare in an external environment means analyzing the *international* practices at play. Adler and Pouliot (2011) initiated a comprehensive practice turn in the field of IR when they introduced the concept of international practices. International practices refer to socially organized activities in the realm of world politics, which is seen as a network of everyday activities. Adler and Pouliot (ibid., p. 1) perceive "[w]orld politics [...] as structured by practices, which give meaning to international action, make possible strategic international interaction, and are reproduced, changed, and reinforced by international action and interaction." World politics has many facets, and its everyday practices can be found in international (business) trade, finance, power, security, organizations and

institutions, strategy, diplomacy, resources (distribution), and military activity (ibid.; (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015; Schindler & Wille, 2019).

A practices approach to remote warfare has not yet received adequate scholarly attention. With one exception (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021), cases of remote warfare have not been studied from a 'practices' perspective. However, this is relevant to the remote warfare debate. Regarding the debate on remote warfare, analyzing case studies of remote warfare according to the pragmatist tradition of practice theory, the remoteness of these wars can be explored as a "set of *practices* [...] that share a common core - a desire to achieve military outcomes without large ground deployments – but that vary in implementation between cases" (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021, p. 448). There are several reasons why the practices approach is useful for the study of remote warfare, which I will now turn to.

First, when studying remote wars from the practices approach, the common core or 'family resemblances' of remote wars can be explored due to the patterned characteristic of practices (Collier & Mahon, 1993, p. 847-848). This is because the repetitiveness of practices allows us to identify regularities in practices over time and across different contexts. Identifying family resemblances makes it possible to label conflicts as remote warfare, even if the cases do not share all the same characteristics, as Stoddard and Toltica explain (ibid., p. 452): [t]here must be a common core of regularities in practices that we see to be able to describe different cases as examples of remote warfare." The repetitiveness of practices makes this possible by facilitating the observation of commonalities between the different case studies, Hence, using the practices' approach to study remote warfare "helps focus on the continuities in military practice across time/space whilst guarding against 'amplification' and the exaggeration of differences" (ibid.).

Second, when reflecting on the discussions of the ontology of practice theory, war can be understood in terms of both continuity and change (Holmqvist-Jonsäter, 2010). Approaching remote warfare as a set of practices allows for an analysis of the "continuous tension between the dynamic, continuously changing character of [military remote] practice on the one side, and the identification of stable, regulated patterns, routines, and reproduction [of military practices] on the other" (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 455-456). Thus, the remoteness of varying conflicts can be understood through both change and continuity as a set of practices that are instances of remote warfare sharing a mutual core but differing in manifestation.

Such an approach is consistent with the recent focus in scholarly literature on change and continuity in the character of warfare (Holmqvist-Jonsäter, 2010; Strachan & Scheipers, 2011). Bousquet et al. (2020, p. 100) argue that instead of a primary and single definition of war, the study of war requires a "strange, paradoxical and provisional ontology that is consonant with the confounding mutability of war." As a solution, they propose to understand war as continually becoming, which they call martial empiricism. Such

a view of the ontology of war aligns with the practices approach taken in this thesis. Interpreting remote warfare as a practice not only allows for the exploration of similarities between activities in conflicts, but also reflects "both the mutability of war and the fact that these practices are liable to change" (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021, p. 453).

In turn, it is possible to de-essentialize the concept of remote warfare by viewing it as a set of political and military practices. The practices approach makes it clear that there is "no one single model of 'remote warfare' even if there is a common thread that runs through different examples" (ibid., p. 448). Using the practices approach to analyze remote warfare facilitates the exploration of different patterns of remoteness, rather than treating remote warfare as a separate category of war. In practice, viewing remote warfare as a set of practices makes it possible to compare Western remote interventions with remote wars conducted by non-Western states that may differ from Western ways of doing things. Or, as Stoddard and Toltica (2021, p. 448) put it: "This opens up the study of remote warfare and shifts the question from 'what is remote warfare?' to how do states strategically and tactical apply military remoteness in different contexts?"

Remote warfare as a strategic practice

The previous section argued that remote warfare should be understood as a practice according to the practices approach. In what follows, I will elaborate on this and explain how to understand remote warfare as a *strategic* practice, as defined by Stoddard and Toltica (2021, p. 453): "a patterned set of competent, repeated behaviours used by states to achieve policy effects through forms of military intervention that avoid the use of large-scale ground deployments." I will then briefly identify the three elements of a strategic practice (objectives, tactics, and benefits) in Western remote interventions, drawing on the remote warfare debate. Finally, I will discuss why studying remote warfare from the practices approach contributes to practice theory itself.

Framing remote warfare as a strategic practice according to the above definition has three implications. First, the strategic use of remote warfare implies that it is "purposeful, 'competent' and targeted towards some end" (ibid.). Second, as a strategic practice, remote warfare involves the repeated use of tactics in a patterned manner to achieve the strategic objectives articulated in the first implication. Third, the final implication of understanding remote warfare as a strategic practice is that states choose the remote approach (or any other strategic practice, for that matter) because they derive some sort of benefit from it (ibid.).

As a result, the three implications of the (strategic) practice approach give rise to three distinct but mutually supportive strands of analysis to be employed in this study. The first analysis involves an examination of the strategic objectives of remote interventions: "to what ends are states using remote

warfare and how does this relate to both their historical and wider patterns of security behaviour and to the behaviours of other states?" (ibid., p. 453-454). Second, the remote tactics used and their patterns should be analyzed: "what combinations of distanced behaviour are put into practice and [...] how do these vary?" (ibid., p. 454). Finally, the final stage of the analysis examines the patterns of advantages that states gain from their involvement in remote military operations (ibid.).

These three strands of analysis can be used to understand the strategic continuities in Western remote interventions. In terms of strategic objectives, the academic debate identifies counter-terrorism as the main objective of Western remote operations (such as the global coalition against ISIS). Counter-terrorism has been a central focus of Western military operations since 9/11 and can thus be seen as a continuity in Western strategic military objectives (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021, p. 451). Scholars also argue that remote warfare serves as a means for great powers to compete for dominance without engaging in direct confrontation (McKay, 2021; O'Rourke, 2022). This is exemplified by the US 2018 National Defence Strategy, which articulates that great power competition has become an increasingly important strategic priority for the US: "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security" (United States Department of Defence, 2018, p. 1). This concern also serves as a strategic objective for remote engagement in military operations. Overall, an overarching goal of Western remote approaches seems to be to manage and shape international security dynamics, whether in terms of counter-terrorism or great power competition (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021).

With regard to the second strand of analysis, the academic debate identifies several tactics as pervasive in Western remote interventions. As previously discussed, the tactics used in remote operations often involve a combination of drones and air strikes, as well as cooperation with local forces and military contractors. There is no exhaustive list of remote tactics, but the literature on remote warfare highlights the increasing willingness of Western states to use such remote tools in their foreign interventions, either instead of or in combination with ground troops (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021; Watson & McKay, 2021, p. 8).

Finally, the academic debate ascribes several benefits to states that engage in remote military operations. Operating remotely is beneficial to states because it allows them to avoid political and financial risks. On the one hand, operating remotely reduces the risks to your own soldiers by removing them from the battlefield. On the other hand, states can externalize the burden of war by working with proxy forces and empowering them to deal with security threats. As a result, it is easier to disengage from conflicts without compromising the ability to address security threats. Next, because remote operations often take place in the shadows, Western states have less to worry about in terms of responsibility and accountability in remote military interventions. Furthermore, because remote tactics are often considered precise, it is thought likely that there are fewer civilian casualties when operating remotely. Overall, remote warfare seems to minimize the political backlash from high civilian or military casualties, the financial burden is

thought to be lower, and this in turn leads to less pressure on political leaders (Demmers & Gould, 2018; Krieg, 2016; Krieg & Rickli, 2018; Stoddard & Toltica, 2021; Waldman, 2018; Watts & Biegon, 2017).

In this thesis, practice theory does not only function as an explanatory tool for remote warfare. Rather, I argue that the analysis of remote warfare, or drones in particular, as a practice contributes to practice theory itself. In fact, understanding remote warfare as a strategic practice helps develop our understanding of the dynamics between the three strands of this analytical framework (objectives, tactics, and benefits). The current literature has created the strategic practice framework in the context of remote warfare (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021), but has treated its three components of objectives, tactics, and benefits in relative isolation. As a result, it is not clear what the dynamics between these three elements are, even though they are intertwined in states' engagement in remote military operations. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how strategic practices work, it is relevant to examine how the interplay between and changes in objectives, tactics, and benefits impact a strategic practice.

Remote warfare is an appropriate field of study to examine these intra-dynamics of a strategic practice because war has been identified by scholars as an ever-changing but also highly repetitive social phenomenon (Bousquet et al., 2020; Holmqvist-Jonsäter, 2010; Strachan & Scheipers, 2011). Therefore, this thesis builds on the scholarship of strategic practices by focusing on a currently understudied relationship in the tripartite framework as applied to remote warfare. It does so by examining how changes in remote tactics affect the strategic objectives pursued and the advantages gained in remote military operations. The case study in particular is relevant to this theoretical endeavor because it shows a dramatic change in the tactics employed in a short period of time. As Turkey's drone capabilities have grown rapidly, it is highly applicable to examine how such changes affect a strategic practice. This thesis examines a unidirectional relationship within the strategic practice framework because the scope of this thesis does not allow me to examine how all of its components interact in an integrated manner. In doing so, this thesis provides a piece of the puzzle of the highly complex and dynamic relationship between objectives, tactics, and benefits within strategic practices.

2. Methodology

> [People] think that research methods are difficult to learn and painstaking to conduct. However, [⋯] you engage in research every day [⋯]. We ask questions, listen to stories, watch others, [⋯] and engage in dialogue. In doing so, we gather qualitative data about social phenomena. Simultaneously, [we] share our own understandings in conversations, blog entries, and emails. We do this [⋯] to understand the world and our place within it. [⋯]. So, at a basic level, we all engage in research everyday. The focused study of research methods takes these everyday actions one step further: to a systematic analysis that may lead to better understandings.
>
> Tracy (2013, p. 2).

Answering the research question of this thesis, requires a grounded and thoughtfully set out methodological approach. The approach taken in this thesis is that of a social research methodology that builds upon qualitative data gathered between April and June 2023. Analyzing this data means engaging in a dialogue between what Ragin (1994, p. 55) has identified as ideas and evidence. Ideas, or theories, inform analytical frameworks, which in turn help us to make sense of the images that emerge from evidence, or data. Synthesizing these frames and images allows us to structure and understand the data we collect and to test, revise, or extend theories. In the end, such a synthesis leads to a representation of social life by forming a coherent whole out of the interplay between the images derived from the data and the analytical frameworks derived from the theories. But before I can adequately engage in this dialogue between theory and data, the route taken towards the collected empirical evidence should be clear. Therefore, the following chapter will concern itself with the research questions, the design, the ethical considerations and limitations of this research project.

Research questions

As stated in the introduction, the research question at the heart of this thesis is the following:

> *How has Turkey's increased drone capabilities influenced its foreign policy towards northern Syria from 2015 to May 2023?*

The beginning and end of this period were chosen because 2015 roughly marks the beginning of Turkey's Syria policy under examination in this thesis, while presidential elections were held in Turkey in May 2023. These elections mark a shift in governance positions in Ankara's policy circles, which may have a significant impact on Turkey's foreign policy processes and decisions. These changes only became apparent during and after the data collection period of this thesis and therefore cannot be included in this study.

The research question is divided into three sub-questions that together attempt to answer the main research question. The first sub-question provides the descriptive account of the thesis, by shedding light on the development and status quo of Turkey's foreign policy and drone policy, specifically in Syria:

1. How has Turkey's foreign policy and drone policy evolved in general and towards Syria since Erdoğan came to power in 2002 until May 2023?

The answer to the first sub-question provides the context in which to understand Turkey's foreign policy and remote warfare behavior towards northern Syria. It therefore goes back to 2002, the year in which Erdoğan came to power and sowed the seeds for all future foreign policy developments. This contextual account will also help me to answer the second sub-question, which I will now address.

The second sub-question focuses on interpreting Turkey's remote warfare behavior in northern Syria as a *strategic practice*. In order to interpret it as such, I trace the objectives, tactics, and benefits that accompany Turkey's remote strategy when it comes to northern Syria. The question is as follows:

2. How can Turkey's remote war in northern Syria be characterized in terms of objectives, tactics, and benefits from Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016 until May 2023?

Since Turkey's military activities in northern Syria began with the Euphrates Shield military operation in 2016, this questions departs from that event. It ends in May 2023, because Turkey's drone campaign in northeastern Syria was still ongoing and because elections were being held at the time.

The last sub-question brings us to the final step towards answering the main research question, by focusing on how experts perceive the influence of Turkey's drone capabilities on its foreign policy towards northern Syria:

3. How do experts interpret the influence of Turkey's increased drone capabilities on its foreign policy towards northern Syria?

By considering drones as a variable of change in TFP, this question allows me to analyze the role of drones in the context of TFP towards northern Syria.

Answering these three sub-questions provided me with the necessary elements to answer the research question by focusing on the context in which TFP and drone capabilities emerged, the content of its remote practices in northern Syria, and the experts' assessment of the influential role of drones on TFP towards Syria.

Research design

Answering the research question requires a specific plan for the manner in which the evidence, or data, is going to be collected and analyzed. This is what Ragin and Amoroso (2011, p. 24) call a *research design*. There are several elements of a research design that pertain specifically to social research, namely the data collection techniques, the sampling method and the methods of analysis. They explain how researchers have come to their presented knowledge and I will therefore elaborate on them in the following section.

Studying the influence of drone capabilities on foreign policy can be done through both qualitative and quantitative research. I chose to conduct qualitative research because it best fits the case study and theory under review. Namely, TFP does not articulate a clear policy on the matter of drones and lacks transparency (European Forum on Armed Drones, n.d.), resulting in a lack of primary data and in the inability to obtain this data independently. A quantitative research design is then less satisfactory (Von Soest, 2022). Furthermore, studying Turkey's remote warfare practices requires a thorough understanding of the context, actions, and reasoning of the case study, considering that the focus is on socially meaningful performances against the backdrop of specific, contextual background knowledge and structures (Flick et al., 2004; Tracy, 2013). Therefore, the research needs to make use of a qualitative approach that can accommodate exactly this.

Moreover, qualitative methods lend themselves well to research based on practice theory, as a practices approach "falls in the realm of interpretative methodology, practice theorists draw on a mix of established methods (usually participant observation, interviews as well as text analysis)" (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 457). Thus, appropriate methods for studying practices are primarily qualitative research techniques.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first sub-question guided the first phase of the research, in which desk research was conducted to explore the context of the case study. The evolution of TFP and the rise of its drone capabilities were examined through various media outlets (news papers, monitoring agencies, think tanks, NGOs, and academic papers and books). In the second phase of the research, I have collected empirical evidence on the objectives, tactics and benefits of Turkey's remote warfare practices in northern Syria and on the relationship between Turkey's improved drone capabilities and its foreign policy using semi-structured expert interviews. I conducted these interviews with individuals with expertise in Turkish foreign policy, particularly as it relates to Syria and Kurdish armed groups in Syria, and Turkey's drone practices.

In order to ensure consistency across the interviews, I used a topic list (see annex 1). The interviews were conducted using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) mediated technologies, or in other words, online video calling software. Conducting the interviews via VoIP is well suited to the research because it expands

the sample range to an international scope without geographic limitations and leads to a greater variety of expert types in the research compared to face-to-face interviews with people I could only reach physically (Lo Iacono et al., 2016).

But what exactly is an expert? Von Soest (2022, p. 2) gives us a broad definition, namely: "experts have specific knowledge about an issue, development, or event." Such an inclusive notion allows for a range of actors to be labeled as experts (Collins & Evans, 2007, p. 3), and thus not just people in positions of power (for a discussion of elites versus experts, see Littig, 2009, and Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019). Such an inclusive interpretation of experts is appropriate to contemporary society, where knowledge production is globalized, fragmented, pluralistic and takes place in transdisciplinary contexts (Gibbons et al., 1994; Knorr Cetina, 1999, p. 12-13 and 18), and is therefore adopted in this thesis. The different types of actors with expertise can be seen as individuals who, regardless of their social position, are 'active participants' in specific affairs, following the notion of Gorden (1980, p. 199). Active participants have acquired knowledge about a specific problem through activities such as volunteering or social work aimed at this specific problem, an interpretation in line with practice theory (Nicolini, 2009). Experts can be "academics, practitioners, political elites, managers, or any other individual with specialized experience or knowledge" (Maestas, 2015, p. 585), such as NGO staff and activists.

However, it is important to emphasize that experts cannot be considered as unproblematic sources of objective information, as their knowledge is partly constructed through social practices and personal experiences, i.e. its production is contingent (Bogner et al., 2009; Bogner & Menz, 2009; Döringer, 2021; Froschauer & Lueger, 2009; Von Soest, 2022). Therefore, I integrated this into my analysis of the interviews, by always being aware of the participants' personal and professional backgrounds.

In terms of sampling, selecting research participants for expert interviews is best done through purposeful, non-probability sampling, as expert judgments are personal and therefore not necessarily representative or replicable (Von Soest, 2022, p. 3). The people I interviewed were selected on the basis of their expertise on the topic, which was acquired through the performance of specific activities. In an attempt to try and overcome the problem of expert subjectivity, the research group was diversified as much as possible in terms of origin, gender, and employment (Meuser & Nagel, 2009). I interviewed Turkish, Syrian, Kurdish, European and American men and women from different types of organizations (NGOs, think tanks, ministries, research institutes, media outlets, and universities), with different occupations (academics, analysts, senior and junior research fellows, (former) diplomats, journalists and (security) advisors) and occupying different positions on the hierarchical ladder. During the analysis, I cross-checked the information provided by the different types of experts in order to increase validity, as what Von Soest (2022, p. 6-7) refers to as internal triangulation.

Research participants were found through snowball sampling, which is suitable for purposeful selection (Bryman, 2012; Goldstein, 2002; Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017; Shesterinina, 2016; Tracy, 2013). As a starting point, my former internship supervisor at the human rights organization PAX put me in touch with experts in his network. These experts then put me in touch with other experts in their respective networks. I also contacted other experts on my own, as I did not want to talk only to a uniform group of research participants (a classic pitfall of snowball sampling). Some of them put me in touch with other experts in their network.

Furthermore, Meuser and Nagel (2009, p. 31) argue that expert interviews work best when the conversation is open, allowing the participants to unfold their reflections and thoughts. This can be achieved by creating a thematic topic list, including pre-formulated questions and avoiding closed questions (ibid.; Tansey, 2007). Therefore, the topic list for this research was guided by general themes with a few specific questions per theme. These questions served as a reminder in case I got 'blank' or the themes were not enough to keep the flow of the conversation going. Not all of them were asked when unnecessary and also not in a fixed order. In addition, I asked follow-up questions 'off-script' in order to realize the full potential of the interview and to ensure a high degree of validity (Von Soest, 2022, p. 7). Using a topic list as an interview guide allowed me compare responses across interviews. In this way, I engaged in data, or participant, triangulation and therefore studied the subject from different angles, which allowed me to verify the data and to increase validity (ibid.; Boeije, 2009; Carter et al., 2014).

Throughout the period of conducting interviews, I maintained a dialogue between the data collected and the theory, which is referred to as an iterative approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2013). Due to the lack of literature and data on the dynamics of drone use by non-Western actors, it is important to keep an open gaze while collecting data in order to gain new insights. Iterative analysis allows for just this, moving back and forth between emerging data on the one hand and existing theories on the other (ibid.). There is an abundance of literature on Western drone practices, so there is no need for purely inductive research to build new theories. However, these theories may not be entirely appropriate for the practices of new emerging drone powers, meaning that a purely deductive approach is not appropriate either. Therefore, it was important to reflect on both the data and the theory throughout the research process.

Condensing and analyzing the interviews was done by coding them in Atlas.ti, which allowed me to organize the interview passages thematically. Starting with general codes derived from the literature, primarily the notions of 'objectives, 'tactics,' and 'benefits' as remote practices (Stoddard & Toltica, 2021), I then created 'in vivo' codes derived from the data itself (Boeije, 2009, p. 101). This allowed me to find empirical patterns in the data, which I then brought into dialogue with the theoretical base. The presentation of these findings and my arguments is done by quoting from the various interviews, in order to

give the research participants a voice as much as possible. To counter the charge that expert quotes are often cherry-picked, when I present the findings, I emphasize the degree to which a particular quote is consistent with other interview statements on the same topic and situate it within the entire empirical corpus (Von Soest, 2022, p. 6).

Ethical considerations

It is important for researchers to consider the moral underpinnings and implications of their research, especially when it inevitably leads to encounters with individuals. This is especially the case when addressing a sensitive and controversial topic. In this sense, asking participants about secret military policy was a particular ethical challenge of this research. My research participants may face worrying consequences in terms of partnerships, (professional) relationships, and the credibility of their programs if they are identified after the research (Lancaster, 2017, p. 99). Therefore, it is important that I adhere to the three main ethical considerations outlined by Boeije (2009) in order to minimize any unnecessary harm to the participants, which I will now address.

According to Boeije (ibid., p. 45), the ethical considerations to be respected in social research are informed consent, privacy and confidentiality. First, regarding the principle of informed consent, I informed the participants prior to the interview of my research objectives, my intentions with the data collected, the structure of the interview, and emphasized that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. I then asked for their verbal consent to participate in the interview and to have the interview recorded. I informed the participants when the recording would begin and end. Second, in terms of privacy, I did not enter or observe any private spaces. For each interview, I made sure to be in a place where I would not be disturbed by other people who might have overheard the remarks. Third, the concept of confidentiality is often operationalized through the notion of anonymity, by ensuring that the research participants cannot be identified (Silverman, 2013; Wiles et al., 2008). Given the controversial nature of the research topic, it was of particular interest to me to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for participants. Therefore, I anonymized all interviews by default. This includes the names of the participants as well as the organizations they work for or any other affiliations. When necessary, I refer to the participant's position or job description in general terms if this does not allow others to identify the interviewee (Lancaster, 2017, p. 98). Several participants agreed to the use of their full names, but I decided to anonymize all participants because this thesis deals with a sensitive topic.

One issue related to both privacy and confidentiality when using technology to conduct online interviews is the fact that the technology is owned by third parties, which, in times of increasing data surveillance, could compromise the anonymity of participants (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). To ensure confidentiality, the interviews were transcribed, anonymized, and stored on a password-protected external

hard drive, including a locked file containing personal information. All interviews were removed from Microsoft Teams after transcription. While this helps to protect their anonymity, it does not fully ensure it.

Finally, given that this research deals with a sensitive topic, namely a top secret military policy with distressing consequences for those on the receiving end of this violence, I had to be careful in my approach to the interviews. I established a careful working method by avoiding questions about personal experiences with drone strikes and by making sure that I was aware of which participants might face consequences from the Turkish authorities if they made certain statements on this issue. If I noticed that these participants were reluctant to talk about a particular issue, I would move on to another question.

Limitations

There were several limitations I encountered in conducting this research. First, there were relatively few inside experts (those who make the decisions) who participated in this research; the participants were primarily outside experts (those who analyze the decisions). One former Turkish diplomat, five Turkish nationals with inside knowledge of TFP and drone policy, and ten non-Turkish outside experts participated in this research. Due to the secrecy surrounding Turkey's drone activities and the lack of transparency in the corresponding foreign policy (European Forum on Armed Drones, n.d.; Hofman, 2020), it was difficult to include more inside experts. The inclusion of both outside *and* inside experts arguably increases the reliability of the results. Inside experts have knowledge of what happens inside the foreign policy apparatus in Ankara, while outside experts can look at it from a distance and with a different perspective (Von Soest, 2022, p. 3-4). However, because I was not able to diversify my research group satisfactorily in terms of inside and outside experts, the reliability of the results was limited.

Another complication was language. First, the fact that I do not speak Turkish meant that I had less access to certain types of information, such as foreign policy documents and articles in Turkish-only media. In addition, I interviewed participants with different first languages whose languages I did not speak. This meant that the interviews had to be conducted in English. For some participants, this may have been a limitation in expressing themselves fully. Next, language proved to be a problem when trying to interview people who did not speak English. For example, I interviewed an expert who only spoke Arabic. I therefore had to use a translator, which may have distorted the meaning of the messages. I tried to overcome this by asking for clarification and by rephrasing and/or repeating questions. There were moments in this interview when the conversation did not flow, possibly due to the use of a translator. Another research participant who did not speak English wanted to answer the interview questions only in writing due to the language limitations. Since I had to translate the questions into Turkish and the answers into English, it is possible that (part of) the meaning of both the questions and the answers became blurred (Mokry, 2022).

A limitation during the qualitative data collection was the focus of the research, covert military operations. As this topic is quite controversial, participants in the research may not have revealed everything they know about it or may have felt uncomfortable or inhibited during the interview. The difficulties of discussing such a sensitive topic may have been exacerbated by the fact that the interviews were conducted online rather than offline in a shared space (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). For example, one participant was afraid of being tapped during the interview and became anxious. This may have affected the extent to which he or she was willing to talk openly. To ensure an open and honest dialogue and to minimize harm to the participants, I promised them confidentiality. However, by supporting the participants' right to secrecy and thus adhering to the convention of confidentiality, aspects of the case may have been obscured (Baez, 2002; Rappert, 2010).

In addition, conducting the interviews was complicated by the Turkish elections on May 14 and May 28 2023, which fell in the middle of the data collection period. On the one hand, the elections meant that many Turkey experts were very busy and that it was difficult to schedule interviews. As a result, two interviews were replaced by written responses. On the other hand, the elections proved to be an unavoidable topic in almost every interview. This meant that in many interviews we were distracted from the more relevant issues for this research and may have missed worthwhile considerations.

Another limitation was found in the use of online technologies to conduct the interviews. During the course of the interviews, there were several occasions when the video calling software did not work properly. There were interviews where the software crashed, resulting in a loss of conversation flow. At some point during the data collection period, Microsoft Teams had updated its terms for recording video calls. This caused a problem with Teams on my device, forcing me to improvise on the fly. The result was a clumsy start to some interviews and a loss of time.

Finally, I need to reflect on my own positionality as a researcher. A researcher's positionality is important for qualitative research because it is susceptible to the researcher's subjectivity and interpretation (Silverman, 2013; Tracy, 2013). Being a Dutch woman and a student, I did not share many characteristics with my research group. My research group was diverse in terms of origin, culture, background, and occupation. On the one hand, this gave me a certain level of objectivity and distance from both the subject and my research group. On the other hand, as I am part of the dominant discourse structures in the Netherlands, I had internalized certain views about Turkey prior to the interviews. In order not to let this influence the interviews, I tried not to react normatively to the participants' statements. I also tried to become aware of my own assumptions about Turkey's (drone) practices by writing them down prior to the interviews. Moreover, I expected that people might not take me seriously because I am a student, a woman, or because of my distance from the topic. This may have put me and the participants on an

unequal footing during the interviews. However, the participants took me seriously during the interviews and were happy to participate. Several experts I approached did not want to participate, for unknown reasons.

3. Descriptive Analysis: The evolution of Turkish foreign policy and drone policy

> [Erdoğan] is a political chameleon, constantly changing colors to survive.
>
> Tol (2022, p. 5-6).

In order to examine Turkey's remote warfare practices in northern Syria, it is necessary to understand the context in which its foreign policy towards Syria has emerged. In this chapter, I study this landscape in which TFP has evolved and how it has influenced Turkish drone policy and its Syria policy. The goal of this chapter is to provide a general understanding of Turkey's foreign and drone policy as a foundation for the empirical analysis in the next chapter. The information presented is based on open-source research, using data that is already 'out there' in the form of journalistic pieces, analytical articles, and reports.

In the following, I outline the general development and status quo of TFP since Erdoĝan came to power in 2002 and highlight its dynamics in the region (especially in Syria). Since TFP cannot be adequately understood without considering its domestic politics, special attention is given to the role of domestic politics in the evolution of TFP. First of all, this chapter outlines several phases of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy, namely those characterized by a pro-EU and pro-reform agenda, by Islamism, and by nationalism. This chapter shows that current Turkey's current policy towards northern Syria is largely driven by nationalist sentiments, the militarization of TFP, and Ankara's quest for strategic autonomy. In addition, I discuss the impact of the 2017 constitutional referendum and the subsequent executive presidency on how foreign policy decisions are made in Ankara. Finally, I look at the transformation of the Turkish defense industry and the development of drones in Turkey. But first, let me portray a general overview of TFP over the past two decades.

The evolution of Turkish foreign policy

Since the sweeping victory of the Justice and Development Party (hereafter AKP) in the 2002 parliamentary elections, TFP has been increasingly dominated by former Prime Minister and current President Erdoĝan. When Erdoĝan came to power in 2002, he disavowed his Islamic past and steered his party towards a 'conservative-democratic ideology', with a pro-EU and reformist domestic agenda. His Middle East policy in this period was characterized as a 'zero problems with neighbors' doctrine that sought to cultivate trade and diplomatic relations with countries throughout the region. In Syria, for example, this led to the establishment of ties with the Assad regime. In doing so, Erdoĝan defied the military's narrative that Turkey

was surrounded exclusively by hostile actors, thereby limiting the military's role in TFP and domestic politics (D'Alema, 2017; Joshi & Stein, 2013; Tol, 2022; Uzgel, 2022) Overall, this desecuritization of Turkey's Middle East policy and its pro-EU agenda were both attempts by the AKP to solve a domestic problem in the name of democracy, in this case the issue of secularism and the military (Ayata, 2015; Tol, 2022; Yackley, 2020). This line of TFP is considered a success because it "allowed [Erdoĝan] to wrap his power grab in a pro-reform, pro-EU language and a noble cause seeking zero problems with neighbors" (Tol, 2022, p. 7-8).

The Islamist agenda

While it seemed that Erdoĝan had left Islamism behind during the days of conservative democracy, he was not afraid to embrace it again when he needed to. His next move would be to replace the parliamentary system with an executive presidency with very limited checks and balances. Such a move would effectively lead to a one-man rule system and could not be justified on the basis of his pro-democracy project. So Erdoĝan changed course and decided to appeal to the religiously conservative segments of Turkish society and the Kurds. In this agenda, Sunni Islam was presented as the primary basis of Turkish national identity based on the Ottoman heritage. To appeal to Turkish Kurds, he recognized their identity and emphasized common Islamic and historical ties. During this period, Turkey was not systematically stripped of its secular character. Rather, religion was used to legitimize and generate support for Erdoĝan's aspired power grab. In practice, this meant that Islam became more visible in the public sphere (Esen & Yardimci-Geyikçi, 2020; Genc, 2019; Jenkins, 2020; Tol, 2022; Uzgel, 2022).

This domestic Islamist agenda was reflected in Turkey's regional policy, with the result that Erdoĝan advocated regional Muslim unity and forged international alliances with Islamist actors. When protests swept through North African and the Middle Eastern countries in 2011, Erdoĝan supported the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups among the various oppositions seeking to overthrow autocratic regimes in their respective states. This, in turn, strained the relations with non-Islamist actors that Erdoĝan had cultivated in previous years. This is exactly what happened in Syria, where Turkey supported the toppling of Assad and provided arms to the Islamist elements of the opposition. The aim of this regional policy was to strengthen the boundaries he had drawn domestically and to secure his rule. It is also believed by some that Erdoĝan aspired to become the regional leader of this Muslim bloc by being at the forefront of this transformation (Ayata, 2015; B. B. Coşkun, 2015; D'Alema, 2017; Tol, 2022; Uzgel, 2022).

Shift towards nationalism

However, Erdoĝan was unable to secure enough support from pious Turks and Kurds for his main plan, an executive presidency. So he turned from Islamism to Turkish nationalism. For Turkish nationalists, the Kurds are the biggest threat to Turkey's territorial integrity. Therefore, after cultivating an alliance with the Nationalist Action Party, the Kurds (in Turkey and in the region) became the scapegoat on Erdoĝan's way to

the executive presidency. Domestically, this led to the criminalization of the Kurdish political opposition and civil society. Regionally, Erdoĝan's nationalist orientation was strongly reflected in Ankara's approach to Syria. The nationalist turn had fueled the desire to curb Kurdish gains in northern Syria and prevent further flows of Syrian refugees into Turkey (there is only one thing that Turkish nationalists resent almost as much as Kurds, and that is refugees). The AKP therefore began to increasingly portray Kurdish militants in Syria as the greatest existential threat to Turkey's national security and territorial integrity. This scapegoating campaign helped legitimize Ankara's next move, which was to stop the rise of these militants by intervening militarily in Syria in 2016 (a month after the failed coup). Erdoĝan's military response to the rise of these Kurdish militants reinforced his nationalism and provided him with the perfect ammunition to continue rallying the nationalists behind him (Federici, 2015; Kösebalaban, 2020; Tol, 2022; Uzgel, 2022).

But what exactly was the rise of Kurdish militants in Syria that Turkey was so determined to fight? The Syrian Kurds had not made much progress in attaining political or cultural rights as a minority group, but the Syrian conflict proved to be a turning point. The rise of the Syrian Kurds during the war in Syria consists of at least two elements. First, the establishment of their de facto autonomy, which began in July 2012 when the YPG took control of three towns near the Syrian-Turkish border, Afrin, Kobane, and Jazira. In March 2016, the PYD declared a federal system of government in these self-governing cantons. The regions were called Rojava or the 'Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria' (hereafter AANES) and functioned as de facto autonomous territories. Second, in the fight against ISIS, the YPG became the dominant fighting force of the umbrella opposition group the Syrian Democratic Forces (hereafter SDF – the terms SDF and YPG are often used interchangeably), and the main local ally of the US-led global coalition against ISIS. As a leading ally of the West with regional influence and *de facto* autonomous territories in northern Syria, the PYD/YPG became a key actor in the Syrian conflict (Federici, 2015; Gunes & Lowe, 2015; Pusane, 2018; Sarı Ertem, 2018; Savelsberg, 2018; Thornton, 2015; Van Dam, 2017).

It is these gains that Ankara is eager to counter. The more land and power the PYD/YPG seized in northern Syria, the more Ankara came to see the PYD/YPG as an imminent national security threat right on its doorstep (Van Dam, 2017, p. 117). Erdoğan made this perfectly clear when he stated that "it is our most natural right to intervene (in northern Syria) since those terrorist formations would disturb our national peace" (Erdoğan, quoted in Davies, 2012). Following the nationalist direction of TFP, countering the Kurdish advances in northern Syria has become one of Ankara's top priorities in Syria. Especially after the collapse of the PKK peace process in 2015 and the failed coup attempt in 2016, Ankara has devoted more efforts and resources to its counter-terrorism strategy against Kurdish militant groups in Syria (Christofis, 2022; Federici, 2015; Pusane, 2018; Tol, 2022; Van Dam, 2017).

The militarization of Turkish foreign policy and the quest for strategic autonomy

Ankara's security concerns, such as Kurdish separatism in northern Syria, have led to an increasingly securitized approach to foreign policy and to the militarization of TFP. Developments abroad have been increasingly identified in terms of their security implications for Turkey. In practice, this means that Ankara frames foreign policy issues as threats to Turkey's territorial integrity and national security. This securitization trend has been an important instigator of the militarization of TFP. The militarization of TFP entails that Ankara has increasingly favored hard power as a foreign policy tool in combination with coercive diplomacy to achieve its goals abroad. One of the main reasons for Ankara's increasing tendency to flex its military muscle is its perception of immediate national threats, which it responds to with military power.

The militarization of TFP is closely linked to Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy. This quest refers to Ankara's desire to manage its immediate security environment independently. Ankara wants to reduce its dependence on other (mostly NATO) countries and become a global defense and security player and a regional power: "Turkey yearns, more than anything, to be a standalone power" (Aydintasbas, 2021). To this end, Ankara has increasingly embraced a forward defense doctrine, which boils down to the military strategy that threats should be countered outside ones own borders in order to prevent aggression at home. Manifestations of this doctrine in the case of Turkey are cross-border military interventions (e.g. in Syria and Iraq) and the employment of forward bases beyond its own borders (e.g. in Qatar and Somalia). This doctrine is also an instance of the militarization of TFP, showing that the militarization of TFP and Ankara's quest for strategic autonomy are deeply intertwined. They paint a picture of a state that sees threats wherever it looks and seeks to counter them, preferably on its own and not shying away from the use of military force. These trends in TFP also coincide with a transformation of the Turkish defense industry, which I will discuss later in this chapter (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Yaşar, 2021; Yavuz, 2022; Yönten & Denemark, 2023; Yossef, 2019).

An executive presidency and current foreign policy decision-making

Erdoğan's turn to nationalism proved successful on his way to an executive presidency. The constitutional referendum was held in 2017, in the wake of the failed 2016 coup and during the subsequent state of emergency. In the referendum, the AKP's proposed constitutional amendments won a majority of the votes, replacing Turkey's parliamentary system with a presidential one. A year later, in June 2018, Erdoĝan was elected the first president of the Turkish Republic, cementing his long-term goal of one-man rule with virtually unchecked powers. The emergence of an executive presidency in 2017 led to new structures and processes of TFP decision-making, which I will highlight below (Cagaptay, 2019; Esen & Gümüşçü, 2020; Esen & Yardimci-Geyikçi, 2020; Kirişci & Toygür, 2019; Kösebalaban, 2020; Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Neset et al., 2019; Tol, 2022; Uzgel, 2022).

Broadly speaking, the new system of governance has secured President Erdoĝan's power over state institutions, allowed the presidency to intervene deeply in the judiciary and bureaucracy, and brought the military further under control (Adar & Seufert, 2021; Uzgel, 2022). Most information on TFP decision-making is not openly available and remains uncertain. Nevertheless, Neset et al. (2019) have made a first attempt to describe the structures and processes involved in TFP decision-making under the new presidential system. Since 2018, foreign policy decision-making in Turkey has been divided among several entities and both formal and informal advisory structures (see figure 3.1). The primary authority for foreign policy decisions is the president. The president is advised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MFA), the Security and Foreign Policy Committee, the National Intelligence Organization (hereafter MIT), the National Security Council, formally appointed advisors, the military and so-called informal advisors (various connections of the president outside the presidency). To these entities I will turn next.

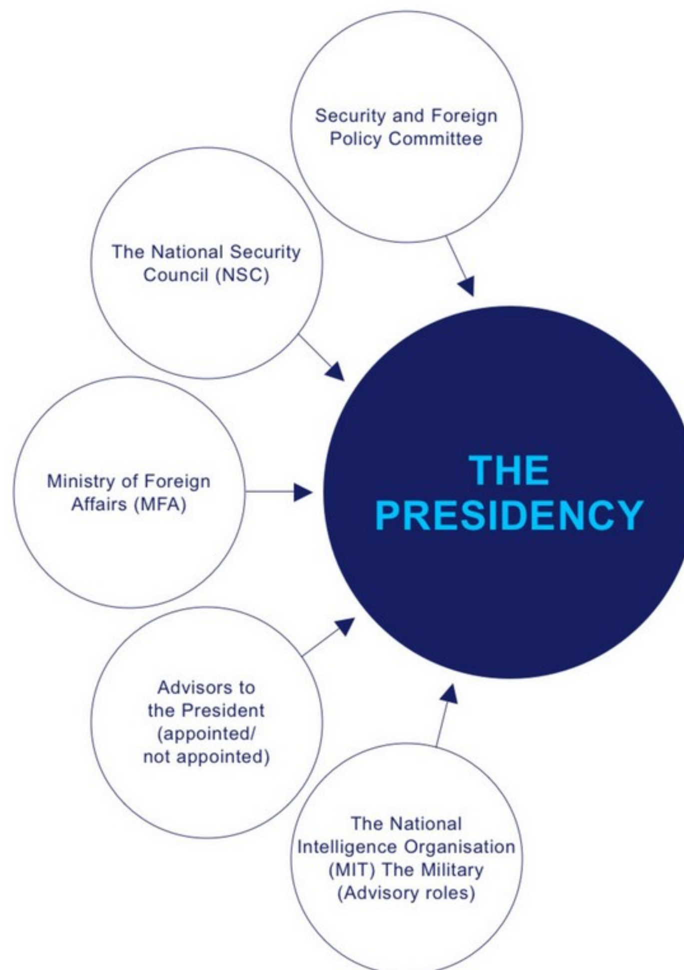

Figure 3.1: The entities and structures involved in TFP decision-making (Neset et al., 2019).

The Security and Foreign Policy Committee (a new entity in TFP structures, chaired by the president) and (in)formal advisors are likely to provide assessments to the presidency, while the MIT, the MFA, and the military provide practical information. Other than than, these entities appear to have zero to extremely limited decision-making power. Based on the advice and information they provide, President Erdoĝan presumably makes policy decisions in a personalized and compartmentalized manner. The type of information provided by the National Security Council is unclear, but its area of interest is national security (ibid.).

Regarding the presidential advisors, Neset et al. (ibid.) note that they are mostly selected based on personal relationships, trust, and loyalty to the president. In addition, the most consulted formal advisors all have a historical relationship with Erdoĝan. Erdoĝan's most important advisor appears to be Ibrahim Kalin, the president's spokesperson and chief advisor from 2014 to 2023, and currently the head of the MIT and deputy chairman of the Security and Foreign Policy Committee. This committee provides Kalin with information, which he then filters and passes on to the president. After receiving the information from the various institutions, President Erdoĝan seems to make the decisions on his own, either with or without the support of his (in)formal advisors (ibid.; Daragahi, 2023; Toksabay, 2023; Uzgel, 2022).

What is striking about TFP under the current presidential system (at least until 2019) is that its structure is primarily determined by presidential decrees rather than by harmonization laws (Neset et al., 2019). Of the 21 presidential decrees issued until 2019, only Presidential Decree No.1 has formulated harmonizing legislation that binds the presidential decrees and referendum amendments to the laws of Turkey (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2018). This lack of harmonization laws means that, in practice, there is no unified legislation clarifying the making of TFP, at least until 2019. In addition, the decrees so far have been formulated in very general terms and have lacked a concrete clarification of the division of powers and responsibilities between different governmental bodies (Neset et al., 2019).

According to Neset et al. (ibid.), these factors related to the presidential decrees have had several consequences on the TFP decision-making process. First, the presidential system has not yet been thoroughly consolidated, and the parliament can easily be bypassed. Second, the uncertainty surrounding TFP decisions and implementation mechanisms has led to a lack of consensus among the various governmental entities on the practical application of these decisions. Bureaucrats are said to be afraid of making mistakes, and hesitation and confusion are common among state institutions and (non-)governmental actors, preventing them from taking initiatives and challenging TFP decisions. Ultimately, these consequences are said to lead to the perpetuation of the concentration of power in the hands of the presidency (Uzgel, 2022).

The evolution of Turkey's drone policy

In the last few decades, Turkish defense policy has undergone quite a transformation. Since 1985, Turkey has been committed to building an indigenous, self-sufficient, modern, national defense industry (Law No. 3238, 1985). The main goal of this policy is to produce all necessary defense instruments domestically and to become a major defense player on the international stage. If it is not possible to produce certain products domestically, they should be purchased from non-Western countries. To this end, Ankara has increased the amount of resources allocated to the defense sector and domestic manufacturers and suppliers receive a significant portion of Turkey's defense budget. A look at some figures illustrates this rise of the Turkish defense industry: Turkey's defense budget increased from approximately $5.5 billion in 2002 to $60 billion in 2020, while the volume of defense and aviation exports increased from $248 million in 2002 to about $3 billion in 2019 (Demi̇r, 2020; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022; Siccardi, 2021). The main institution in Turkey that manages the country's defense sector is the Defense Industry Agency (hereafter SSB), which was placed directly under the presidency after the 2017 referendum. Currently, the SSB and the presidency manage the Turkish defense industry in close cooperation (Demi̇r, 2020). Overall, defense and security has become a top priority for the AKP under Erdoğan and is seen as an indispensable capacity to secure its interests. It is for this reason that so many resources have been devoted to its transformation.

This transformation of the Turkish defense industry has occurred in parallel with the militarization of TFP and Ankara's quest for strategic autonomy. The strengthening of the Turkish industrial-military complex and the increasing domestic production of military instruments can be seen as enabling factors for the militarization of TFP. The growing interplay between TFP and the Turkish defense industry became apparent when the former president of the SSB stated that there is "a clear need to enhance Turkish defense industry, and to lay the ground for a closer relationship between Turkish foreign policy, the defense industry and military needs" (Demir, 2020, p. 33). Together, the militarization of TFP and the transformation of the Turkish defense industry function as a response to the growing national threats Ankara perceives. In terms of strategic autonomy, the improvement of Turkey's domestic military production and the simultaneous procurement of military equipment from non-Western sources are an important aspect of achieving this autonomy. In other words, the expansion of domestically produced military instruments functions as a *source* of autonomy in the implementation of foreign policy (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022; Yavuz, 2022).

Drone Power Turkey

In practice, these foreign and defense policy trends have led to a rapid increase in Turkey's drone expertise and production. Turkey has become one of the world's leading users, exporters and producers of drones. Over the past decade, Turkey has produced armed and ISTAR drones that are close to the quality of those

manufactured by countries such as the US and Israel, and they are in high demand on the international stage. The domestic development of drones got a boost after Turkey ordered unarmed drones to fight the PKK in southeastern Turkey, first from the US in 1996 and later from Israel in 2006. However, Turkey was not satisfied with these for several reasons. First, since the drones were unarmed, Turkey had to send in an F16 when the location of PKK fighters was pinpointed. By the time the fighter jet arrived, the targets were gone. Second, the Israeli drones took five years to be delivered, did not work properly, and were controlled by Israeli operators. Turkey also suspected that the intelligence gathered would be passed on to the Israeli intelligence service. When Ankara tried to acquire armed US drones, the US Congress did not approve the sale to Turkey in 2010 and 2012 (Farooq, 2019; Hofman, 2020).

Faced with these problems, there was only one solution for Turkey: stop relying on NATO partners to protect its interests and instead produce its own uncrewed aerial vehicles (Daily Sabah, 2016). The domestic development of its own armed drone became a top priority for Ankara. Two Turkish defense companies, Baykar Makina and Turkish Aerospace Industries (hereafter TAI), took on the task. TAI was responsible for the development of the ANKA family of drones, while Baykar focused on the Bayraktar series, of which the TB2 has gained worldwide attention. The global attention on the TB2 is attributed to its affordability and lightweight design, coupled with its ability to effectively engage and destroy modern warfare systems with minimal losses. A striking fact about the Bayraktar drone program is that it is headed by Selçuk Bayraktar, a former MIT student and current son-in-law of President Erdoĝan. Since Bayraktar married Erdoĝan's youngest daughter, the Baykar company has become Ankara's preferred drone manufacturer. The TB2 is currently at the heart of Turkey's aerial operations and has made Bayraktar a national hero (Farooq, 2019; Hofman, 2020; Mitzer & Oliemans, 2022a; Witt, 2022).

Broadly speaking, at the time of writing, Turkey has used drones primarily for two different purposes. On the one hand, armed drones play an important role in Turkey's counter-terrorism strategy, in the fight against the PKK both in Turkey itself and in Syria and Iraq. The UAVs proved to be a game changer in Ankara's domestic drone campaign, as their use significantly reduced the PKK's mobility in southeastern Turkey. They hover almost constantly over southeastern Turkey, northern Syria, and northern Iraq, gathering intelligence on the whereabouts of Kurdish militants and striking when necessary. On the other hand, unlike the US and Israeli practice, Turkey sends its drones to warring parties in foreign theaters of conflict to be used against state armies, such as in Nagorno-Karabakh and Libya. In the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan was supported by Turkish drones, after it was able to turn the tile in its favor (Kınık & Çelik, 2021; Mitzer & Oliemans, 2021). In Libya, a shipment of Turkish drones enabled the Government of National Accord to counter General Haftar and regain control of the capital, Tripoli (Jawad, 2020, 2020; Mitzer & Oliemans, 2022b). Turkey's drone policy is characterized by this dual role of drones: as a tool within Turkey's

counter-terrorism strategy and as a tool to influence conflicts abroad (Farooq, 2019; Hofman, 2020; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022).

Altogether, Turkey's increased use and production of uncrewed aerial systems is part of Ankara's efforts to build an indigenous industrial-military complex and contributes to both its strategic autonomy and the militarization of TFP. Several authors argue that Turkey's highly efficient and effective drone arsenal is most likely boosting the assertiveness of its foreign policy. They increasingly perceive Turkey's drone superiority as a crucial part of its foreign policy, leading some to call this 'Bayraktar Diplomacy' (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022; Mitzer & Oliemans, 2022a; Yackley, 2020).

4. Empirical Analysis: Turkish remote practices in Syria

> There has been this constant in Turkish foreign policy, [and that] is to perceive the PKK as a threat and to go after them wherever they go.
>
> Interview (April 2023).

In order to analyze the role of drones in Turkey's foreign policy towards Syria, we need to understand the remote military operations in which they are used. Therefore, in this chapter I examine the remote character of Turkey's military campaigns in northern Syria. I analyze this Turkish way of remote warfare in terms of the tripartite understanding of *strategic practices* as outlined by Stoddard and Toltica (2021). The first section discusses the strategic objectives of Turkey in northern Syria, followed by the second section which portrays the tactics employed by the Turkish government. The third section deals with the benefits gained by Turkey from this specific military activity. Finally, I examine experts' interpretations of the role of drones in Turkey's foreign policy towards Syria and analyze the relationship between the strategic objectives pursued, the remote tactics employed, and the benefits derived in its military operations. This analysis is based on 14 interviews I conducted with experts on Turkey's foreign policy and drone activities and on two written responses in combination with open-source investigations. The open-source research is based on a collection of publicly available sources, namely articles from journalists and analysts, reports written by organizations with access to either northwestern or northeastern Syria and quantitative data from the Rojava Information Center (hereafter RIC). This allows me to piece together data that is already 'out there' with experts' knowledge to create a thorough understanding of Turkey's remote warfare practices. Let me now turn to the first strand of analysis: the strategic objectives of Turkey's remote warfare campaign in northern Syria.

Strategic objectives of Turkey's engagement in Syria

Turkey pursues a complex set of strategic objectives in northern Syria, which have changed over the course of the Syrian conflict, but which also reveal persistent elements. While Ankara's initial objectives were ideologically and politically motivated, its interest has shifted to shaping the security dynamics in northern Syria. Turkey's security concerns in northern Syria are twofold: Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons (hereafter IDPs) in northwestern Syria on the one hand and the perceived threat of the YPG/SDF and the AANES in northeastern Syria on the other.

Safe zone

A recurring element in Turkey's objectives in northern Syria is the establishment of a 30-km 'safe' or 'buffer' zone, although some of the rationales for this zone have changed over time. From the beginning of the conflict and after the Arab revolution, Turkey's involvement in Syrian affairs has been about overthrowing the Assad regime and supporting a takeover by the ideologically like-minded Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. To this end, Ankara pushed for a so-called 'safe-zone' along the entire Turkish-Syrian border, which would serve as a safe haven for anti-Assad opposition groups and as a shelter for IDPs (Adar, 2020).

However, as the conflict evolved, Turkey's motivations for creating such a zone also changed. Starting around 2015, Ankara increasingly perceived northern Syria as a PKK security threat and the 30-km zone was henceforth intended as a buffer against the YPG/PYD. There are several reasons that have paved the way for this shift, including the start of the US-YPG cooperation against ISIS in 2014, the collapse of the PKK peace process in Turkey in 2015, the Russian intervention to protect the Assad regime in 2015, the military coup in Turkey in 2016 and the establishment of the AANES between 2014 and 2016. Altogether, these events led to an increasingly securitized and militarized approach by Turkey towards northern Syria.

Syrian refugees

One consistency in Ankara's plea for the safe zone has been the humanitarian arguments that the state has put forward in favor of the zone. Overall, Turkey has explicitly pursued two main objectives in its Syria policy, namely the return of Syrian refugees to Syria and the prevention of a new influx of refugees into Turkey. In the early years of the conflict, Ankara suggested that a safe zone on the Syrian side of the border would be a solution to the problem of settling IDPs inside Syria (in combination with closing the Syrian border). As the Syrian conflict continued to unfold, Syrian refugees continued to stream into Turkey. This created an additional dilemma for Turkey, to which the safe zone was supposed to be the answer. As Turkey is hosting more Syrian refugees than its institutional capacity allows (there are currently more than 3.3 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, registered by the UN Refugee Agency), the safe zone is presented as a place where they can return to (UNHCR, 2023).

A central component of Turkey's goal to prevent new Syrian refugees from crossing the Syrian-Turkish border is the situation in Idlib, as expressed by one of the participants in this research:

> *We spoke a lot about the situation in Idlib and there we got the idea from Turkish advisors and officials that they are very alert on the situation in Idlib exploding and how that could cause a new influx of refugees into Turkey [...].* (Interview, April 2023).

But what exactly is the deal with Idlib? During the height of repression by the forces of the Government of Syria (hereafter GoS), the Syrian Arab Army (hereafter SAA), Idlib became a place of refuge for those fleeing the SAA (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023). The population of Idlib and its surroundings has more

than doubled since the beginning of the Syrian conflict (Karasapan, 2021), and the number of people in Idlib dependent on UN aid increased by almost 50 percent in 2022 compared to 2021, according to the US Agency for International Development (2022, p. 2). Adding to the fragility of the situation is the fact that Idlib is one of the last rebel strongholds in Syria and is currently under the control of the militant group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (hereafter HTS), which the GoS wants to expel from the area. A clash in Idlib would result in many refugees heading to Turkey. The unstable situation in Idlib is therefore one of Ankara's main concerns in northwestern Syria, as articulated by a research participant as follows:

> *In the Northwest, it's a bit different. There are no Kurds, we're talking […] Idlib. Especially there, I think the security concern is the one that comes from a threat of refugees, of Syrian refugees coming into […] Turkey. Every objective there is making sure that there is no additional inflow of refugees from Idlib, which is why the border has been sealed off to every extent possible. […]. But Turkey is supporting local militias, essentially with the objective of creating a stable situation so that people don't get out.* (Interview, April 2023).

Counter-terrorism

In addition to serving as an area to which Syrian refugees can return to and where the IDPs can be housed, the 30-km safe zone also functions as a buffer against the perceived PKK threat. The Turkish government has increasingly perceived the Kurdish autonomous zone and the YPG/SDF presence in northeastern Syria and in the Shahba region (a canton in northwestern Syria controlled by the YPG/SDF) as a threat to its national security and territorial integrity (Talbot, 2019), as the following research participants express:

> *[Turkey's presence in northern Syria] very much has to do with the Kurdish question and the fact that the Kurdish groups like the YPG and the PYD are seen to be connected to the PKK in Turkish government eyes. And those groups in particular are present in the […] northeastern regions, but also the region towards Iraq in the north. And so […] these groups are perceived to be a great threat to Turkish territorial integrity. And therefore, in the framework of so-called forward defense, that's a doctrine which was agreed upon a long time ago, but it's a name for something that the Turkish government has been doing all along in the region, which is to hunt down Kurdish groups, which are seen, which are perceived to be related to the PKK.* (Interview, June 2023).

> *The military interventions took the issue of meddling in Syria's affairs a step further. And that is much more related to the presence of the Kurdish autonomous zone and a Kurdish military group that is supported by the United States. And therefore, […], the Syrian policy has now been reduced to the presence of a Syrian Kurdish political entity. And that of course always relates to Turkey's own Kurdish problem and the PKK […]. And the fact that the PYD is the offshoot of the PKK in Syria, basically defines the parameters of Turkey's policy vis-a-vis Syria now.* (Interview, May 2023).

The Kurdish entities in Syria are partly perceived as a threat because Turkey is afraid that the Kurdish successes in Syria might lead to an upsurge of PKK terrorism within its own borders, as a research participant explains: "As one need to remember, [...] Turkey rejects any Kurdish entity in Syria and sees that as a threat because [it] potentially [...] brings [...] Kurdish ambitions in Turkey."

It is worth noting that Turkey's security and counter-terrorism objectives do not confine themselves to Syria. Turkey's fight against terrorism stretches to Iraq as well, something to which almost every research participant referred to, and finds its origin in the domestic PKK conflict going back decades:

> *[Y]ou have to look at Turkey's counter-terrorism strategy and how it seems to have evolved over the years. And this is not necessarily Syria specific. I would almost treat the whole terrain there, from Iraq to Syria, as the same in this context. Turkey has been dealing with the threat of terrorism for quite a while now. [...]. And the challenge that Turkey has been facing is that these terrorist elements have always found safe havens in Iraq and in Syria.* (Interview, May 2023).

> *But at the end of the day, Turkey's fight against terrorism [has] been there for decades. So it is not necessarily what you see in Syria. And what you have seen in Syria and Iraq and what we just talked about is not a function of politics in Turkey. It has sort of its own lifeline, if you will, because of the continuing threat that's been there forever.* (Interview, May 2023).

Opposing the PKK threat in northeastern Syria is not only aimed for through the objective of the safe zone. There are several other sub-objectives Ankara is pursuing to weaken the SDF/YPG, namely to create instability and to keep the pressure high, as articulated by a research participant as follows:

> *So the focus is to create instability in that area. So it's really clear for the Turkish government that the governance structure in northeastern Syria is aligned to the PKK. And that by itself is the issue. So the operations [are aimed at] creating instability, to keep this area under threat. So whether it's a drone operation or a missile operation or like different kinds of even smaller operations, [it] is just to create instability [...].* (Interview, April 2023).

Taken together, Turkey has several strategic objectives that differ for northwestern Syria and for northeastern Syria and the Shahba region. In northwestern Syria, Turkey seeks to control refugee flows into Turkey and return Syrian refugees to Syria. Turkey's military activities in northeastern Syria are aimed at countering the Kurdish entities present there. A recurring aspiration for both objectives has been the attempt to create a 30-km 'safe' or 'buffer' zone along the Turkish-Syrian border. Turkey's engagement in northern Syria has become increasingly militarized and securitized, reflecting patterns of its broader foreign policy trends. How this militarization and securitzation manifests itself in practice in Syria will be discussed in the following section, focusing on the tactics Turkey has employed in northern Syria and emphasizing its use of drones.

Remote tactical practices in the military activities of Turkey in Syria

Turkey's involvement in northern Syria can be characterized by two key tactics, namely its cross-border military operations into Syria and its campaign of targeted killings and leadership decapitation in northeastern Syria and in the Shahba region. These elements correspond to roughly two distinct phases of Turkey's involvement in Syria. The first phase of its involvement in Syria is characterized by the occurrence of several cross-border military operations, and the second by a targeted killing campaign.

Cross-border military operations

The first phase of Turkey's military engagement in northern Syria consists of four cross-border military operations, namely Operation Euphrates Shield (2016), Operation Olive Branch (2018), Operation Peace Spring (2019) and Operation Spring Shield (2020). In one way or the other, the first three operations aimed to weaken the military and/or political Kurdish entities in the areas they invaded (among other objectives). The last operation was not aimed against these Kurdish entities but against a SAA offensive. All operations tried to prevent a refugee flow from Syria into Turkey. Ultimately, the operations brought the respective areas under Turkish control through the presence of the TAF and/or elements of Turkey's proxy forces. Currently, Turkey is present in these areas in a military and/or a political capacity. Figure 4.1 shows the different areas of influence in Syria, including the territories occupied by Turkey in northern Syria.

The first three cross-border military operations all involved a variety of remote tactics. Several research participants indicated that different air tactics, including drones, were used in the early stages of the operations to clear the ground, after which the TAF and its proxy force, the Syrian National Army (hereafter SNA), were send in.[2] However, it can only be said with certainty that Turkey deployed drones during the last two operations (Olive Branch and Peace Spring), which is also underlined by analyst Gurcan. According to Gurcan (2019, p. 14), new military technologies like the TB2 tactical armed drones were game changers in Olive Branch, whereas it is not sure if and how extensively they were used in Euphrates Shield. Whether Turkey used drones during Euphrates Shield has never been independently verified and it is unclear what role, if any, they played.

2 To clarify, the Syrian National Army (SNA) is a rebel group in northern Syria that acts as a proxy force for Turkey, while the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) is the army of the Syrian government.

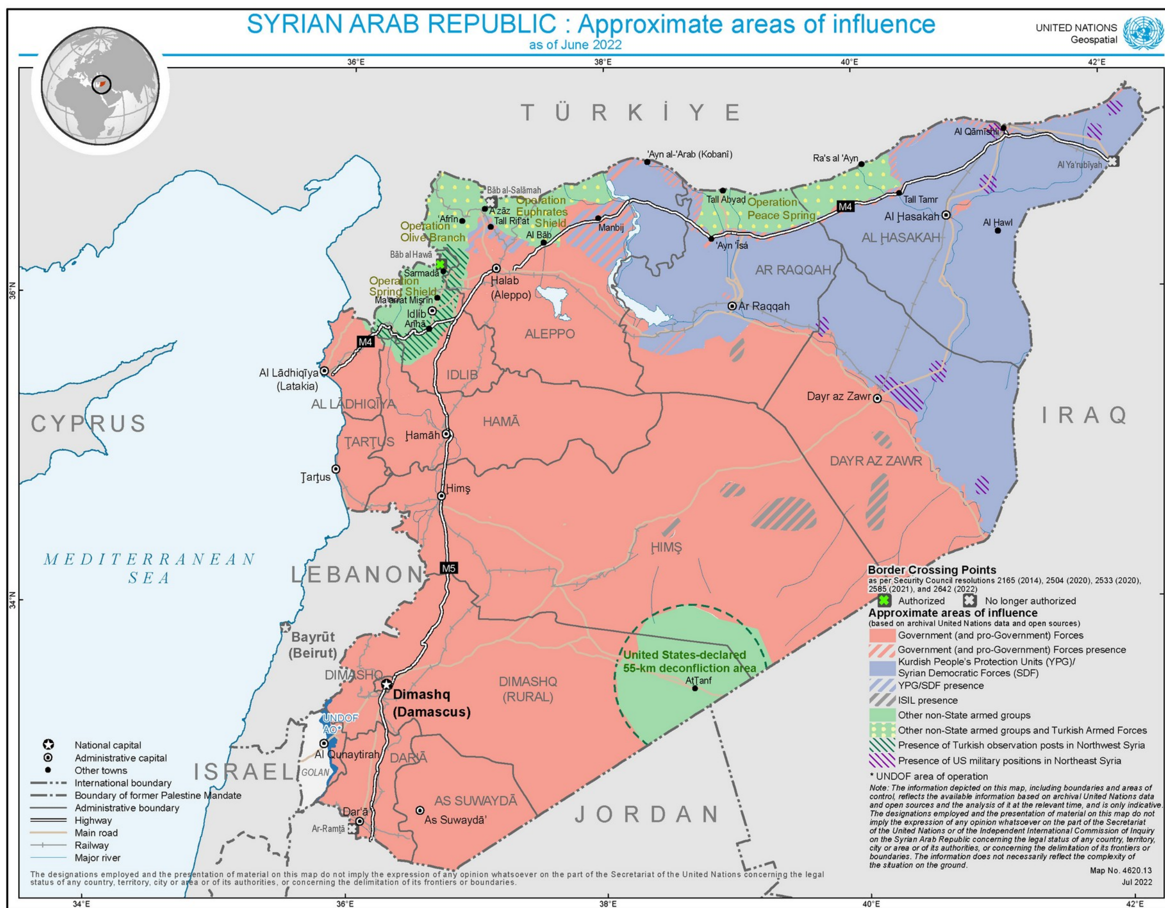

Figure 4.1 Areas of influence in Syria, June 2022 (UN Geospatial, 2022).

The last operation, Spring Shield, was of a different nature than the first three. This operation targeted the advance of the SAA forces towards Idlib and was triggered by an airstrike by either Russia or Syria on a Turkish military position that killed 33 Turkish soldiers (Crino & Dreby, 2020; Van Veen, 2021). Fearing an escalation of the situation in Idlib and the spillover of Syrian refugees into Turkey, the TAF launched a show of air, artillery and ground power that "decimated the Assad regime's military capabilities in Idlib" (interview, May 2023). Turkey's Anka-S (its combat debut) and TB2 drones carried out hundreds of strikes against SAA forces, something it had previously done only in counter-terrorism operations. During Spring Shield, drones were according to one research participant used for target acquisition, as a close air support function for auxiliaries on the ground, for defensive strikes and for the suppression of air defense (interview, May 2023). Operation Spring Shield was the first time "where [an invasion] was really heavy drone warfare" (interview, June 2023), after which Turkey's drone capabilities were thrust into the international spotlight. Analysts mark the event as an

> *escalation in the conflict in terms of drone employment. Until Spring Shield, Turkey had refrained from using its drones offensively against the Syrians. In the operation, Turkey claimed its drone strikes and artillery fires had knocked out over one hundred armored vehicles, dozens of artillery*

systems and killed hundreds of Syrian personnel. While those numbers cannot be verified, the operation was an unquestioned success in that it stopped the Syrian advance and enabled Turkey to stabilize the conditions on the battlefield.” (Crino & Dreby, 2020).

Currently, Turkey is present in Idlib only in a military capacity (to prevent more regime offensives) whereas HTS handles the governance, according to a research participant (interview, April 2023). In the other areas (Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Peace Spring), “Turkey takes a much more hands-on approach to administration. […]. Turkey has stepped in sort of as the central authority through various military and civilian proxy institutions” (interview, April 2023).

However, Turkey’s ability to conduct a cross-border military operation is constrained by so-called geopolitical blockers, namely the US and Russia (Çevik, 2022, p. 5). Both the US and Russia are military present in northeastern Syria and Ankara therefore needs their permission to launch an invasion. For example, when Ankara wanted to launch Operation Euphrates Shield in al-Bab and Operation Olive Branch in Afrin, it had to engage in “top-level diplomatic talks with Moscow” (Kasapoğlu, 2018, p. 4). Later on, when President Trump ordered the withdrawal of US troops from northern Syria in 2019, this was perceived as a green light for such an invasion, and Turkey subsequently launched Operation Peace Spring (The Economist, 2019). In the absence of such a green light, Ankara has had to resort to other tactics and this is when we begin to see the transition to the second phase of Turkey’s military activities in northern Syria.

Targeted killing campaign

After Operation Peace Spring, Turkey’s desire for a new ground invasion was not granted by the US and Russia, and that’s when we see Turkey begins to carry out targeted drone strikes against Kurdish military figures in northeastern Syria, starting roughly in 2020. According to the RIC, this campaign of drone strikes primarily targets “military and civilian sites and personnel within the areas governed by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria” (2023, p. 4). The attacks are believed to be carried out by the MIT, the Turkish intelligence agency, which is said to have its own drone fleet independent of the TAF. This tactic is believed to be used to weaken both the military SDF and the political AANES and to decimate their operational capabilities. There are several trends and patterns visible in this drone campaign.

Drone strikes: where, what, and who?

Geographically speaking, Turkish drone strikes have primarily occurred near the Turkish-Syrian border. Research participants who track the security situation in northern Syria noticed a pattern in that most of the fixed-wing drone strikes (TB2, Anka-S, Akinci) occur within a 30-km range of the border, but there are outliers that strike further. Experts believe that drone strikes are clustered, meaning that there are several in a short period of time and then nothing for a while. Loitering munition deployments tend to occur near

the front lines, where they target regular soldiers (interview, April 2023). Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of drone strikes in northeastern Syria in 2022, as documented by the RIC.

Figure 4.2: Geographical distribution of Turkish drone strikes in northeastern Syria in 2022. Source: (Rojava Information Center, 2023).

On the matter of the type of targets, experts note that it is primarily individuals who are being targeted, sometimes while traveling in a vehicle or while in a fixed residence. During a period of escalation in the fall of 2022, it was the first time that energy, electricity, and oil infrastructures were struck by drones and airstrikes in a coordinated manner. However, a research participant noted that outside "those periods of heightened conflict, where they go full on and they launch everything they can, the drones are really, it seems, specifically targeting individuals rather than infrastructure" (interview, April 2023).

Regarding the type of individuals targeted, experts monitoring the situation on the ground in northeastern Syria explained they have observed an expansion of the target list. Over the years, the type of individuals targeted would have expanded from high-value to medium-value targets and from military figures to political, non-military figures. Allegedly, the targeting campaign started with striking non-Syrian PKK leadership. This expanded to Syrian ex-PKK and PKK leadership. It then expanded to individuals affiliated to the PKK and now also includes Syrian civilian non-PKK targets (interview, April 2023). However, it is important to note that nothing is known for certain about the MIT's targeting cycle in northeastern Syria. Therefore, the above statements are all assumptions based on observations (interview, May 2023).

Intelligence

In order to carry out drone strikes as accurately as Turkey has been doing, it is believed that it collects various types of intelligence. First of all, the MIT is believed to use its drones for ISTAR purposes, monitoring areas allegedly sometimes for 24 hours. Turkey's drone surveillance capability allows it to monitor the

actions of targets and to monitor areas where an insurgency is happening, as happened in Afrin after Operation Olive Branch (interview, April 2023). Ultimately, Turkey's drone campaign in northeastern Syria is believed to be so successful because its drones can simultaneously provide aerial surveillance and strike capability, or, as one participant aptly out it, "the drone marries the sensor and the shooter together" (interview, May 2023). Drones therefore play an important role in Turkey's counter-terrorism strategy, as one research participant put it, "[W]ith its drone capacity increasing, that has exponentially increased Turkey's intelligence gathering and strike capability, Turkey's been able to successfully implement this [counter-terrorism] policy" (interview, May 2023).

Secondly, this is complemented by an increase in Turkey's human intelligence capacity (interview, May 2023). Experts do not know for sure to what extent Turkey is using human intelligence in northern Syria, but most believe that "they have very good intelligence on the ground, because their targeting is quite accurate" (interview, April 2023). This on-the-ground intelligence most likely takes the form of informants who place GPS trackers on vehicles and inform the MIT about "who is who and who can be targeted" (interview, April 2023). Ultimately, as one expert put it, this has led to the "MIT [having] a very good understanding of everything that happens in northeast Syria. The Turks know what's happening there, and so they have very good fidelity on targets" (interview, May 2023).

Periodic trends

Experts have observed an increase in Turkey's 'precise' drone strikes in northeastern Syria since 2021. One expert emphasizes that "[t]here's a few [drone strikes] in 2020, there's a few in early 21, but summer 2021 you really see a dramatic increase of strikes, it's been going on ever since. [...]. To be honest, drones were only seriously used since summer 21" (interview, April 2023). An investigation by the RIC documenting Turkey's drone strikes in northeastern Syria in 2022 found a 46% increase in drone strikes from 2021 to 2022 (Rojava Information Center, 2023, p. 4). The research participants have several ideas as to why Turkey has increased its drone strikes since 2021, such as the maturation of technology and geopolitical reasons, but the actual reason is unclear.

Experts tracking the security situation in northeastern Syria have observed a decrease in drone strikes since the beginning of 2023. While drone strikes took place every month in 2022, these experts counted two strikes in February 2023, zero in March and two in April. In 2022, there were 39 strikes recorded by May, while in 2023 there were 16 strikes in the same period (interview, May 2023). One expert believes this may have something to do with the SDF's increasing use of a network of underground tunnels, which means the SDF doesn't has to move as much on the surface any more. The expert wondered if "their drone strikes have decreased because they have less targets because they are hiding more."

Additionally, several experts believe that the decrease could be due to the earthquakes of February 2023, as Ankara was busy responding to the earthquakes. However, what struck many experts was the fact that there were at least two drone strikes immediately after the earthquake, even after the PKK had declared a ceasefire due to the earthquakes. This led some to believe that there are two different agendas at play, one being the agenda of the president and of the Ministry of Defense and Foreign Affairs, who decide to escalate when it is strategic to do so. The other agenda would be that of the MIT, which seems to be "working off a [target] list that's quite separate from the regular escalation of violence" (interview, April 2023). The drone strikes didn't seem to respect the president's agenda. However, it is not clear what the real reason for the drop in strikes is and whether there are in fact two different agendas at play.

Other trends: retaliation, ISIS, and civilian harm

Several participants observed a retaliatory dynamic between the SDF and the TAF. Allegedly, the SDF retaliates after Turkish drone strikes with cross-border attacks against the TAF on Turkish territory, mostly using anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) against TAF vehicles or positions. In response, the TAF sometimes "decide[s] to shell, to use artillery shelling mortar attacks against either the location from where the attack was directed or [other SDF targets]" (interview, April 2023). This follows a pattern of a UAV attack against a Kurdish political or military figure, followed a few days later by an SDF ATGM attack against a Turkish asset and then a Turkish retaliatory cross-border attack. This pattern of retaliatory attacks usually occurs for a few rounds and then ceases.

Some research participants indicated that they believe Turkey has deliberately targeted SDF members fighting ISIS and military positions near ISIS to keep the pressure on the SDF high. Targeting individuals who are important to the SDF's fight against ISIS would "weaken the SDF's efforts to get to ISIS and makes the SDF more stretched, like thin on the ground, having to focus both on the ISIS threat and the threat of invasion from Turkey itself" (interview, May 2023). And Turkey benefits when the SDF is weakened. In addition, Turkey is suspected of targeting security checkpoints of Al-Hol camp, a camp where ISIS' families are held and which is controlled by the SDF, to further overstretch the SDF. Experts believe that Turkey is "really using drone strikes to pressure the SDF from many directions" (interview, May 2023).

On the issue of civilian harm resulting from drone strikes, the research participants disagreed on how Turkey deals with this. On the one hand, some experts believe that Turkey has no regard for civilian harm at all and may even deliberately target individuals. For example, there have been incidents in which Turkey has targeted public places such as schools, markets and hospitals (Zaman, 2023b). On the other hand, several research participants felt that Turkey is good at keeping its strikes surgical and tries to limit the number of civilian casualties, possibly for reasons related to its (international) reputation and the repercussions of committing a massacre. Two participants stated that Turkey might be motivated to keep

civilian casualties low in northern Syria because of the geographical proximity and the family, historical, and cultural ties between the civilians there and in southeastern Turkey. Unfortunately, due to the conflicting statements of experts and the lack of other data on this issue, I am not able to make an assessment here, as this would require me to speculate.

In this section, I have outlined and analyzed the remote tactics used by Turkey in northeastern Syria. Overall, the tactics employed involve a combination of cross-border military operations, including ground troops, drone strikes and the use of proxy forces, and a campaign of precision drone strikes in northeastern Syria, using drones for both surveillance and strike purposes, supplemented by human intelligence. In the following section, I will analyze the various benefits Turkey derives from the use of these remote tactics considering its strategic objectives.

The benefits of Turkey's remote practices in northern Syria

The use of remote tactics, as discussed in the previous section (cross-border military operations, proxy forces, and precision drone strikes), provides Ankara benefits in terms of achieving its strategic objectives. Launching ground incursions into northern Syria offers Ankara the most advantages, for two reasons. On the one hand, the military interventions have allowed Ankara to create several safe zones in northern Syria, providing a place for Syrian IDPs and refugees and acting as a buffer against the SDF/YPG and PYD/AANES. On the other hand, Turkey has taken some Syrian territory from the autonomous administration and handles or oversees the governance in these areas, thereby increasing its control. Therefore, as expressed by an expert, "[these] direct Turkish interventions [...] help [Turkey] achieve the two goals I mentioned previously, preventing in a new influx of refugees into Turkey and walking back the successes of the autonomous administration" (interview, April 2023).

The extensive use of proxy forces in the Syrian areas Turkey controls is an additional benefit of its successful cross-border military operations since they offset any risk to Turkey's own forces. The TAF is present in the different zones under Turkish control in Syria, but the most work (military and governance tasks) is carried out by the SNA. Turkey is supporting local militias who are part of the SNA "essentially with the objective of creating a stable situation so that [Syrian refugees and IDPs] don't get out" (interview, May 2023). Thus, the use of proxies in areas under its control helps Turkey achieve its strategic objective while having the advantage of avoiding the risk of high casualties among its own troops, which would in turn have negative domestic consequences.

Drones as an alternative to ground operations

If Turkey is denied a full-scale invasion by the US and Russia, drones offer Turkey a way out to continue achieving its strategic objectives. As mentioned in the previous section, the US and Russia have a military

presence in Syria and they also control parts of the Syrian airspace. Because of their control over Syrian airspace, Ankara needs their support if it wants to enter the Syrian airspace with fighter jets. Since fighter jets require such permission, they enter Syrian airspace only during authorized cross-border military operations. Regarding drones, one research participant points out that

> *Turkish drones can operate in northern Syria without a green light from Russia or the United States of America. This is one of the political motivations to prefer drones [over] fighter jets as using fighter jets would come in with some political costs or political disadvantages.* (Interview, May 2023).

A research participant with expertise in the technical side of Turkish drones explained a characteristic of Turkish drones, specifically the Akinci, that allows them to conduct strikes without entering Syria:

> *[T]echnically, you don't have to cross into the airspace of Syria to launch drone strikes, [...]. There's a way you can use the munition to actually lob them across the border, so launch them across the border and for them to go to their target.* (Interview, April 2023).

But there is more to the story. Turkish drones do not just stay on the Turkish side of the border: one research participant on the ground noted that he/she sometimes sees or hears the drones overhead for up to 24 hours in northeastern Syria and in the Shahba region. There have also been numerous claims by journalists and civilians of sightings of Turkish drones over northern Syria. Furthermore, there have been strikes deep inside Syria, at one point 70-km from the border. This distance can't be covered by launching the missile from Turkish territory. Therefore, the technical answer is not enough to explain why Turkish drones are present in Syrian airspace.

One possible explanation for why "the [Turkish] drones can enter Syrian airspace without any obstacle" (interview, May 2023), is that the US appears to have tacitly accepted Turkish drone strikes in northeastern Syria (which is also a part of the Syrian airspace that the US controls). Namely, the US does not publicly condemn Turkey for the strikes. One research participant frames this as follows:

> *[T]he US is tacitly accepting that PKK fighters have no place in Syria and that it's actually working in their interest to take out the hardliners from the movement in Syria. [...] [T]he US thinks that, cynically maybe, it's easier if the hard learners are getting killed by Turkish drone strikes, so they'll only be dealing with the more moderate leadership*. (Interview, April 2023).

From time to time, there is some US pushback when, for example, Turkey attacks SDF commanders close to the coalition. But overall, the US refrains from publicly condemning Turkey for its drone strikes in northeastern Syria. It appears that drones have become an internationally accepted option for Turkey (interview, May 2023). After testing the waters and "seeing how much they can push both the US and to some lesser extent the Russians about entering the airspace" (interview, April 2023), Turkey has learned

that "it can fly its drones in the Syrian airspace whenever it wants" (interview, May 2023). Drones have achieved some kind of international legitimacy and Turkey therefore faces relatively little consequences for carrying out its drone campaign in northeastern Syria. This may be one of the reasons why Turkish drones are allowed to enter the Syrian airspace in northeastern Syria.

Altogether, the fact that the use of drones allows Turkey to pursue its strategic objectives while falling short of a ground invasion, is one of its greatest advantages and one of the main reasons why Turkey is primarily engaged in drone warfare in northeastern Syria. One research participant captured the essence of this practice as follows:

> *[I]n the context of being somehow denied a green light for this invasion by America and by Russia, the kind of guarantor powers in the various regions of north and east Syria, Turkey has kind of used its drone war to achieve strategic objectives, by method which, while falling short of an all out ground invasion, still is heavily damaging*. (Interview, May 2023).

Beneficial characteristics of drones

In addition to being an important enabler for Turkey to achieve its objectives in northern Syria, drones have provided Ankara with several other general benefits. First, the domestic creation of its own drone arsenal has provided Turkey with an autonomous capacity to pursue its objectives in northern Syria without being dependent on external actors. For example, the fact that its intelligence is collected by domestically produced weapons means that there is no 'buzz on the line' between intelligence collection and the MIT office where that data is analyzed, which was the case when Turkey used such assets from other nations and allies. Ultimately, as one expert put it,

> *the enablers that Turkey has been increasingly using in this regard, mapping intelligence and the use of drones, has been something that has enormously grown in terms of a capacity that Turkey's been tapping into. And it has shifted from enablers in the hands of our allies or enablers that Turkey was buying from abroad, like the Israeli drones, to indigenous capacity. And we've seen a significant increase obviously in the use of this capacity after Turkey was able to field its own assets. […]. [Its increasing drone capacity] gave Turkey autonomous capability to conduct these operations.* (Interview, May 2023).

Second, Turkey's drone strikes are praised for being very precise, accurate, and surgical. The precision of the strikes means that the TAF and the MIT are able to hit only the target (with minimal collateral damage), rather than indiscriminate attacks. This advantage is not only due to the technical specifics of the Turkish drones. The accuracy of the strikes is also highly dependent on the drone operator. Several research participants believe that Turkey's strikes are highly accurate because its operators are experienced in operating Turkish drones (interviews, April and May 2023). Ultimately, the accuracy of its drone strikes is

beneficial to Turkey in achieving its strategic objective of weakening the SDF/YPG without damaging its (international) reputation.

Third, the use of uncrewed aerial vehicles eliminates any risk to Turkey's own soldiers in its drone campaign, and it reduces the risk to its own forces during the offensives. Low or zero casualties, in turn, increase the domestic legitimacy of Turkey's military activities in Syria and lead to less public backlash. Engaging in drone strikes is therefore a "low risk, high reward tactic for them" (interview, June 2023).

Fourth, the use of drones in northern Syria is perceived by experts and analysts as a cost-effective and efficient way to achieve its goals. As one research participant (interview, April 2023) explains: "[Drones] allow them to strike high-value targets, [...], in a very efficient and cost-effective way." Drones enable to weaken the SDF and the AANES by, for example, eliminating military and political figures in northern Syria and hindering their movement. Furthermore, Turkey's drone campaign in northeastern Syria is allegedly way cheaper than carrying out cross-border military operations:

> *The TB2 [...] is very cheap. It's mostly made of commercial parts, so they can put a lot of them up. And they've married them to their munitions. The little rockets on munitions, again, are cheap, largely made of commercial parts, and can get the job done effectively. And so they can put pressure on [...] YPG/SDF/PKK leadership in Syria through drone strikes.* (Interview, June 2023).

Geographical benefits

The use of drones in northeastern Syria is also beneficial to Turkey for two geographical reasons. First, the terrain of northeastern Syria is flat because it consists mostly out of plains. This means that there is little geographical protection for the SDF/YPG and the PYD/AANES (interview, April 2023) and drones can easily monitor them for long periods of time, which further complicates their movement. A second geographical advantage is that the area of focus for Turkey is

> *clustered along their border within 30-km. [...]. None of the distances we're talking about here are very far. And so the inherent challenges of the TB2, it's slow, it can't carry very much, [...], are offset by the fact that they can just put them so close to the border. And they do so they can maximize their loiter time over the country.* (Interview, May 2023).

Taken together, the flatness of Syria's terrain and the geographic proximity of the areas of concern mean that the geography of Syria is very favorable to Turkey, which it can exploit through precision drone strikes.

Psychological effects

Another benefit of Turkey's drone campaign is that it takes a heavy psychological toll on both SDF/YPG members and the local population. With regard to the local population, the drone strikes increase and fear

among civilians and "destabilize civilian life" (interview, May 2023). For this, Turkey does not need to bomb northeastern Syria every day: "if people fear that there could be a strike, that fear does a lot of work in terms of discouraging people from wanting to live there, from wanting to participate in the autonomous administration or the SDF" (interview, May 2023). Several experts mentioned that the drone campaign and its psychological and economic effects, in combination with other factors, have led to outward migration from northeastern Syria. In this way, the psychological impact of Turkey's drone campaign on the local population in northern Syria contributes to its goal of weakening the SDF/YPG.

Next, the SDF/YPG has also suffered psychological hardships as a result of the Turkish drone campaign. For one research participant, this was evident when (s)he noticed that "it's much harder to meet the [SDF/YPG] leadership now than it was two years ago. [...]. [T]hey put in place all sorts of operational security measures to reduce the chances of being a target" (interview, April 2023). One source of fear is that "the [SDF/YPG] feel that they are always watched and they have to adjust their movements, [...] they have to adjust their military way of conduct against the threat [that] there might be a drone above somewhere" (interview, May 2023), and that anyone could be targeted at any time. Another factor that puts a psychological strain on SDF/YPG and AANES members is the fear of espionage and informants. This has a major impact on the political and military institutions in northeastern Syria:

> *[I]f you're a politician or a military leader who's worried about which people around you might be informants, which people around you might be trying to pass on information that could have you harmed or killed, you're going to be less trusting. You're going to be less willing to bring in new people, it's more difficult to get the best range of perspectives and form the most inclusive political processes, which I think again, that contributes to lower quality governance, which is something that Turkey wants.* (Interview, May 2023).

The fear of espionage is a burden not only for the SDF/YPG leadership, but also for the lower ranks, as it creates mistrust between comrades (interview, April 2023). Taken together, the drone strikes and constant surveillance create a high level of psychological pressure on both the leadership and the lower ranks of the SDF/YPG and AANES/PYD, supporting Turkey's objective of weakening these institutions.

Messaging and propaganda

In all operations and campaigns, the Turkish government has enjoyed the benefits of using drone strikes for propaganda and messaging purposes, both domestically and internationally. On the domestic front, experts and analysts believe to see an increase in drone strikes or an increase in positive information released by the Turkish government about drone strikes against Kurdish groups in Syria around election time or when there is an electoral problem. Experts and analysts expect Ankara to do this to "show that [it] is actually hunting PKK terrorists, and then that might help your voter turnout or your opinion polls" (interview, April

2023). Turkey's fight against terror is namely "something where it transcends political party lines" (interview, May 2023). Therefore, drone strikes are believed to be instrumentalized by Erdoĝan domestically in order to "appeal to a broad base that goes beyond his own party base" (interview, May 2023), and to "increase Erdoĝan's popularity around key days" (interview, May 2023).

On the international stage, experts believe that Turkey is using its drone program in Syria to send a message both to potential buyers of its drones and to international actors operating in northern Syria. On the first point, analysts and experts believe that Syria has provided Turkey with an excellent theater in which to test and showcase its drone arsenal for better exports:

> *Northeast Syria is actually a really good test ground for the Turkish weapons industry. And it's a great way to showcase to buying countries, for exports, that it's a conflict-tested weapon. [...]. I think Turkey is so good at selling its Bayraktar and other weapon platforms because it's really combat proven.* (Interview, April 2023).

This also relates to the second point, to international actors. According to one expert, "Syria, Russia, [and] the US [are] taking Turkey much more seriously now that it has a tested capability and they know that they're flying a fleet of very capable drones. [...]. In terms of deterrence and credibility as a military actor, that's benefiting Turkey" (Interview, April 2023). This was evident during Operation Spring Shield, in which Turkey targeted a state army and subsequently uploaded drone footage of the destruction of enemy targets and an official press release about the regime's destroyed equipment. This practice is in stark contrast to that of the US. If we look at US drone practices, we see that the US classifies almost everything about its drone strikes, and that they do not rip their drone feeds because they want to hide the quality of the sensor. This means that whenever you see a US drone image online, the images are not that sharp (Interview, May 2023). According to one research participant, this is an area where Turkey is

> *a pioneer. [...]. They're not shy about sharing. What the Turks have done, is that they've realized you can rip two-minute clips from these high definition drone feeds and put them op on social media through cutouts. That's entirely against US practice. [...]. The Turks realized that this has incredible propaganda value.* (Interview, May 2023).

In contrast, Turkey's approach to drone strikes against suspected PKK members in northeastern Syria and the targeting cycle here is very different. That is handled much more clandestinely and secretively "in terms of how they do it, in terms of what they do" (Interview, May 2023).

In addition, most research participant believe that Turkey sends messages to the international community through specific strikes. An example of this was the strike against Mazlum Kobane, commander-in-chief of the SDF and a US-ally, in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq, while he was traveling in a convoy with an American delegation (Zaman, 2023a). There were no casualties, and details of the strike lead many analysts and

experts to believe that it was intended as a message to the US that it was unhappy with its relationship with Kurdish militants (interview, April 2023). Experts believe that Turkey had the capability to actually strike the vehicle (given the precise nature of its drones), but chose not to. Instead, it likely wanted to send a message. Messaging through such strikes can serve multiple purposes, including warning, threatening, escalating, and deterring. Drones provide the Turkish government with an excellent medium to convey such messages.

Experts on the influence of Turkey's drone capabilities on its foreign policy

The final part of the empirical research conducted concerns the third sub-question, namely how the research participants interpret the influence of Turkey's increased drone capabilities on its foreign policy towards northern Syria. In this section, I will highlight their differing views on this proposition and draw some tentative conclusions. Given the subjectivity and positionality of both the research participants and the researcher, and the lack of a complementary quantitative method in this research, it is important to emphasize that none of these conclusions are definitive.

As a general observation, experts had very different views on whether Turkey's increased drone capabilities have had any impact on its foreign policy towards northern Syria. Of 14 interviews and 2 written responses, 6 were positive, 5 were negative, and 5 were somewhere in between. Participants who indicated that Turkey's drone capabilities have an impact on its foreign policy were asked how they perceived this impact, and most experts pointed to various aspects of TFP that the capabilities are believed to affect. Those who believed that Turkish drone capabilities do not affect TFP generally had two explanations for this. Some think that it is policy that requires and gives rise to certain weapons, rather than weapons that shape policy. Others noted that there are many factors that shape Turkey's foreign policy and that it is therefore too difficult to say what role, if any, its drone capabilities play. Those who fell somewhere in between either did not know or found the question too difficult to answer definitively.

There were several aspects recurring in multiple interviews, whether the participants answered yes, no or something in between. First, 9 out 16 research participants referred to the idea that its increased drone capabilities have given Turkey an increased capacity to pursue its objectives and that they have a broader range of actions to undertake:

> *I think drones allow them to pursue their policy in a relatively low-risk way and allow them to do things that they probably wouldn't be able to do before. I don't know if they'd be carrying out targeted air strikes with conventional manned aircraft.* (Interview, April 2023).

I think the military capacity have ultimately made them… They have just a broader range of actions that they can undertake, they don't rely anymore on small aerial range. They can get far inside Iraqi territory, and in the of Syria the same, and put pressure on the groups in a way that they couldn't before. (Interview, April 2023).

And so you're able to do things, foreign policy wise, […], you can't do with say an F16. […]. That's far more visible, it's more expensive and arguably the effects would be less than however drones they put out there. This was the same thing that happened with the Russians. The Russians killed 36 Turks because of Ankara's escalatory things. But everybody pretended it never happened. And when you have something like a drone, you can then sort of pull back, but you have an uncrewed system that allows you to sort of control escalation. So yeah, it's definitely changed their foreign policy. (Interview, May 2023).

One participant mentioned it is not only foreign policy the drone capabilities have influenced, but also Turkish economic policy:

[A]nd it's changed their economic policy. What Baykar has done, is they've upended the market. I think they're the most popular drone exporter in the world. They make a perfect system for export. It's cheap, very cheap. The munitions are very cheap. They can sell them together. So you're not like buying one platform to carry another. […] It's a perfect export. (Interview, May 2023).

The second aspect mentioned frequently, by 8 of the 16 research participants, is that the increased drone capabilities may have made Turkey and the TAF more confident or adventurous in their military endeavors and that it has increased their willingness to act:

I think it's a way for them to feel more confident about supporting a new offensive. I think it's easier for the public to accept a new offensive, knowing that those extremely powerful drones […] will be a magic trick that will allow them to have zero casualties during a new offensive. […]. And so I think increased capacity gives them more confidence for renewed offensive. But at the same time, it allows them to conduct strikes wherever they want in northeast Syria without having to actually step in. And so it's a way […] which allows you to conduct remote warfare by not endangering the lives of your soldiers. And so, I think the fact they have this new tested capacity has helped them to become much bolder and more adventurous in their military operations in northeast Syria. (Expert interview, April 2023).

I think it made Turkey much more confident in its policy in northern Syria for sure. And the drones have kind of allowed it to carry out military objectives with less risk to yourself. So that's been a big game changer. I mean they lower the threshold for military invasion, and make it a lot easier to do

things. You don't have to like fly manned aircraft to do airstrikes if we could do precision air strikes. It makes it a lot easier to do a ground operation. (Interview, May 2023).

I think they are more confident that they can achieve their goals with less risk and with better precision. [...]. *If I were planning in Ankara, I would think differently in the absence of drone assets. I would not take as much risk as I may be willing to take under these circumstances. So yes, I think probably the answer to that question is: as Turkeys indigenous capacity and intelligence gathering capacity has increased, so has its readiness to take action. And I think we see this in the form of these surgical operations that Turkey is undertaking*. (Interview, May 2023).

However, most participants emphasized that they do not know this for sure and that they expect Turkey's foreign policy towards Syria to be influenced by many different (domestic, regional and international) factors and events (e.g., the collapse of the PKK peace process in 2015, the Russian intervention, the coup attempt in 2016). Such processes and factors are likely to feed into each other, making it an intertwined process. Therefore, many did not know this for sure.

One participant highlighted Operation Spring Shield as an important moment in Turkey's drone campaign in northern Syria that influenced its foreign policy towards Syria. Because of its drone dominance during this operation, Turkey gained the upper hand and was able to enforce a ceasefire on Idlib:

Turkish drone capabilities helped, especially during operation Spring Shield in 2020. When Turkish fighter jets could not enter the Syrian airspace, Turkish drones took over the bulk of the operational needs and capabilities. And they helped Turkey to enforce a ceasefire on Idlib. Without the capabilities of Turkish drones, Russia and the Assad regime and Iran would most likely have killed most of the civilians in the area of Idlib. We would have a humanitarian disaster. [...]. But it was Turkish drone capability which enforced this, and thus it changed the Turkish foreign policy in northern Syria and managed to increase and strengthen Turkish position with Russia, Iran and Assad regime. (Interview, May 2023).

This would mean that drones can play a vital role in the emergence of certain events that ultimately shape the position of Turkey towards Syria.

Several research participants explained that Turkey's drone capabilities played an influential role in Turkey's strategy towards northern Syria, especially when Russia and the US blocked Turkey's ambitions for an intervention. Drones have supposedly supported Turkey in finding an alternative and a change of strategy to pursue the same objectives:

It can be said that Turkey has been able, through this technology, to devise a contingency plan, when a military operation against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in eastern Syria was not

approved of. Turkey began targeting SDF leaders and patrols in eastern Euphrates; thereby Turkey's political maneuvering with other parties [...] was enhanced. Therefore, the higher the military power a state has, the more influential its foreign policies become; and its ambitions gradually evolve. Turkish UAVS, after their repeated use in Syria, have thus become vital and effective tools for Turkish policy in Syria. (Expert written response, June 2023).

But it's changed their strategy. Turkey has been able to incorporate the use of, for example, its artillery with drone assets in terms of target acquisition, intelligence gathering. And it's been able to put together that composition in such an integrated manner in which it has been very efficient. So the risk element and the potential of success has increased significantly. So it has led to a change in strategy in the way in which Turkey is conducting these activities and it's been employed successfully. So there's really a shift in strategy. (Interview, May 2023).

Yes, as Turkey's military-technological edge improved, we see more of a human-machine teaming strategy complement traditional operations. But yes, as Turkish military capabilities improve, especially in the unmanned systems segment, we also see this reflecting on Turkish way of war-fighting in Syria as well. (Expert written response, June 2023).

This could imply that Turkey's drone capabilities influence the ways in which Turkey seeks to achieve its objectives, and possibly also influences its policy ambitions.

Lastly, several research participants expressed that they perceive Turkey to be so strong without its drone capabilities (Turkey is ranked as the fifth strongest NATO military power in Global Firepower's 2023 Military Strength Ranking list (Global Firepower, 2023), that these capabilities are unlikely to influence the direction of Turkish foreign policy:

I think [the drones were] one tool. I think the Turkish Air Force and the Turkish military is already so powerful that they didn't really need the drone to decide on whether or not they wanted to launch an operation. (Interview, April 2023).

Turkey is one of the largest armies in NATO. They already had far superior capacity than the SDF from the get-go, from before the SDF got the first rifle. [...]. I don't know if they were emboldened at some point by their military capacity, but I don't think it's the main factor in Syria in terms of policy, no. I don't think that has shaped much of their foreign policy towards the SDF. (Interview, April 2023).

Taken together, the interviews conducted do not provide a single or conclusive answer to the question of whether and how Turkey's increased drone capabilities have influenced its foreign policy towards northern Syria. The opinions presented are very different from each other and highlight different aspects of this

potentially influential relationship. As such, these positions are best understood as hypotheses that require further research.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current landscape of remote warfare is changing. We have moved beyond the time that the strategy of remote warfare is the exclusive domain of a few Western states. Instead, more and more non-Western states and even non-state actors have become involved in fighting wars from a distance, changing the character of these types of wars. One of the most striking examples of this new phase of remote warfare is that of Turkey: a drone power on the rise. In this thesis, I presented qualitative data on the dynamics of Turkey's remote war in northern Syria with a focus on its drone practices. This case study is examined to gain a deeper understanding of contemporary forms of remote warfare by non-Western drone users. As I argue, it is of paramount importance that this new dimension is included in the current Western-dominated scholarly debate on remote warfare. If not, we run the risk of 'fossilization': simply reifying certain categories as representing the enduring features of remote warfare, which would preclude alternative understandings of why and how these wars are fought. In order to adequately represent remote warfare in academia and deeply understand its societal implications, we must keep pace with who is fighting remote wars and how they approach them. This is especially true as we are likely to see the use of remote warfare increase over time (Elie, 2002; McKay, 2021; Stoddard & Toltica, 2021).

The qualitative data presented in two successive chapters aimed to answer the following research question: *How has Turkey's increased drone capabilities influenced its foreign policy towards northern Syria from 2015 to May 2023?* The purpose of conducting this research was twofold. First, I aimed to shed light on the dynamics present in remote wars waged by non-Western drone powers, ultimately to broaden the scope of the remote warfare debate and contribute to the de-essentialization of the concept of remote warfare. Second, this thesis wanted to explore whether Turkey's increased drone capabilities are influencing other aspects of its foreign policy towards northern Syria. In doing so, I aimed to contribute to the theoretical concept of strategic practices by exploring the relationship between remote tactics and the evolution and formation of foreign policy pursued in remote wars.

Findings

In the descriptive analysis chapter, I first outlined the development and status quo of Turkey's foreign policy in general and towards Syria in particular. This chapter presented the answer to sub-question 1. The descriptive analysis chapter describes the different phases of TFP under Erdoĝan, of which the current TFP falls under the heading of nationalism. I then explained how Turkey's approach to Syria is heavily influenced by the militarization of TFP and Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy. Next, I explained what the foreign policy decision-making process in Ankara looks like after the 2017 constitutional referendum and the

establishment of the executive presidency. In short, after this referendum, foreign policy decision-making in Ankara became heavily centralized. Foreign policy decisions are solely in the hands of President Erdoĝan, who makes these decisions alone or with input from a few (in)formal advisors.

Next, I outlined the evolution and status quo of Turkey's drone capabilities. Following Ankara's decision to strengthen and domesticate its industrial-military complex, Turkey's drone capabilities have been on the rise. Turkish drones are in demand on the international stage because of their many advantages. For example, they are relatively cheap, very effective, and there are relatively few restrictions on their use by foreign actors (e.g., in terms of export controls). An important element of Turkey's drone policy has been the export of drones to foreign theaters of conflict, in an attempt to 'turn the tide' in its favor. Currently, Turkey has a large arsenal of various drones with both combat and ISTAR capabilities, which have been used extensively in northern Syria.

In the empirical analysis chapter, I first examined Turkey's remote practices in northern Syria based on in-depth interviews and written responses from experts on Turkey's foreign policy and drone practices. Interpreting Turkey's remote war as a strategic practice, I have shown the strategic objectives, tactics, and benefits for Turkey of using remote instruments in Syria. In sum, what we see is that Turkey tries to increasingly shape military outcomes and security dynamics in northern Syria remotely. Turkey's security-oriented objectives in northern Syria consist of roughly two factors: controlling refugee and IDP flows in northwestern Syria and countering the terrorist threat posed by the YPG/SDF and PYD/AANES in northeastern Syria. Tactically, Turkey has launched ground invasions into northern Syria with the purpose of command and control and makes heavy use of proxy forces here to achieve its goals. When denied a full-fledged invasion, Turkey began to rely on a drone campaign of targeted killings to counter terrorist threats. Finally, engaging in these tactics offers Ankara numerous benefits in achieving its objectives, ranging from cost-effectiveness to export promotion, and from precision to autonomous surveillance. By examining these three components and relating them to the information presented in the descriptive analysis chapter, I have provided a systematic and detailed account of the dynamics of Turkey's remote war in northern Syria as a strategic practice, thereby answering sub-question 2.

Subsequently, the second part of this chapter included a discussion of the research participants' perceptions of the influence of Turkey's increased drone capabilities on its foreign policy towards Syria. Participants were split on whether these drone capabilities have had an impact on TFP towards Syria. About one-third of the participants felt that the drones capabilities have had no impact on TFP towards Syria. Just over a third felt that drones had a role in shaping TFP towards Syria, and about another third fell somewhere in between these extremes. Those who believed that Turkey's drone capabilities have been of influence on TFP primarily believed that drones have allowed Turkey to pursue its objectives through a broader range of actions and/or that its increased drone capabilities have made Turkey more confident,

assertive, and willing to act in foreign policy. This final part of the empirical analysis chapter addressed sub-question 3.

However, due to the uncertainty of the participants' expressions, the statements in the empirical analysis chapter are inconclusive and should be considered as hypotheses that need further investigation. Thus, the main research question cannot be answered definitively. What can be said is that Turkey's increased drone capabilities fall within the securitization and militarization of its nationalistic foreign policy and its counter-terrorism strategy. The results of this research do not indicate that Turkey's increased drone capabilities have influenced these major foreign policy orientations. If its drone capabilities did influence TFP, it may have done so in a narrower sense, such as a broader range of actions to take to achieve foreign policy objectives. This seems to be the case with Turkey's drone campaign in northeastern Syria: an implementation of foreign policy that owes its existence to Turkey's increased drone capabilities and that allows Turkey to pursue its foreign policy ambitions in the absence of a military operation.

Remote warfare and practice theory

Then, how do these findings relate to, first, the debate on remote warfare, and second, practice theory? To begin with, this research has attempted to move beyond the scholarly pitfall of merely studying Western remote interventions but simultaneously builds on this same scholarship. I have done so by examining a case of remote warfare by a non-Western actor that is increasingly militarily active at a distance: Turkey. In doing so, this research contributes to the currently understudied remote character of non-Western military operations, taking a step in moving beyond the Western-dominated perspective on remote warfare. While this thesis is not able to make any generalizations about the remoteness of military operations by other states, it does provide observations that give rise to new research agendas.

What did the case of Turkey show? An important aspect of this case study in comparison to the much-studied Anglo-Saxon interventions is the use of remote tactics in relative geographic proximity. This proximity seems to provide advantages for a remote strategy that are lacking when fighting remotely from a greater distance. Next, another difference from most Western examples, is the focus of the objectives. While recent Western remote military operations have focused primarily on counter-terrorism, this is only a partial driver for Ankara. Ankara is also concerned with controlling refugee flows from Syria and repatriating Syrian refugees from Turkey. Furthermore, the case study shows that non-remote and remote tactics can be used in a rather intertwined way to achieve policy outcomes, instead of remote tactics merely serving as an alternative to ground troops. A neat binary between non-remote and remote interventions therefore does not seem to be appropriate when approaching remote warfare. Overall, the case showed how drones can be very influential at the tactical level and occupy a central position in Turkey's tactics towards Syria.

Finally, what is also striking is that the case study shows how drones can be used for messaging and propaganda purposes, an area in which the Turkish state has been a pioneer, in stark contrast to Western practice. The Turks have posted on social media high-resolution clips of drone feeds from Turkey's drone war against Assad's forces during Operation Spring Shield in 2020 (Stein, 2021), presumably for messaging purposes. By releasing such footage, it is believed that, on the one hand, Turkey was trying to present itself as a credible military actor to international actors and perhaps deter them. On the other hand, it is thought that Turkey was trying to send a message to potential buyers of its UAV systems. By releasing information about targeted strikes against suspected PKK members, Turkey may be seeking to justify its fight against the PKK in northeastern Syria domestically and gain support. Positive information about, and sometimes footage of, such strikes is likely to be released whenever Ankara needs to boost its image, such as before elections or when an electoral problem has arisen. It is clear that Turkey is not afraid to share, and this is something we are increasingly seeing with other states involved in drone strikes. The most recent example of this is the many videos found online of Ukrainian drone strikes against Russian targets during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (Gavin, 2022). The case of Turkey shows that drones are no longer only used in the shadows. On the contrary, they are being brought into the spotlight to achieve political and military goals at home and abroad.

Overall, by exploring remoteness in the case study as a set of strategic practices, this research contributes to recent scholarly calls to de-essentialize 'remoteness' (Stodddard and Toltica, 2021). Exploring the remoteness of Turkey's military approach as a set of strategic practices has been done by studying its objectives, tactics, and benefits. Such an exploration allows for an analysis of the tension between the *continuity* and *change* in the remoteness of military practices and opens up space for the analysis of different patterns in the manifestation of remoteness (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015; Strachan & Scheipers, 2011). This research has thus contributed to the remote warfare debate by expanding our knowledge of the different manifestations of remote warfare and thereby deepening our understanding of its common core. In doing so, this study provides a framework for future research on differences and regularities in remote military practices.

Researching the tension between continuity and change of remote military approaches also contributes to the study of practices, especially the pragmatist tradition. Recognizing that practices are made up of repetitive patterns that are constantly changing, this thesis analyzed if and how the emergence of a specific tactical practice affects (the reproduction of) military practices and foreign policy. Turkey was a perfect case study for this, as it shows a very clear shift in the military instruments used in northern Syria due to the increase in its drone capabilities. The emergence of its drone capabilities has led to a change in Turkey's tactical practices in northern Syria, that is, the way in which it seeks to achieve its strategic objectives. However, the findings of this thesis are limited in terms of any systematic changes that these

shifts in tactical practices bring to broader TFP practices. Nevertheless, this research contributes to our current understanding of practices by making a first attempt to empirically explore the intra-dimensions of strategic practices, particularly the dynamics surrounding tactics. It also adds to the debate by suggesting several hypotheses for future research in this area, which will be discussed in the next section.

Recommendations for further research

This research leads me to make several recommendations for further research. As mentioned earlier, this thesis discussed the thoughts of experts on the influence of Turkey's increased drone capabilities on its foreign policy towards northern Syria but cannot draw any conclusions from it. This empirical data has generated several ideas or hypotheses that can be further analyzed in qualitative research or tested in quantitative research. Therefore, future research should follow up on the preliminary results of this study. This mainly concerns two ideas.

First, the idea that Turkey's increased drone capabilities have also increased its capacity to pursue foreign policy objectives, meaning that Ankara's range of foreign policy actions has expanded. Further research should examine what this expansion entails and how it affects the way in which Ankara implements its foreign policy. Second, the idea that the increase in drone capabilities has made Ankara more 'confident' or 'adventurous' in its military operations, increasing its willingness to act. This first requires an operationalization of such military confidence, after which a qualitative research method can be used to analyze whether Ankara has indeed become more confident because of its drone capabilities. Depending on the level of access to empirical data, a quantitative study might also be relevant here in order to test for an increase in military confidence. A possible fruitful source of data in these areas is the inclusion of Turkish primary data.

Furthermore, another aspect worthy of further research is to examine the role of northern Syria for Turkey's policy towards other foreign theaters of conflict. Several research participants referred to the idea that Syria appears to have functioned as a 'testing ground' for Turkish drones, after which the experience was probably used as a blueprint in other battlefields. Further research should examine how the formation of a remote tactical practice in one context can be transferred to another context and how this affects that practice. This would further contribute to the study of change and continuity in remote tactical practices across contexts.

In addition, the case study shows that an actor-specific component may also be necessary to research a remote warfare case with the practices approach, as remote warfare and foreign policy decisions may be dominated by one or a few individuals. To fully understand the dynamics of strategic practices, it is sometimes not enough to just look at their objectives, tactics, and benefits. Instead, when a strategic

practice is largely determined by one or a few actors, the study of that practice benefits from examining who pushes the buttons. Particularly as practice theory sits at a precarious intersection between ontology and epistemology, it is important that practice theorists explore how agency is a factor in the ongoing emergence of strategic practices.

Finally, further research should follow up on the call to study non-Western remote military operations. As Stoddard and Toltica (2021, p. 463) note: “The study of remote warfare outside of Western cases is still in its infancy.” While this thesis has contributed to this research gap, more research on the patterns of remoteness of these interventions is needed. Particular attention should be paid to comparing Western and non-Western instances of remote warfare, to comparing the remote warfare practices of democratic and less democratic states, and, perhaps more importantly, to comparing non-Western practices with each other.

Concluding remarks and recommendations for praxis

Thus, this research demonstrates how drones as a remote tactic may play an increasingly central role in the strategic practice of remote warfare, with numerous implications felt on the ground. More specifically, this thesis provides a detailed empirical account of how remote warfare in general, and drones in particular, are playing an increasingly important role in Turkey’s approach to Syria. Drones have become the weapon of choice for Turkey to achieve its goals in Syria, especially when the geopolitical circumstances do not allow for anything else. Turkey’s remote presence in Syria shows both patterns of continuities and differences with Western case studies of remote warfare, and influences the character of conflict in the region and beyond. Turkey’s foreign policy behavior towards Syria can be seen as an example of ‘Bayraktar Diplomacy,’ in which Turkey seeks to achieve the goals of its military endeavors abroad by relying on its drone superiority (Mitzer & Oliemans, 2022a).

This phenomenon of Bayraktar Diplomacy has set an example for other countries to copy this behavior, made possible in part because Turkish drones are cheap, effective, and easy to purchase without difficult export regulations. We can already see that Turkey’s remote military behavior is spreading. Drones have become the preferred type of weapon for many countries, for whom the Bayraktar TB2 drone is often the weapon of choice. The number of countries currently under contract for the TB2 has risen to 28, with Kuwait signing a $370 million deal for the armed drone in January 2023 (Ergocun & Nur Cakmak, 2023). In light of these realities, I offer several recommendations for the Turkish state and the international community to help them recognize and manage the implications of the rapid proliferation of drones and the impact of remote warfare.

Given the international demand for Turkish drones and their presence in numerous conflicts around the world, I recommend that the Turkish government strengthen its drone export regulations and take concrete steps to establish itself as a responsible drone player. Being in the position that Turkey is in, it should step up and go beyond the line of reasoning that exported Turkish drones have nothing to do with Turkey anymore. For example, when Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said regarding the export of Turkish drones to Ukraine that "the drones may have been manufactured in Turkey but after [they were sold], they belong to Ukraine. They cannot be referred [to] as Turkish weapons" (TRT World, n.d.). While it may be true that only Kyiv has the final say in determining how its imported drones are to be used, this is a separate issue from suppliers being completely absolved of any responsibility after the sale. Such a stance is in stark contrast to the principle of responsible conduct inherent in the export control agreements under which drones fall and to which Turkey is a party (Coşkun, 2022).

To build a solid reputation as a drone user and exporter reputation without compromising its competitive edge in the market, Turkey should take the following two steps. First, Ankara should adopt a clear position on its own use of drones and its drone exports, for example in the form of a national code of conduct. Such a position should address the mechanisms by which drone strikes are conducted, the policies that authorize them, the framework that guides export procedures (including end-user agreements and compliance measures), and the underlying principles of accountability for civilian harm based on human rights and humanitarian law. In doing so, Ankara should try to find the right balance between being an ethical, responsible drone user and exporter without losing its commercial appeal (ibid.).

Second, in addition to creating a policy framework that outlines the guiding principles for Turkey's drone use and export, Ankara should increase transparency about its drone sales, strikes, and policies. It should be clear who the recipients of Turkish drones are, and information about these transactions should be publicly available. Furthermore, the public should not be kept in the dark about how Turkey conducts drone strikes and about strikes that have taken place, including their consequences on the ground. In order to ensure the proper use of drones, there should be no gray area in these terms. Transparency should be increased both in Turkish export mechanisms and in Turkey's own use of drones.

However, these issues are not unique to Turkey. At present, there exists no global framework that sets international standards for the sale and transfer of drones (ibid.). Drones are therefore covered by existing export control mechanisms, but the unique characteristics of drones require a tailored approach. Following the launch of the US-led 2016 Joint Declaration (U.S. Department of State, 2016), an international process should be undertaken to develop robust international regulations to improve control mechanisms for the export and use of UAVs. Such an agreement should set standards for monitoring both the use and export policies of drones, for sharing information on carried-out strikes and misuse, and for holding states accountable when civilians are harmed. Annual meetings should be held to discuss new relevant remote

technologies, to review progress in the implementation of the agreement, and to discuss new policies and improvements. This international process should be inclusive, transparent and multi-stakeholder (e.g. civil society, industry). Such an approach will strengthen the legitimacy of this international negotiation process and provide expertise for its input (Zwijnenburg, 2017). Turkey could even go so far as to actively promote this debate among its NATO allies, thereby enhancing Turkey's reputation as a responsible exporter and user of drones and a credible ally.

Bibliography

Abrahms, M., & Mierau, J. (2017). Leadership Matters: The Effects of Targeted Killings on Militant Group Tactics. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *29*(5), 830–851. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1069671

Adar, S. (2020). *Repatriation to Turkey's "Safe Zone" in Northeast Syria: Ankara's Goals and European Concerns* (1; SWP Comment, pp. 1–4). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2020C01_ada.pdf

Adar, S., & Seufert, G. (2021). *Turkey's Presidential System after Two and a Half Years: An Overview of Institutions and Politics* (2; SWP Research Paper). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkeys-presidential-system-after-two-and-a-half-years

Adelman, R. A., & Kieran, D. (2018). Re-Conceptualizing Cultures of Remote Warfare: Editors' Introduction. *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, *11*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2017.1416764

Adler, E., & Bernstein, S. (2005). Knowledge in Power: The Epistemological Construction of Global Governance. In M. Barnett & R. Duvall (Eds.), *Power in Global Governance* (pp. 294–318). Cambridge University Press.

Adler, E., & Pouliot, V. (2011). International Practices: Introduction and Framework. In *International Practices* (Vol. 1, pp. 3–35). Cambridge University Press.

AFP News. (2016, August 24). *Erdogan says Syria operation aimed at IS jihadists, Kurdish PYD*. Yahoo News. https://sg.news.yahoo.com/erdogan-says-syria-operation-aimed-jihadists-kurdish-pyd-092204994.html

Al Jazeera. (2017, March 30). *Turkey ends 'Euphrates Shield' operation in Syria*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/3/30/turkey-ends-euphrates-shield-operation-in-syria

Al Jazeera. (2022, June 2). *Russia urges Turkey not to launch offensive in northern Syria*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/2/russia-urges-turkey-not-to-launch-offensive-in-

northern-syria

Ali, M. (2022). The Role of Turkiye in the Black Sea and the Russo-Ukrainian war: A Short Overview. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, *8*(3), 356–367.

Archambault, E. (2021). *Making Drone Violence Strategic: A Conceptual Genealogy of Remote Warfare* [Durhem theses, Durham University]. http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/14200/

Archer, M. S. (1996). *Culture and agency: The place of culture in social theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Ayata, B. (2015). Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World: Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor? *Journal of European Integration*, *37*(1), 95–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2014.975991

Aydintasbas, A. (2021, May 19). *Turkey Will Not Return to the Western Fold*. Foreign Affairs. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/turkey/turkey-will-not-return-western-fold

Baez, B. (2002). Confidentiality in qualitative research: Reflections on secrets, power and agency. *Qualitative Research*, *2*(1), 35-58. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794102002001

Banasik, M. (2016). Unconventional war and warfare in the gray zone. The new spectrum of modern conflicts. *Journal of Defense Resources Management (JoDRM)*, *7*(1), 37–46.

BBC News. (2016, August 24). *IS conflict: Turkey-backed Syrian rebels take Jarablus*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37171995

Bearak, M., Kelly, M., & Lee, J. S. (2022, February 7). *How Ethiopia used a Turkish drone in a strike that killed nearly 60 civilians*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/ethiopia-tigray-dedebit-drone-strike/

Boeije, H. R. (2009). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications. https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/4912251

Bogner, A., Littig, B., & Menz, W. (2009). Introduction: Expert Interviews — An Introduction to a New Methodological Debate. In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & W. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing Experts* (pp. 1–13). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230244276_1

Bogner, A., & Menz, W. (2009). The Theory-Generating Expert Interview: Epistemological Interest, Forms of Knowledge, Interaction. In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & W. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing Experts* (pp. 43–80).

Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230244276_3

Bonds, E. (2019). Humanitized violence: Targeted killings and civilian deaths in the US war against the Islamic State. *Current Sociology*, *67*(3), 438–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118807520

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.

Bousquet, A., Grove, J., & Shah, N. (2020). Becoming war: Towards a martial empiricism. *Security Dialogue*, *51*(2–3), 99–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619895660

Brighi, E., & Hill, C. (2016). Implementation and behaviour. In S. Smith, A. Hadfield, & T. Dunne (Eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (3rd ed., pp. 147–167). Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed.). OUP Oxford.

Brzozowski, A. (2019, October 14). *EU condemns Turkey's military action, stops short of common arms embargo*. Euractiv. https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/eu-condemns-turkeys-military-action-stops-short-of-common-arms-embargo/

Bueger, C., & Gadinger, F. (2015). The Play of International Practice. *International Studies Quarterly*, *59*(3), 449–460. https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12202

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (10th ed.). Routledge.

Cagaptay, S. (2019). *Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Cagaptay, S. (2020). *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Carlsnaes, W. (1992). The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis. *International Studies Quarterly*, *36*(3), 245–270. https://doi.org/10.2307/2600772

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville. (2014). The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*(5), 545–547. https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547

Cerny, P. G. (1990). *The changing architecture of politics: Structure, agency, and the future of the state*. SAGE Publications.

Çevik, S. (2022). *Turkey's Military Operations in Syria and Iraq* (37; SWP Comment, pp. 1–8). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2022C37_TurkeysOperations_Syria_Iraq.pdf

Chamayou, G. (2015). *Drone Theory* (J. Lloyd, Trans.). Penguin Books Ltd.

China Power Team. (2020, August 25). *Is China at the Forefront of Drone Technology?* China Power. https://chinapower.csis.org/china-drones-unmanned-technology/

Christofis, N. (2022). Introduction: The Kurds in Erdoğan's 'New' Turkey: domestic and international implications. In N. Christofis (Ed.), *The Kurds in Erdogan's "New" Turkey* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Collier, D., & Mahon, J. E. (1993). Conceptual "Stretching" Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis. *The American Political Science Review*, *87*(4), 845–855. https://doi.org/10.2307/2938818

Collins, H., & Evans, R. (2007). *Rethinking Expertise*. The University of Chicago Press.

Conflict Armament Research. (2022). *Missile Components Used in Drone Attacks in Northeast Syria* (Frontline Perspective, pp. 1–26). https://www.conflictarm.com/perspectives/missile-components-used-in-drone-attacks-in-northeast-syria/

Coşkun, A. (2022, January 18). *Strengthening Turkish Policy on Drone Exports*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/01/18/strengthening-turkish-policy-on-drone-exports-pub-86183

Coşkun, B. B. (2015). Neighbourhood Narratives From "Zero Problems With Neighbours" to "Precious Loneliness": Turkey's Resecuritized Middle East Policy After the Arab Spring. In E. Monier (Ed.), *Regional Insecurity After the Arab Uprisings: Narratives of Security and Threat* (pp. 187–203). Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137503978_10

Crino, S., & Dreby, A. (2020). Turkey's Drone War in Syria – A Red Team View. *Small Wars Journal*. https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/turkeys-drone-war-syria-red-team-view

Daily Sabah. (2016, May 28). *Turkey no longer buying US drones, will rely on local technology instead*. Daily Sabah. https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2016/05/28/turkey-no-longer-buying-us-drones-will-

rely-on-local-technology-instead

D’Alema, F. (2017). *The Evolution of Turkey’s Syria Policy* (17; IAI Working Papers, pp. 1–18). Istituto Affari Internazionali.

Daragahi, B. (2023, August 22). A Higher Kalın: Turkey’s religion scholar turned spy chief [Substack newsletter]. *Turkey Recap*. https://turkeyrecap.substack.com/p/a-higher-kaln-turkeys-religion-scholar

Davies, W. (2012, July 28). *Crisis in Syria emboldens country’s Kurds*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19021766

Demir, İ. (2020). Transformation of the Turkish Defense Industry: The Story and Rationale of the Great Rise. *Insight Turkey*, *22*(3), 17–40.

Demmers, J. (2017). Introduction: Conflict analysis in context. In *Theories of Violent Conflict: An Introduction* (pp. 1–17). Routledge.

Demmers, J., & Gould, L. (2018). An assemblage approach to liquid warfare: AFRICOM and the ‘hunt’ for Joseph Kony. *Security Dialogue*, *49*(5), 364–381. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618777890

Detsch, J. (2021, March 30). *The U.S. Army Goes to School on Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*. Foreign Policy. https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/30/army-pentagon-nagorno-karabakh-drones/

Dixon, R. (2020, November 11). Azerbaijan’s drones owned the battlefield in Nagorno-Karabakh—And showed future of warfare. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/nagorno-karabkah-drones-azerbaijan-aremenia/2020/11/11/441bcbd2-193d-11eb-8bda-814ca56e138b_story.html

Döringer, S. (2021). ‘The problem-centred expert interview’. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *24*(3), 265–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1766777

Ehrhart, H.-G. (2017). Postmodern warfare and the blurred boundaries between war and peace. *Defense & Security Analysis*, *33*(3), 263–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1351156

Elie, Serge. D. (2002). The Representation of Gender in the Ethnographic Discourse on Yemen: A Case of Paradigmatic Fossilization? *Middle East Women's Studies Review*, *17*(1–2), 13–18.

Ergocun, G., & Nur Cakmak, B. (2023, January 18). *Turkish drone-maker Baykar exports Bayraktar TB2 to 28 countries*. Andalou Agency. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkish-drone-maker-baykar-exports-bayraktar-tb2-to-28-countries/2791055

Esen, B., & Gümüşçü, Ş. (2020). A Small Yes for Presidentialism: The Turkish Constitutional Referendum of April 2017. In *The AKP Since Gezi Park* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Esen, B., & Yardimci-Geyikçi, Ş. (2020). The Turkish presidential elections of 24 June 2018. *Mediterranean Politics*, *25*(5), 682–689. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2019.1619912

Espinoza, M. (2018). State terrorism: Orientalism and the drone programme. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, *11*(2), 376–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1456725

European Forum on Armed Drones. (n.d.). Turkey • EFAD. *EFAD*. Retrieved September 8, 2023, from https://www.efadrones.org/countries/turkey/

European Union Agency for Asylum. (2023, February). *Idlib*. EUAA. https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-syria-2023/idlib

Farooq, U. (2019, May 14). *How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power*. The Intercept. https://theintercept.com/2019/05/14/turkey-second-drone-age/

Fatih Tayfur, M. (1994). Main approaches to the study of foreign policy: A review. *METU Studies in Development*, *21*(1), 113–141.

Federici, V. (2015). The Rise of Rojava: Kurdish Autonomy in the Syrian Conflict. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, *35*(2), 81–90. https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2015.0023

Flick, U., Kardorff, E. von, & Steinke, I. (2004). What is Qualitative Research? An Introduction to the Field. In U. Flick, E. von Kardorff, & I. Steinke (Eds.), & B. Jenner (Trans.), *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (M. Senellart, Ed.; G. Burchell, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan.

France24. (2019, September 29). *Dans le ciel libyen, bataille entre drones turcs et émiratis*. France24. https://www.france24.com/fr/20190929-dans-le-ciel-libyen-bataille-entre-drones-turcs-et-%C3%A9miratis

Froschauer, U., & Lueger, M. (2009). Expert Interviews in Interpretive Organizational Research. In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & W. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing Experts*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230244276_11

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Prentice-Hall. http://archive.org/details/studiesinethnome00garf

Gavin, G. (2022, March 15). *Turkish drones are transforming the war in Ukraine*. The Spectator. https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/turkish-drones-are-transforming-the-war-in-ukraine/

Genc, K. (2019). Erdogan's Way: The Rise and Rule of Turkey's Islamist Shapeshifter. *Foreign Affairs*, *98*(5), 26–34.

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P., & Trow, M. (1994). *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*. SAGE Publications. http://archive.org/details/mode1_2

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Polity Press.

Global Firepower. (2023). *NATO Member States Military Ranking (2023)*. https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing-nato-members.php

Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday.

Goldstein, K. (2002). Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *35*(4), 669–672. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096502001130

Gorden, R. L. (1980). *Interviewing: Strategy, techniques, and tactics* (3rd ed.). Dorsey Press. http://archive.org/details/interviewingstra0000unse

Gregory, D. (2011a). From a View to a Kill: Drones and Late Modern War. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *28*(7–8), 188–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411423027

Gregory, D. (2011b). The everywhere war. *The Geographical Journal*, *177*(3), 238–250. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2011.00426.x

Groh, T. L. (2019). *Proxy War: The Least Bad Option*. Stanford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503608733

Guillaume, X. (2007). Unveiling the `International': Process, Identity and Alterity. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *35*(3), 741–758. https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298070350030501

Gunes, C., & Lowe, R. (2015). *The Impact of the Syrian War on Kurdish Politics Across the Middle East*. Chatham House.

Güney, N. A. (2022). Food Corridor: Türkiye's Successful Role as Mediator. *Insight Turkey*, *24*(3), 43–52.

Gurcan, M. (2019). *Assessing the Post–July 15 Turkish Military: Operations Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch* (59; Policy Notes). The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/assessing-post-july-15-turkish-military-operations-euphrates-shield-and-olive

Gurcan, M. (2021, August 27). *Turkey's targeted killings signal new strategy against Syrian Kurdish forces*. Al-Monitor. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/08/turkeys-targeted-killings-signal-new-strategy-against-syrian-kurdish-forces

Heckathorn, D. D., & Cameron, C. J. (2017). Network Sampling: From Snowball and Multiplicity to Respondent-Driven Sampling. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *43*(1), 101–119. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053556

Hofman, L. (2020, December 10). *How Turkey became a drone power (and what that tells us about the future of warfare)*. The Correspondent. https://thecorrespondent.com/832/how-turkey-became-a-drone-power-and-what-that-tells-us-about-the-future-of-warfare

Hollis, M. (1994). *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Holmqvist-Jonsäter, C. (2010). Introduction. In C. Coker & C. Holmqvist-Jonsäter (Eds.), *The Character of War in the 21st Century*. Routledge.

Hudson, V. M., & Day, B. S. (2020). Introduction: The Situation and Evolution of Foreign Policy Analysis: A Road Map. In *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (3rd ed., pp. 1–36). Rowman & Littlefield.

Human Rights Watch. (2022, December 7). *Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/07/northeast-syria-turkish-strikes-exacerbate-humanitarian-crisis

Hürriyet Daily News. (2017, March 30). *Turkey can start new operation if necessary as Euphrates Shield ends: PM*. https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-can-start-new-operation-if-necessary-as-euphrates-shield-ends-pm--111401

Jackson, P. T., & Nexon, D. H. (1999). Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics. *European Journal of International Relations*, *5*(3), 291–332. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005003002

Jaeger, D. A., & Paserman, M. D. (2009). The Shape of Things to Come? On the Dynamics of Suicide Attacks and Targeted Killings. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *4*, 315–342. https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00009013

Jawad, R. (2020, June 4). *Libya conflict: GNA regains full control of Tripoli from Gen Haftar*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52920373

Jenkins, G. (2020). Islamism in Turkey. In S. Akbarzadeh (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam* (2nd ed., pp. 155–169). Routledge.

Johnston, P. B. (2012). Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns. *International Security*, *36*(4), 47–79. https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00076

Joshi, S., & Stein, A. (2013). Not Quite 'Zero Problems': Ankara's troubles in Syria. *The RUSI Journal*, *158*(1), 28–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.774637

Kaarbo, J., Lantis, J. S., & Beasley, R. K. (2012). The Analysis of Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective. In R. K. Beasley, J. Kaarbo, J. S. Lantis, & M. T. Snarr (Eds.), *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior* (2nd ed.). CQ Press.

Karadsheh, J., & Sariyuce, I. (2022, April 11). *Turkish drones have become a symbol of the Ukrainian resistance*. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/11/middleeast/mideast-summary-04-11-2022-intl/index.html

Karasapan, O. (2021, May 13). *The coming crisis in Idlib*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-coming-crisis-in-idlib/

Kasapoğlu, C. (2018). *Control of the Syrian Airspace: Russian Geopolitical Ambitions and Air Threat Assessment* (14; SWP Comment, pp. 1–4). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

Kirişci, K., & Toygür, I. (2019). *Turkey's New Presidential System and a Changing West: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish-West relations* (15; Turkey Project Policy Paper). Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/turkeys-new-presidential-system-and-a-changing-west/

Kınık, H., & Çelik, S. (2021). The Role of Turkish Drones in Azerbaijan's Increasing Military Effectiveness: An Assessment of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. *Insight Turkey*, *23*(4), 169–191. https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2021234.10

Knorr Cetina, K. (1999). *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge*. Harvard University Press.

Kösebalaban, H. (2020). Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward Syria: The Return of Securitization. *Middle East Critique*, *29*(3), 335–344. https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2020.1770450

Kowalczewska, K., & Łubiński, P. (2022). Legality of the Turkish military operations in Syria. *Review of International, European and Comparative Law*, *XX*, 55–83. https://doi.org/10.26106/9r8g-jt22

Krieg, A. (2016). Externalizing the burden of war: The Obama Doctrine and US foreign policy in the Middle East. *International Affairs*, *92*(1), 97–113. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12506

Krieg, A., & Rickli, J.-M. (2018). Surrogate warfare: The art of war in the 21st century? *Defence Studies*, *18*(2), 113–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2018.1429218

Kurpershoek, R., Muñoz Valdez, A., & Zwijnenburg, W. (2021). *Remote Horizons: Expanding use and proliferation of military drones in Africa*. PAX. https://paxforpeace.nl/publications/remote-horizons/

Kutlay, M., & Öniş, Z. (2021). Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: Strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence? *International Affairs*, *97*(4), 1085–1104. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab094

Lancaster, K. (2017). Confidentiality, anonymity and power relations in elite interviewing: Conducting qualitative policy research in a politicised domain. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *20*(1), 93–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1123555

Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern* (C. Porter, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press.

Law No. 3238, Ongur Partners International Law § Legislation (1985). https://www.ongurpartners.com/law-no-3238.html

Leonard, M. (2016, March 7). *The New Interventionists*. Project Syndicate. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/interventionism-effect-on-global-order-by-mark-leonard-2016-03

Littig, B. (2009). Interviewing the Elite — Interviewing Experts: Is There a Difference? In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & W. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing Experts* (pp. 98–113). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230244276_5

Lo Iacono, V., Symonds, P., & Brown, D. H. K. (2016). Skype as a Tool for Qualitative Research Interviews. *Sociological Research Online*, *21*(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3952

Maestas, C. (2015). Expert Surveys as a Measurement Tool: Challenges and New Frontiers. In L. R. Atkeson & R. M. Alvarez (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods* (pp. 583–608). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190213299.013.13

McKay, A. (2021). Conclusion: Remote Warfare in an Age of Distancing and 'Great Powers.' In A. McKay, A. Watson, & M. Karlshøj-Pedersen (Eds.), *Remote Warfare: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (pp. 234–

250). E-International Relations.

Mehmetcik, H., & Çelik, A. C. (2022). The Militarization of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, *24*(1), 24–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2021.1992190

Meuser, M., & Nagel, U. (2009). The Expert Interview and Changes in Knowledge Production. In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & W. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing Experts* (pp. 17–42). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230244276_2

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Mitzer, S., & Oliemans, J. (2021, September 27). The Conqueror of Karabakh: The Bayraktar TB2 [Oryxspioenkop]. *Oryx*. https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/09/the-conqueror-of-karabakh-bayraktar-tb2.html

Mitzer, S., & Oliemans, J. (2022a, February 23). A Monument Of Victory: The Bayraktar TB2 Kill List [Oryxspioenkop]. *Oryx*. https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/12/a-monument-of-victory-bayraktar-tb2.html

Mitzer, S., & Oliemans, J. (2022b, November). An Unmanned Interdictor: Bayraktar TB2s Over Libya [Oryxspioenkop]. *Oryx*. https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/11/an-unmanned-interdictor-bayraktar-tb2s.html

Mokry, S. (2022). What is Lost in Translation? Differences between Chinese Foreign Policy Statements and Their Official English Translations. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *18*(3), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orac012

Neset, S., Aydin, M., Dikici Bilgin, H., Gürcan, M., & Strand, A. (2019). *Turkish foreign policy: Structures and decision-making processes* (3; CMI Report R). Chr. Michelsen Institute. https://www.cmi.no/publications/6854-turkish-foreign-policy-structures-and-decision-making-processes#author-details

Nicolini, D. (2009). Articulating Practice through the Interview to the Double. *Management Learning*, *40*(2), 195–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507608101230

O’Rourke, R. (2022). *Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense - Issues for Congress* (CRS Report, p. 67). Congressional Research Service. https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1159700

Philipps, D., & Schmitt, E. (2022, March 11). Over Ukraine, Lumbering Turkish-Made Drones Are an Ominous Sign for Russia. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/11/us/politics/ukraine-military-drones-russia.html

Pol, A., & Zwijnenburg, W. (2022). *A Laboratory of Drone Warfare: The role and relevance of uncrewed aerial systems in the war in Syria*. PAX. https://paxforpeace.nl/publications/a-laboratory-of-drone-warfare/

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. (2018, July 10). *Presidential Decree No. 1* [Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye]. Digital Transformation Office. https://cbddo.gov.tr/en/presidential-decree-no-1

Pusane, Ö. K. (2018). How to Profile PYD/YPG as an Actor in the Syrian Civil War: Policy Implications for the Region and Beyond. In Ö. Z. Oktav, E. Parlar Dal, & A. M. Kurşun (Eds.), *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War: The ISIS and YPG Cases* (pp. 73–90). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67528-2_4

Ragin, C. C. (1994). *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method*. Pine Forge Press.

Ragin, C. C., & Amoroso, L. M. (2011). *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method*. Pine Forge Press.

Rappert, B. (2010). Revealing and concealing secrets in research: The potential for the absent. *Qualitative Research*, *10*(5), 571–587. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794110375229

Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *5*(2), 243–263. https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310222225432

Rojava Information Center. (2023). *Incessant War: Turkey’s Drone Campaign in North and East Syria, 2022*. Rojava Information Center. https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2023/03/incessant-war-turkeys-drone-campaign-in-nes-2022/

Sarı Ertem, H. (2018). Surrogate Warfare in Syria and the Pitfalls of Diverging US Attitudes Toward ISIS and PYD/YPG. In Ö. Z. Oktav, E. Parlar Dal, & A. M. Kurşun (Eds.), *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian*

Civil War: The ISIS and YPG Cases (pp. 129–148). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67528-2_7

Savelsberg, E. (2018). Savelsberg, Eva. "The Kurdish PYD and the Syrian civil war. In M. M. Gunter (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook on the Kurds* (pp. 357–365). Routledge.

Schatzki, T. R. (2002). *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*. Penn State University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271023717

Schindler, S., & Wille, T. (2019). How Can We Criticize International Practices? *International Studies Quarterly*, *63*(4), 1014–1024. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz057

Security Council. (2015). *Resolution 2254*. United Nations Security Council Resolutions. http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2254/

Shesterinina, A. (2016). Collective Threat Framing and Mobilization in Civil War. *American Political Science Review*, *110*(3), 411–427. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000277

Siccardi, F. (2021, September 14). *How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy*. Carnegie Europe. https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/09/14/how-syria-changed-turkey-s-foreign-policy-pub-85301

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Snyder, R. C., Bruck, H. W., & Sapin, B. (2002). Decision-Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics. In R. C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, & B. Sapin (Eds.), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making (Revisited)* (pp. 21–152). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230107526_2

Soliman, M. (2022, March 7). *Drones are re-engineering the geopolitics of the Middle East*. Middle East Institute. https://www.mei.edu/publications/drones-are-re-engineering-geopolitics-middle-east

Sönmez, G. (2017). A Scorecard for Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield. *Terrorism Monitor*, *15*(7), 3–5.

Stein, A. (2021, June 11). *Say Hello to Turkey's Little Friend: How Drones Help Level the Playing Field*. War on the Rocks. https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/say-hello-to-turkeys-little-friend-how-drones-help-level-the-playing-field/

Stoddard, E., & Toltica, S. (2021). Practising remote warfare: Analysing the remote character of the Saudi/UAE intervention in Yemen. *Defence Studies*, *21*(4), 447–467.

https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2021.1994395

Strachan, H., & Scheipers, S. (2011). Introduction: The Changing Character of War. In H. Strachan & S. Scheipers (Eds.), *The Changing Character of War* (pp. 1–26). Oxford University Press.

Swidler, A. (2001). What Anchors Cultural Practices. In K. K. Cetina, T. R. Schatzki, & E. von Savigny (Eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (pp. 83–101). Routledge.

Talbot, V. (2019). *Turkey in Syria: Role, Interests and Challenges* (Rebuilding Syria: The Middle East's Next Power Game?, pp. 87–94). Italian Institute for International Political Studies. https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/rebuilding-syria-middle-easts-next-power-game-23863

Tansey, O. (2007). Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-probability Sampling. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *40*(4), 765–772. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096507071211

Taylor, C. (1985). *Human Agency and Language*. Cambridge University Press. https://philpapers.org/rec/TAYHAA

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press.

Taylor, C. (1993). Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger. In C. Guignon (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (pp. 317–336). Cambridge University Press.

The Economist. (2019, October 7). *Donald Trump gives Turkey the green light to invade northern Syria*. https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/10/07/donald-trump-gives-turkey-the-green-light-to-invade-northern-syria

Thornton, R. (2015). Problems with the Kurds as proxies against Islamic State: Insights from the siege of Kobane. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, *26*(6), 865–885. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2015.1095844

Toksabay, E. (2023, June 6). Turkey's Erdogan appoints spokesperson Kalin as intelligence chief. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-erdogan-appoints-his-spokesperson-ibrahim-kalin-intelligence-chief-2023-06-05/

Tol, G. (2022). *Erdoğan's War: A Strongman's Struggle at Home and in Syria*. Hurst & Company. https://www.hurstpublishers.com/book/erdogans-war/

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (1st ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

TRT World. (n.d.). *Turkey rejects Russia's accusations, not answerable for Ukraine's drone use*. Turkey Rejects Russia's Accusations, Not Answerable for Ukraine's Drone Use. Retrieved September 27, 2023, from https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/turkey-rejects-russia-s-accusations-not-answerable-for-ukraine-s-drone-use-51214

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *PKK*. Retrieved September 5, 2023, from https://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.en.mfa

UN Geospatial. (2022, July 1). *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2022*. United Nations Geospatial. https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/syrian-arab-republic-approximate-areas-influence-june-2022

UNHCR. (2023, June 8). *Syria Regional Refugee Response: Türkiye*. Operational Data Portal. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113

United States Department of Defence. (2018). *2018 National Defense Strategy*. https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Photos/igphoto/2001867424/mediaid/2451071/

U.S. Department of State. (2016, October 28). *Joint Declaration for the Export and Subsequent Use of Armed or Strike-Enabled Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)*. U.S. Department of State. //2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/10/262811.htm

USAID. (2022). *Syria - Complex Emergency* (4; Fact Sheet). United States Agency for International Development. https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-4-fiscal-year-fy-2022

Uzgel, İ. (2022). *Turkish Foreign Policy After Presidentialism* (7; Turkish Views: Crisis and Opportunities for Turkey in 2023). Middle East Institute. https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkish-foreign-policy-after-presidentialism

Van Audenhove, L., & Donders, K. (2019). Talking to People III: Expert Interviews and Elite Interviews. In H. Van den Bulck, M. Puppis, K. Donders, & L. Van Audenhove (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of*

Methods for Media Policy Research (1st ed., pp. 179–197). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16065-4_10

Van Dam, N. (2017). *Destroying a Nation: The Civil War in Syria*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Van Veen, E. (2021). *Turkey's interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib* (CRU Policy Brief, pp. 1–11). Clingendael. https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turkeys-interventions-its-near-abroad-case-idlib

Von Soest, C. (2022). Why Do We Speak to Experts? Reviving the Strength of the Expert Interview Method. *Perspectives on Politics*, *21*(1), 277–287. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722001116

Waldman, T. (2018). Vicarious warfare: The counterproductive consequences of modern American military practice. *Contemporary Security Policy*, *39*(2), 181–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1393201

Walker, D. M. (2018). American Military Culture and the Strategic Seduction of Remote Warfare. *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, *11*(1), 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2017.1416763

Walsh, D. (2021, December 20). *Foreign Drones Tip the Balance in Ethiopia's Civil War*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/20/world/africa/drones-ethiopia-war-turkey-emirates.html

Watson, A., & McKay, A. (2021). Remote Warfare: A Critical Introduction. In A. McKay, A. Watson, & M. Karlshøj-Pedersen (Eds.), *Remote Warfare: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (pp. 7–33). E-International Relations. https://www.e-ir.info/publication/remote-warfare-interdisciplinary-perspectives/

Watts, T., & Biegon, R. (2017). *Defining Remote Warfare: Security Cooperation* (1; Remote Control Project). Oxford Research Group. https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/ORG_RemoteControl_SecCoop.pdf

Watts, T., & Biegon, R. (2021). Revisiting the remoteness of remote warfare: US military intervention in Libya during Obama's presidency. *Defence Studies*, *21*(4), 508–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2021.1994397

Wiles, R., Crow, G., Heath, S., & Charles, V. (2008). The Management of Confidentiality and Anonymity in Social Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *11*(5), 417–428.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701622231

Wilgenburg, W. van. (2021, October 28). *China says Turkey's military operations in northeast Syria are illegal*. Kurdistan24. https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/26063-China-says-Turkey%27s-military-operations-in-northeast-Syria-are-illegal

Witt, S. (2022, May 9). The Turkish Drone That Changed the Nature of Warfare. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/16/the-turkish-drone-that-changed-the-nature-of-warfare

Yackley, A. J. (2020, October 15). *How Turkey militarized its foreign policy*. POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/how-turkey-militarized-foreign-policy-azerbaijan-diplomacy/

Yaşar, N. T. (2021). *Syria and Libya's contributions to the evolution of the Turkish "forward defence" doctrine* (Research Project Report 7; Syria Transition Challenges Project, pp. 1–19). Geneva Centre for Security Policy. https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/doc/syria-libya-turkish-forward-defence

Yavuz, M. H. (2022). The motives behind the AKP's foreign policy: Neo-Ottomanism and strategic autonomy. *Turkish Studies*, *23*(5), 659–680. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2022.2100700

Yönten, H., & Denemark, R. A. (2023). Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa under the AKP: An empirical analysis. *Turkish Studies*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2023.2222525

Yossef, A. (2019, December 10). *Upgrading Iran's Military Doctrine: An Offensive "Forward Defense."* Middle East Institute. https://www.mei.edu/publications/upgrading-irans-military-doctrine-offensive-forward-defense

Zaman, A. (2023a, April 7). *Drone strike targets US Syrian-Kurdish ally Mazlum Kobane, Turkey suspected.* Al-Monitor. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/04/drone-strike-targets-us-syrian-kurdish-ally-mazlum-kobane-turkey-suspected

Zaman, A. (2023b, May 4). *Turkey's drones are killing Kurdish children in northeast Syria*. Al-Monitor. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/05/turkeys-drones-are-killing-kurdish-children-northeast-syria

Zwijnenburg, W. (2017). *Global Ambitions for Armed Drones*. PAX.
https://paxforpeace.nl/publications/global-ambitions-for-armed-drones/

Zwijnenburg, W., & Postma, F. (2019, April 10). *Fear the Reaper: Wie geeft richting aan het drone-debat? [Fear the Reaper: who is guiding the drone debate?]*. Clingendael Spectator.
https://spectator.clingendael.org/nl/publicatie/fear-reaper-wie-geeft-richting-aan-het-drone-debat

Appendix 1: Interview guide

A. General

1. Could you tell me about your current and/or previous work and how your work relates to Turkey's drone strikes in northern and eastern Syria?

B. Questions about Turkey's remote warfare practices in northern Syria

2. In your opinion, what are Turkey's strategic objectives with its remote warfare practices in Syria?
   ~ Have these objectives changed or been achieved over the years, and if so, how?
   ~ Do these objectives differ for the attacks during military operations and the ones happening scattered over the years?
   ~ Do these objectives differ for the different areas where it carries out drone strikes?
3. Do you see any patterns in the way Turkey is using its drones in northern Syria?
4. In your opinion, how does Turkey benefit from its remote warfare activities in northern Syria?
5. In the process of deciding on Turkish drone policy towards northern Syria, are there other actors beside President Erdoĝan who have a say in this matter?
   ~ Who decides on Turkey's day-to-day drone activities in northern Syria?
6. Looking at the specifics of how Turkey has used its drones in the major military operations, what was the role of the drones in these operations? Did the drones just clear the ground for the ground troops to enter? Or did they have other functions?
7. Looking at the current practices of targeted strikes in northeastern Syria, are the drones accompanied by others tactics or other forms of intelligence? Or do these missions solely depend on the drones?
8. How do you think the earthquake will affect/affects Turkey's foreign policy towards the Syrian Kurds?

C. Questions about the relationship between Turkey’s drone capabilities and its foreign policy towards Syrian Kurds in northern Syria

9. What are the strategic implications of Turkish efforts to increase its drone capabilities for Turkish foreign policy towards northern Syria?
   ~ *Has the fact that they strive to produce it entirely domestically had any implications on this policy?*

10. Has Turkey’s increased drone capabilities, in your opinion, been of influence in shaping the development of its foreign policy towards northern Syria?

11. What is your opinion about the idea that Turkey’s increased drone capabilities has stimulated an increasingly aggressive approach towards Kurdish armed groups in northern Syria?

Appendix 2: Questions interview 15 in Turkish

1. Turkish: Kuzey Suriye'ye yönelik Türk dış politikası ve drone faaliyetlerine yönelik çalışmalarınızdan ve araştır; malarınızdan bahseder misiniz?
English: Could you tell me about the research you have conducted on Turkish foreign policy towards and drone activities in northern Syria?

2a. **Turkish:** Sizce kuzeydoğu ve kuzeybatı Suriye'deki drone faaliyetleriyle Türkiye'nin stratejik hedefleri nelerdir?
English: In your opinion, what are Turkey's strategic objectives with its drone activities in north-eastern and north-western Syria?

2b. **Turkish:** Bu hedefler yıllar içinde değişti mi?
English: Have these objectives changed over the years?

2c. **Turkish:** Bu hedefler, son yıllarda Suriye'de yürüttüğü büyük askeri operasyonlar ve kuzeydoğu Suriye'de gerçekleşen cerrahi saldırılar için farklı mı?
English: Are these objectives different for the major military operations it has conducted in Syria and the surgical strikes that are taking place in northeastern Syria?

3. Turkish: Türkiye'nin Suriye'nin kuzeyinde insansız hava araçlarını kullanma biçiminde herhangi bir model görüyor musunuz? Saldırı hedeflerini, konumu, zamanlamayı düşünün.
English: Do you see any patterns in the way Turkey is using its drones in northern Syria? Think about the target selection, the location, the timing.

4. Turkish: Sizce Türkiye, Suriye'nin kuzeyindeki savaşında İHA kullanmaktan nasıl bir fayda sağlıyor?
English: In your opinion, how does Turkey benefit from using drones in its war in northern Syria?

5. Turkish: Sizce Erdoğan'ın yanı sıra Suriye'deki Kürt silahlı gruplarına ilişkin Türk İHA politikasına karar veren başka kilit aktörler var mı? Örneğin MİT?
English: Do you think there are other key actors beside Erdoĝan who decide on Turkish drone policy regarding Kurdish armed groups in Syria? For example, the MIT?

6. Turkish: Sizce Türkiye'nin artan drone kabiliyetleri, Suriye'deki Kürtlere yönelik Dış Politikasının şekillenmesinde etkili oldu mu? Yoksa Türkiye'nin artan insansız hava aracı yetenekleri, yalnızca Kuzey Suriye'deki dış politika emellerini kolaylaştırıcı olarak mı hareket etti?
English: Has Turkey's increased drone capabilities, in your opinion, been of influence in shaping the development of its Foreign Policy regarding the Kurds in Syria? Or has Turkey's increased drone capabilities acted solely as an enabler of foreign policy ambitions in northern Syria?

Appendix 3: Questions interview 16 written format

A. Questions about Turkey's remote warfare practices in northern Syria

1. In your opinion, what are Turkey's strategic objectives with its remote warfare practices in northern Syria?

   a. *Have these objectives changed or been achieved over the years, and if so, how?*

   b. Do these objectives for the use of drones differ for the cross-border military operations and for the precise attacks happening in northeastern Syria?

   c. Do these objectives differ for the different areas where it carries out drone strikes (the north-east and north-west?

2. Do you see any patterns in the way Turkey is using its drones in northern Syria?

   Think about: type of targets, (geographical) location of targets, civilian casualties, timing of strikes, periods of escalation vs relative calm?

3. According to my knowledge, Turkey has used/uses the TB2, Akinci and Anka drones and loitering munition (Kargu) in northern Syria. Can you confirm this? Do they also deploy other drones?

   a. *Do these different drones serve different purposes? Or, in other words, are the different drones deployed for different reasons, matching the drones' qualities?*

   b. If so, which drone is deployed for what purposes?

4. In your opinion, how does Turkey benefit from its remote warfare activities in northern Syria?

5. Are there other actors beside Erdoĝan that decide on Turkish Foreign Policy towards northern Syria?

   a. *Who decides on Turkey's day-to-day drone activities in north-eastern Syria?*

6. Looking at the specifics of how Turkey has used its drones in the cross-border military operations, what was the role of the drones in these operations? Did the drones, for example, clear the ground for the ground troops to enter? Or did they have other functions?

7. Looking at the current practices of targeted strikes in north-eastern Syria, are the drones accompanied by others tactics or other forms of intelligence? Or do these missions solely depend on the drones?

8. Why do you think Turkey's use of drones in northeastern Syria has increased significantly since 2021?

9. Turkey has only targeted energy infrastructure in the period of escalation in October/November 2022. Why do you think they primarily target individuals and not more often this type of infrastructure?

10. If we compare Turkey's different cross-border military operations in northern Syria, we see that the first one (Euphrates Shield) lasted seven months, the second one (Olive Branch) lasted two months and Spring Shield and Peace Spring lasted about a week. Why do you think the first operation lasted relatively long while the others were shorter and shorter?

11. Experts often disagree about Turkey's regard for civilian casualties when using drones in northern Syria. Do you think there are relatively many or few civilian casualties in Turkey's drone strikes in northern Syria? Why do you think this is the case?

B. Questions about the relationship between Turkey's drone capabilities and its Foreign Policy regarding Syrian Kurds in northern Syria

12. What have been the strategic implications of Turkey's efforts to increase its drone capabilities for Turkish foreign policy towards northern Syria?
    a. *Has the fact that they strive to produce it entirely domestically had any implications on this policy?*

13. Has Turkey's increased drone capabilities, in your opinion, been of influence in shaping the development of its Foreign Policy towards northern Syria?
    a. In other words, has Turkey adjusted its Foreign Policy towards northern Syria on the basis of its enhanced drone capabilities?