

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: TURKEY'S STATUS-SEEKING  
POLICIES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

A Master's Thesis

by

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August 2020

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Bilkent University 2020



*To My Family and Feyza*

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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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In partial fulfillments of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE DEPARTMENT OF  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY  
ANKARA

August 2020

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations.



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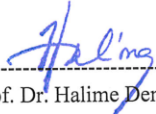
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **GREAT EXPECTATIONS: TURKEY'S STATUS-SEEKING POLICIES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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August 2020

This thesis aims to analyze the role of status concerns in Turkish foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Utilizing Richard Ned Lebow's theory that he built in his book *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, this research argues that Turkish foreign policy makers have been adopting policies that are primarily driven by status-concerns. Although status concerns are rooted in the human need for self-esteem, they have systemic consequences as they govern political behavior. Benefitting two other complementary theories -Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Prospect Theory-, this thesis demonstrates how numerous agendas in Turkish foreign policy are the manifestations of this human motive. While SIT is employed to identify the policies that are pursued to enhance Turkey's status in the international system, Prospect Theory is used to explain Turkey's risky and ambitious policies after the Arab Spring which were resulted from the reference point bias. Ranging from the EU accession

process to the most recent policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, this thesis analyzes various major foreign policy agendas and offers a new way of thinking in examining Turkish foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Human nature, Reference point bias, Social Identity Theory, Status-seeking, Turkish Foreign Policy

## ÖZET

### BÜYÜK UMUTLAR: 21. YÜZYIL'DA TÜRKİYE'NİN STATÜ ARAYIŞ POLİTİKALARI

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Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Ağustos 2020

Bu tez, 21. Yüzyılda Türk dış politikasındaki statü kaygılarının rolünü analizlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Richard Ned Lebow'un *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* kitabında kurduđu teoriden faydalanarak, bu araştırma Türk dış politika yürütücülerinin öncelikli olarak statü kaygılarını esas alan politikalar bensimediğini ileri sürmektedir. Statü kaygıları insanın özsaygı ihtiyacından kaygılanıyor olmasına rağmen, siyasal davranışı kontrol ettiđi için sistemsel sonuçları vardır. Diğer iki bütünleyici teoriden faydalanarak -Sosyal Kimlik Teorisi (SKT) ve Beklenti Teorisi-, bu tez Türk dış politikasındaki birçok gündemin bu insani güdünün tezahürü olduğunu göstermektedir. SKT Türkiye'nin uluslararası sistemdeki statüsünü arttırmak için yürütülen politikaları tespit etmek için kullanılırken, Beklenti Teorisi Türkiye'nin Arap Baharı sonrasındaki referans noktası yanılmasından kaynaklanan riskli ve hırslı politikaları açıklamak için kullanılmıştır. AB katılım sürecinden son zamanlarda Dođu



Akdeniz'deki politikalara uzanan birçok dıř politika gündemini analiz etmektedir ve Türk dıř politikasını incelemek için yeni bir düşünce tarzı önermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İnsan doğası, referans noktası yanılması, Sosyal Kimlik Teorisi, statü arayışları, Türk Dıř Politikası

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Asst. Prof. Dr. Seçkin Köstem for his invaluable guidance, encouragement and patience throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies at Bilkent University. I have been extremely lucky and privileged to have a supervisor who has immense knowledge and always an understanding attitude.

I gratefully acknowledge Prof. Dr. Ersel Aydınli for teaching me a lot more than academic knowledge, for his guidance about my future studies, for accepting to join my thesis committee and his insightful comments. I also would like to thank Prof. Dr. Emel Parlar Dal for accepting to take part in my thesis committee and for her constructive criticisms.

I wish to extend my gratitude to my sisters Bilge Betül and Buşra Zeynep for their continuous support in my life and my education. I also express my love to my little niece Amine Pelin for her unending emotional support with her innocence and beautiful smile.

My whole-hearted gratitude goes to my parents Hatice and Hüseyin Yılmaz, for all the things they have done for me throughout my whole life and their unconditional support. Without the support of my parents, this and many other achievements would not have been possible. I am indebted to them in every step in my life and my academic career.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Feyza, who has always been patient and understanding during all my absences and my travails throughout this process. I feel greatly fortunate to have her in my life and will always be grateful for all the things I have learned from her. Her passion and positivity in life will always be an inspiration for me.

For all the support and love, I am thankful to all of you.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A major part of the literature on Turkish foreign policy addresses several critical junctures and demonstrates the reasons and motivations behind these turning points in Turkish foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Considering major changes both in Turkey's domestic affairs and the international system, scholars have been positing various arguments on the possible impacts of these incidents on Turkish foreign policy. There is no doubt in saying that these arguments indeed enriched our understanding of the motivational grounds of Turkish foreign policy. However, rather than specifying the changes, this thesis demonstrates a coherent composition or motivational continuities in Turkish foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) governments by drawing on social and political psychology literature.

While, for instance, in 2015, Turkey became the first NATO member in 50 years to down a Russian aircraft, it then became the first country to possibly deploy Russian S-400 missile defense system on a NATO member's territory. On the other hand, even though at the beginning of the 2000s one-third of the Turkish Constitution was rewritten together with a series of reforms to be able to join the EU, this policy lost its primacy and even, at one point, Turkish state elites declared their consideration to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Although these shifts can be considered as major changes in Turkish foreign policy, and indeed they are, I argue that there is motivational continuity stemming from human nature. Drawing on Richard Ned Lebow's (2008) theory that he established in his book *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, I argue that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Turkish foreign policy has primarily been driven by the desire for higher status in the international system, or by what he calls *spirit*.

Lebow offers (2008) three fundamental human drives that govern people's desires and determine individuals' behavior which are *appetite*, *reason*, and *spirit*. While appetite refers to physiological desires like food, wealth, or sex, reason prevents the excesses of spirit and appetite. Finally, the spirit is the human drive for self-esteem or people's need to feel good about themselves which is achieved by excelling in the dimensions that are deemed as valuable by the society that this particular actor lives in. In their application of desire for status to international relations, Paul et al. (2014) argue that wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, and even a country's performance in the Olympic Games can be dimensions for status ranking. However, the aim is not to have better material capabilities or broader sphere of influence with diplomatic clout, rather it is to best others in these dimensions to be recognized as a high-status actor (Ellemers, 1993). Nevertheless, status is "socially scarce" and high-status cannot be attained by everyone (Paul et al., 2014, p. 9). This prompts states to pursue a wide range of policies, either conflictual or collaborative, to outperform others in the dimensions that are valued by the international society. The manifestation of the desire for status in international relations, I argue, is explanatory of Turkey's conflictual and collaborative foreign policy agendas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, as directly equalizing the motives of individuals with states would be erroneous or inaccurate, I utilize *Social Identity Theory* to explain how the motives of individuals are being influential in the countries' foreign policy agendas and which strategies countries employ to have a higher status in the international system.

Although these theories and the methods with which I will link the theories with the empirical evidence will be examined thoroughly in Chapters 2 and 3, getting a glimpse of these theories is essential to summarize my arguments in this thesis. The

foundational assumptions of Social Identity Theory (SIT) are about the value that the individuals attach to the membership of a group or a country (Tajfel, 1978b). While people define their identity with the links that they have with certain groups or nationalities, they also manage to have self-esteem when their nations or groups achieve to have higher status by outperforming the groups that they compare themselves with in the relevant dimensions. Onea (2014) argues that as the leaders are the representatives of their nations, they put even more emphasis on the status of their countries as it becomes more vital to their desire for self-esteem. Therefore, state leaders' desire for self-esteem prompts them to adopt policies that have the potential to increase the status of their countries in the international status hierarchy. Besides, although it is not within the scope of this thesis, these policies are frequently pursued in order to appeal to the public opinion and to ensure social cohesion within the country. Therefore, people's desire for self-esteem manifests itself in international relations which is why I argue that human nature has systemic consequences.

More importantly, SIT proposes that the actors give three different responses according to the conditions that they face in their society in order to achieve self-esteem. The first of these responses is *social mobility* which refers to the condition when an actor endeavors to emulate the behaviors of an elite club in order to join them as a member and enhance its status in the society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, for an actor to adopt this strategy, the doors of the elite club must be open to new members (Larson & Shevchenko, 2014). The policies that are pursued to join elite clubs like the EU can be categorized as social mobility policies. On the other hand, if the elite club does not accept new members and the actor regards the status hierarchy as illegitimate by believing that there is a gap between its deserved status



and the status ascribed to it, it adopts *social competition* strategies. It refers to the policies that aim to outdo the other state on relevant dimensions of comparison. Arms race or scramble for having higher influence on a particular region can be given examples of social competition. Finally, when the actor cannot get into the elite club but perceives its status within the status hierarchy as legitimate, it might adopt *social creativity* strategies. States pursue this strategy to show their uniqueness or their better performance in a distinct dimension in order to enhance their status. Overall, I argue that SIT is a useful tool in explaining Turkish foreign policy as Turkish foreign policy makers adopted all these strategies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it is also helpful to demonstrate how Lebow's delineation of human nature is manifested in Turkish foreign policy. Nonetheless, another proposition of SIT claims that the actors choose comparisons with particular others that have similar status in their society or rather, pick comparisons after which they are likely to prevail and have a higher status within the status hierarchy (Abrams & Hogg, 2006). However, by examining the Turkish case, I argue that Turkey compared itself with the countries that have a much higher status in the international system after the Arab Spring.

Although Turkey's deserved status was relatively acknowledged in international society, Turkish foreign policy makers adopted social competition strategies against various major powers in the international system after the Arab Spring. Regarding this puzzle that occurred after 2011, I benefit from *Prospect Theory*. The main proposition of this theory is that the individuals are risk-averse with respect to gains and risk acceptant with respect to losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Yet, countries determine the losses or gains according to their reference points which are often framed around the status quo. In other words, what represents a status gain or status loss depends on the country as each one has a different position

in the international status hierarchy. Referring to prospect theory, Greve and Levy (2018) argue that rising state leaders seldom determine a reference point superior to the status-quo based on positive future outcomes. I argue that their argument is explanatory for Turkish foreign policy after the Arab Spring as Turkish state elites determined a status reference point superior to status-quo with great expectations for the future. That is why they started to feel a continuous loss in Turkey's status after the Arab Spring and adopted risky foreign policies to reach its aspiration level in the international system.

Therefore, utilizing the aforementioned three complementary theories, this thesis endeavors to find an answer to a simple question: What is the role of status concerns in Turkish foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? My main hypothesis is that Turkish foreign policy has been primarily driven by status concerns. Referring to SIT, I argue that while Turkey adopted social mobility and social creativity strategies to increase its standing in the international status hierarchy before the Arab Spring, it started pursuing social competition strategies after 2011. The reason why Turkish foreign policy makers started to believe that there was a gap between the status that Turkey deserved and the one that was ascribed to it is that they determined a reference level that was well-above Turkey's deserved status. That is to say that the international status hierarchy was not illegitimate like Turkish foreign policy makers believed, but rather they determined a status aspiration level that was above its deserved status. This eventually prompted the key individuals to compare Turkey with major powers in the international system. As its aspiration level was repudiated by the international society, Turkish foreign policy makers started to have a continuous feeling of loss and pursue highly risky social competition strategies.

While status concerns have been relatively neglected in the literature on Turkish foreign policy, its applications to Turkish foreign policy have recently become the subject of scholarly attention (Zarakol, 2012; Parlar Dal, 2019a; 2019b; Parlar Dal & Dipama, 2019; Aydınlı & Mathews, 2020). This thesis contributes to the growing literature by exploring numerous major foreign policy agendas of Turkey and their links to the leaders' status concerns throughout an almost 20 years period. More importantly, while several policies in Turkish foreign policy like the downing of a Russian aircraft or risking Turkey's NATO membership to buy S400s are deemed as anomalies in Turkish foreign policy, I explain how these policies are parts of whole Turkish status-seeking policies or Turkey's responses to the repudiation of its aspiration level. Thus, this thesis endeavors to show that the material interests or ideational factors that have been discussed in the literature are manifestations of human nature and they are frequently unintentionally used as tools to satisfy Turkish state leaders' desires to achieve higher status and improve self-esteem. That is to say that this thesis analyzes a relatively less-explored area of research and introduces a new way of thinking on Turkish foreign policy.

It is important to study Turkish status-seeking policies in today's international relations as Turkey plays active roles both in several areas in the world now and in international organizations. Besides, examining alternative explanations to the motives behind Turkey's policies can help explain its major foreign policy agendas today like its active stance in the Libyan Civil War. More importantly, the argument of this thesis can be expanded to numerous other rising powers and might give clues about the possible future challenges of rising powers to the international system or the hegemonic power. Therefore, this study is important in not only explaining or predicting Turkish foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but also it can be applied to a

wide range of countries to analyze the role of status concerns in their foreign policy agendas.

Although research methodology will be explained thoroughly in Chapter 3, I will briefly lay out the methods that will be used to link the aforementioned theories with the empirical evidence throughout the thesis. As the status dimensions are determined in a particular society and status is bestowed by the other actors in this society, there is little doubt in saying that status is a socially constructed phenomenon. That is the foremost reason why the research on status faces methodological problems both in measuring status and demonstrating its importance. SIT or prospect theory are helpful to show how one can designate the manifestations of human nature in international relations or how state leaders behave with respect to gains or losses of status. However, which policies are particularly pursued in order to attain higher status or the ranking where the state leaders believe their countries' status to be at are uncertain. To overcome these problems, I utilize two concepts from within the status literature which are *status marker* and *status signaling*. According to Gilady (2018), countries' wasteful efforts to have status markers like aircraft carriers or having a seat in the UNSC in today's international politics show the extent to which they are concerned with their status and which policies are particularly pursued with status concerns. Throughout the thesis, I will address these policies and Turkey's efforts to attain status markers in the international system to show the role of status concerns in particular agendas in Turkish foreign policy. On the other hand, status signaling refers to the acts which reflect the state leaders' beliefs about their countries' deserved status. State leaders can signal their preferred status in the international system in numerous different ways like their diplomatic activity or rhetorical position in global affairs. I will utilize the process-tracing

method to show the causal chains between events and examine the gradual changes in Turkish state leaders' signaling of Turkey's status or the changes in their eagerness to attain status markers.

The contribution of this thesis to the existing literature on Turkish foreign policy is that it demonstrates the possible problems in several existing arguments by offering a new perspective to examine long-lasting foreign policy agendas in the last 20 years and brings a psychological explanation to the swift changes in Turkish foreign policy. While, for instance, the EU accession process has never been examined from this perspective, Turkey's other status-seeking policies are relatively less-explored. Besides, although Turkish foreign policy after the Arab Spring and especially in the Syrian Civil War has been analyzed from interest-based or ideational perspectives, this thesis draws a broader perspective. It argues that although all these arguments are accurate to an extent, they either only emphasize "appetite and fear" by neglecting "spirit" or focus only on identity which I argue to be constituted by the aforementioned fundamental human motives.

As my argument is primarily built on the perceptions and psychologies of the key individuals in Turkey, the second chapter is a comprehensive discussion on why I believe in the explanatory power of the individual level and how other state or system-level International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) theories have less explanatory power in explaining countries' foreign policy behaviors.

Chapter 3 introduces the literature on status, the concepts that are used throughout the thesis, and explains the differences between similar concepts like honor, status, reputation, prestige, and recognition to overcome conceptual confusion. Besides, it displays the main propositions of the three complementary

theories that are utilized to examine leaders' motivations and demonstrates how these theories create a theoretical mosaic to explain important puzzles in Turkish foreign policy. Moreover, it shows how the theories are linked with the empirical chapters by introducing the research methodology.

Chapter 4 brings corroborative evidence that Turkey pursued social mobility and social creativity strategies by addressing several agendas in Turkish foreign policy and examining state leaders' speeches. While Turkey's accession process to the EU was social mobility strategy to enter an elite club, its policies like foreign aid agenda were social creativity strategies.

Chapter 5 examines Turkish foreign policy after the Arab Spring and demonstrates why the Arab Spring was a turning point. It argues that the foreign policy makers, starting from 2011, had reference point bias which prompted them to pursue highly risky social competition strategies like Turkey's policies throughout the Syrian Civil War.

Chapter 6 summarizes the main arguments of this thesis and highlights the limitations of this research. Finally, it offers new areas for further research on the role of status concerns in Turkish foreign policy.

## **CHAPTER II: THEORIES ON DIFFERENT LEVELS AND THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

For decades now, scholars of international relations have been formulating various theories and answers to the questions regarding the determinants of countries' foreign policy actions in the international system. Although the majority of theories have been built on the reasons why the nations fight and their motivations behind international conflicts, there are also many others that strive to explain different aspects of countries' international behavior such as foreign economic policy-making theories. Much the same as the variety of topics, agents or structural factors that might account for countries' behavior in the international system are also considered to be numerous in the foreign policy analysis literature. To categorize and simplify these possible determinants of foreign policy behavior, many scholars have developed typologies or frameworks. In this chapter, I will examine these typologies, frameworks, international relations theories derived from them and also explain why I argue the individual level of analysis has more explanatory power in international politics. As this is a study on status concerns within foreign policies of countries, I argue it is essential to analyze well-developed research programs on international politics to take a preliminary step and demonstrate why I will put more emphasis on individual level before discussing the theoretical propositions about the status concerns of Turkish foreign policy in the following chapter.

However, it is important to note that like many other phenomena in the international system, status concerns of countries can also best be understood by examining all three levels. As it will be discussed in the third chapter, status is bestowed by the society whereas its motivational ground stems from human nature. That, understandably, prompts scholars to study status and its impacts at multiple

levels. Yet, stating that the individual level has higher explanatory power is not to say that it is possible to comprehend a state's foreign policy concerns without examining other levels or that other levels are unnecessary to comprehend countries' foreign policy objectives as a state's status is bestowed by the society of states, and individual level is by no means sufficient by itself in examine foreign policies of countries. It is rather to say that motivational grounds of foreign policies of countries are mainly rooted in human nature. Therefore, it is not the international system that makes people strive for higher-status or more wealth but it is mainly the human nature that stimulates international scramble for higher-status. While the reasons why I argue that the status concerns are influential in states' foreign policies will be discussed in the third chapter, this chapter will examine how foreign policies of countries are mainly related to statesmen's perceptions, fundamental human motives and thereby to the individual-level.

## **2.1 Waltz's Typology and System-Level Theories**

The typology that Kenneth Waltz (1959) built in *Man, The State and War* has particularly been useful and benefitted by a myriad of scholars. In his book, Waltz proposes three images, later referred to as levels by Singer (1961), to categorize the root causes of nations' behavior in international relations. By referring to earlier works of scholars who argued either the root of all wars can be found in human nature and behavior or the reasons of war arouse within the internal structure of the states and societies, he introduced first and second images which are also referred to as individual and state level of analysis. Yet, by arguing that the anarchic system enforces its judgment to all states, he believes that international conflict is inevitable mostly because of systemic constraints. Although he thinks that the first two levels of analysis are also needed for the comprehension of international relations and in fact



are determinants of foreign policy, the anarchic nature of the international system is where the major causes of war lie (Waltz, 1959). That is to say that the individual and state level of analysis can also be the causes of actual occurrences of wars or foreign policy decisions of countries but the international system is, as he calls, the permissive cause which enables conditions for international conflict and is the root cause of states' desire to survive. Therefore, Waltz argues that his third image is not the immediate cause of war, and thereby the actual determinants of many foreign policy decisions, but it is where one must scrutinize to find the roots of international conflict.

Together with the neorealist theory that he developed in 1979, Waltz's typology and his emphasis on the third image inspired scholars of international relations to establish many divergent system-level theories on the determinants of international politics (1979). Yet, he later commentated on neorealist theory by saying that it explains the recurrence of war in the international system but it cannot trace the actual causes of certain foreign policy decision or particular wars. In fact, he believes, a combination of three levels is needed to explain the certain reasons for particular wars (Waltz, 1988, p. 620). Therefore, "Waltzian neorealism" is inadequate or rather inapplicable in explaining foreign policy behavior and therefore is not within the scope of this chapter. On the other hand, however, offensive realist scholars offered a different view by claiming that offensive realism explains the general tendencies in foreign policies of countries and the immediate causes of international conflict without having to examine other levels of analysis like domestic factors (Zakaria, 1992; Mearsheimer, 2001). They argue that it is a compulsion for all states, in the presence of a zero-sum and uncertain international system, to act aggressively and to secure themselves by adopting power-maximizing

strategies. In fact, for Mearsheimer (2001), the greatest strategy for a state to ensure its security is to achieve hegemony. That is to say that the anarchic nature of the international system prompts states to adopt aggressive strategies that generally yield to wars.

However, numerous hypotheses and concepts are contrasted with offensive neorealism and one of its main assumptions which argues that the best way for a state to ensure its security is to achieve hegemony. An example of that is the balance of power theorists' suggestion that the most important goal of states is to avoid a hegemonic power in the international system. It is a concept whose history traces back to the very early text of international politics. For instance, David Hume (1752) deemed the balance of power as the perpetual rule of politics and thereby foreign policies of countries. Despite numerous versions of the balance of power theory were established until today, most scholars share the basic assumption that states strive to ensure their survival and to prevent hegemony. Besides, these scholars also agree upon the idea that a coalition will be formed to balance any state that strives to be a hegemon (Levy & Thompson, 2011). Nonetheless, by examining the international structure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many discussions on the propositions of the balance of power theory have been held. Absence of a balancing coalition against the United States brought many questions to the literature on the balance of power and therefore to the literature on the determinants of states' foreign policies. Additional concepts like soft-balancing or underbalancing were introduced to explain the causes of why other great powers did not form a coalition to prevent U.S. hegemony (Paul, 2004; Scweller, 2005). The argument behind soft-balancing is that weaker states do not participate in the costly act of balancing against the overwhelming military power of

the United States and rather, through other means, complicate the process through which the hegemon takes unilateral actions (Paul, 2004).

The aforementioned additions to the balance of power theory were criticized by numerous scholars. Mowle and Sacko (2007) argue that the argument behind soft-balancing is not different from not balancing and therefore erroneous (p. 147). More interestingly, regarding today's "unbalanced" international system, several scholars argued that concepts like the balance of power are now obsolete. They assert that the international system is no longer anarchic by exemplifying the long-lasting peace in the world (Lebow, 1994; Legro & Moravcsik, 1999). Even Waltz admits that the conditions under which he wrote his theory have changed and today's conditions in the international system are not natural (2000). Although many other scholars attributed states' passivity in not restoring the balance of power and forming an alliance against the U.S. to the changing nature of the international system, others proposed alternative explanations.

Bandwagoning was the first to many alternative explanations which was introduced by Quincy Wright (1942) who termed this state policy as "underdog policy" (p. 136). This refers to the strategy when weak states do not resist the force of a stronger belligerent state as they are not able to balance the adversary and therefore chose to align with it not to face the cost of a destructive conflict. However, Waltz (1979) questions the term and claims that the states do not join the stronger side to maximize their power because their first concern in the international system is to maintain their positions (p. 126). Since bandwagoning allows the stronger state to acquire even more power, it is not how states act in the international system. A more comprehensive criticism both to the balance of power and bandwagoning concepts was made by Stephen Walt. He claimed that these concepts are framed only in terms

of power which is why these hypotheses are flawed. States balance or bandwagon with or against another state not according to it being the most powerful state but according to it being the most threatening power. According to him, together with the aggregate power of a country, other major factors that might increase or decrease the level of threat of a state for another state. These factors can be summarized as the geographical proximity, offensive capability and also offensive intentions (Walt, 1985, pp. 8-9). Put differently, a close weaker state can be more threatening than other great powers and thus, a state might align with stronger countries to overcome the problems stemming from its proximity with these certain countries. Regarding today's international relations, this theory contradicts severely with other theories and brings about a divergent explanation for balancing or bandwagoning behaviors of the countries. That is why, while examining states' foreign policy behavior under the U.S. hegemony, Walt (1985) argues that the countries did not adopt aggressive foreign policy behaviors against the U.S. as it is not the most threatening power to them because of the factors that are mentioned above.

An important contribution to the balance of power debate and to the discussion of why the U.S. hegemony remained unbalanced, is Mearsheimer's take up on Cristopher Layne's (1997) concept of offshore balancing. Offshore balancing is a concept that refers to a great power's foreign policy strategy. A great power that adopts the offshore balancing strategy aims to align with countries in certain parts of the world to contain a potential threat or prevent the rise of a hostile state.

Mearsheimer (2008) believes that offshore balancing has been the U.S.' grand strategy for a long time which is why it has not been faced with a balancing coalition in the aftermath of the Cold War. That is to say that the offshore balancing strategy of the hegemonic power influences other states' foreign policy behavior and thus, the

absence of a balancing act can be explained by the dominance of an offshore country in the international system.

Another argument about the aftermath of the Cold War that attributes the stability in the international system to its unipolar nature is the hegemonic stability theory. Scholars' main assertion is that the states in the international system do not endeavor to balance or strive to adopt aggressive policies for furthering their impact in the international system in the presence of hegemonic power (Gilpin, 1981). Put differently, stability in the international system is not dependent on the balance of power between powerful states but on the existence of a hegemon. The reason why the existence of hegemonic state ensures the stability can be explained with Robert Gilpin's assumptions on the states' foreign policy behaviors. Believing that the stability of the system depends on the hegemonic power, he asserts that the states' foreign policy behaviors depend on their perceptions towards the international structure. To elaborate, if no state perceives it to be profitable to change the status quo in the international system, the system will remain stable as countries believe it to be very costly to initiate a change under the rule of a hegemon (Gilpin, 1981, pp. 10-11). Therefore, he believes that the states or group of states benefit from cost-benefit calculations and would be discouraged if a hegemon's power increases the costliness of change in the international system. As opposed to that, however, Keohane (1988) later found it accurate but rather incomplete in explaining international stability and completely attributing the pattern of order in international relations to the existence of a hegemonic power. In fact, he explains why it can be in the interests of states to pursue cooperative behavior in their foreign policy agenda by not simply underlining altruism in the international relations but demonstrating the rationale of this behavior. The international institutions and regimes, which he

described as persistent rules that prescribe activities in international relations, are demanded by the states since these countries are eager to establish a legal framework for reducing risks and to have better information from the international system. That is to say, as opposed to many theories discussed above, Keohane (1982) states that the conditions in the international system prompt states to facilitate agreements between themselves to establish international regimes and thereby reduce uncertainty in the system which overlaps with the states' interests. Therefore, without a hegemonic rule, the balance of power and altruism in the international system, Keohane believes, stability and international order are possible as the states' interests lie in the stability of the system.

The aforementioned theories are discussed as they are proved to be well-developed research programs and proposes the states' foreign policy behavior from the system-level perspective. However, A.F.K. Organski's power transition theory will be discussed since it attracted a lot of attention in the international relations literature but also it relates to the core of my study. His theory puts forth another view on the causes of foreign policy behavior from the system level. Power transition theory puts states into four different categories according to both their degree of power and also their degree of satisfaction within the international system and he believes that these criteria determine the states' possible foreign policy agenda. He offers a dichotomous understanding between powerful, weak and satisfied, dissatisfied countries, and suggests that countries adopt policies in line with their positions on the power-satisfaction axis. Although there are weak and dissatisfied countries, they are not as powerful as rising challengers that have the potential to change the system through mostly conflictual means. More importantly, power transition theory asserts that a rapid rise in power produces dissatisfaction in itself

and is elicits conditions that are conducive to international conflict (Organski, 1968, p. 371). Despite agreeing with Organski's several propositions, I share Greve and Levy's (2018) concern about a core assumption of power transition theory. Power transition theory claims that a rising power will be dissatisfied with the material benefits that this state receives from the international system. However, I believe, together with Greve and Levy, that a rising state can also be dissatisfied with its status in the international system which is an intangible source of dissatisfaction (p. 155). In other words, limiting the causes of dissatisfaction with material benefits is misleading since the states also perceive the higher-status as an end in itself in the international system. Therefore, a rising power might be a threat to the international order both because of its dissatisfaction with the material benefits that it receives from the system and also the rising-state leaders' perceptions towards their country's deserved status in the international hierarchy.

On the other hand, leaders' perspectives are inseparable wholes with the countries' foreign policy behavior as discussed above. That is to say, like other aforementioned system-level theories, power transition theorists also failed to incorporate individuals' perspectives in their hypotheses and ignored the state leaders' misperceptions towards other states, the system and also their own states' statuses in the international structure. In other words, another reason why I argue the explanatory level of individual level is higher than the system-level theories is that I argue, following Robert Jervis (2017), that all states would react similarly if the international environment or the system-level would be the only determinant of states' foreign policy behavior (p. 18). Nonetheless, scholars like Arnold Wolfers (1965) argues that if the external circumstances in the international system are grave, there is no need to focus on the decision-making level since everyone would run

away from “a house on fire” (p. 14). Like many scholars who believed in the higher explanatory power of the individual level, Jervis attempted to debunk Wolfers’s argument by giving the Hitler example during the Second World War. Although Hitler took power in the early 1930s, Chamberlain perceived the existence of a fire in 1939 and for many other state leaders, there was no fire at all (Jervis, 2017, p. 21). Thus, although the signal from the external environment was extreme, not all state leaders perceived it in the same way and thus, the gravity of the situation during WWII did not prompt all countries to respond in the same way. On the other hand, assuming that all countries responded in the same way, it still does not support the propositions of the system-level theories since it might be not because of the clarity of the external circumstances but can be because the state-leaders believed this to be the case. All in all, Jervis (2017) debunks numerous system-level theories, rightly so, by adducing historical examples to accentuate discrepancies between their propositions and facts. Despite there are many other system-level theories, it is not fruitful to discuss each of them as they do not contribute to the discussion of this chapter and are not relevant to the main argument of this study. However, in addition to the discussed system-level theories, numerous scholars suggested distinct frameworks that benefit from the combination of levels of analyses by believing that one needs to scrutinize the combination of various levels to comprehend the actual causes of the states’ behavior.

## **2.2 Multiple-Level Frameworks and Neoclassical Realism**

Although many scholars adopted Waltz’s typology, many others revised it by thinking that it is either inaccurate or incomplete and by putting emphasis on other levels or even the combination of them. Levy and Thompson (2011) found it flawed as they assert that there are many factors in the international system that cannot be



put into any of the categories. Referring to interactions between states which they call as dyadic level, they assert that the history of relations between countries might predispose state leaders to construe the actions of other countries in certain ways. Besides, there are also non-state actors in the international system that have increasingly more impact on the behaviors of other actors which cannot be categorized in any of Waltz's three images. More importantly, they reject the idea that if the dyadic and system levels are the major determinants of international conflict, any reasonable state or political leader would behave in the same way and assert that scholars of international relations have to look at the combination of these three levels to identify the causes of war (p. 16).

Suggesting a different framework, Alexander Wendt (1987) draws attention to the agent-structure problem in international politics. In his constructivist framework, Wendt criticizes several theories by asserting that these theories make either state agents or system structures as their ontologically primitive units. Put differently, these theories presume either states as the actors that transform the system or the international environment as the system that structure the relations between these states. However, as Wendt (1987) claims, the states and the international system are mutually constituted entities and therefore each is the effect of the other and cannot be treated as given (p. 339). Therefore, as these factors are interdependent, one must examine their codetermination to explain the causes of international politics.

Together with Levy, Thompson and, Wendt, there are many others that either adopt these frameworks to their theories or while not benefitting from them, stress the significance of multiple levels in their theories and thus, in explaining the nature of international politics. Neoclassical realist theory is a comprehensive critique of the

system and state-level theories and is a way of thinking that strives to broaden our understanding of international politics by encapsulating different levels of analyses. The name of this theory is coined by Rose Gideon (1998) in one of his book reviews, in which he argued that several scholars like Fareed Zakaria and William C. Wohlforth established this mid-range theory (p. 144). Although there are nuances between multifarious forms of this theory, they are all in line with the following arguments below that address the shortcomings of Waltz's typology and theory. Neoclassical realist scholars' first counter-argument to structural realism derives from the state leaders' perceptions. They argue that these leaders' perceptions are flawed and they might not be able to receive the signals that come from the international system correctly (Wohlforth, 1993). Related to this point, not all systemic stimuli are comprehensible or unambiguous which increases the complexity of the process in which the leaders endeavor to identify threats and opportunities. Even though this process could be tractable and is clear to be comprehended, leaders' responses to the problems or opportunities in the international system might not be rational as all statesmen have their distinct personalities or have different experiences (Byman & Pollack, 2001). Another crucial criticism is that the process of systemic circumstances and states' response to them is unlike the action and reaction in physics. That is to say that the states might not be able to mobilize the necessary resources to respond to the systemic signals because of domestic institutional and economic constraints. Therefore, by presenting these criticisms to structural realism, these scholars divert the scholarly attention to the variables that intervene to the systemic threats and opportunities (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 23). Despite agreeing on the problems of structural realism, different neoclassical realists brought about

divergent solutions or additions by incorporating the state level determinants to their theories.

Referring to numerous empirical examples from history like the absence of balancing act against Napoleonic France, Randall Schweller (2004) discusses various puzzling cases in which states failed to respond to increasingly rising threats in the international system. He suggests an explanation of these puzzles by stating that “underbalancing” or not responding to these problems in the international system can be comprehended by examining domestic politics. Defining underbalancing as a state’s inability to balance against a potential threat as a result of its domestic politics, Schweller addresses various distinct components of domestic politics. Ranging from social cohesion to regime vulnerability, he believes that these items of domestic politics restrain states to respond urgently to possible threats or at least delay their responses. On the other hand, Jeffrey Taliaferro (2004) attributes states’ behavior in coping with risky situations in the international system to the way that leaders’ process and comprehend international stimuli.

As opposed to these, however, Ripsman et al. (2016) find the propositions of this type of neoclassical realism as erroneous in many ways. They argue that these scholars assume that the international system delivers clear signals to the countries which might be an erroneous presumption for the nature of the international environment. More importantly, these theories cannot explain the majority of foreign policy behaviors as they are built to analyze rare circumstances or the cases which are surprising deviances from the expectations of structural realists. That is why Ripsman et al. contributed to the debate on neoclassical realism by introducing several variables that argued to be intervening to the international stimuli of which some have more impact than the other in certain times. Among these variables, they

count perceptions of state leaders, strategic culture and domestic institutions. Put differently, they believe these variables determine the way a state deals with the systemic stimuli and affect the way that these states pursue certain foreign policy agenda (2016). However, stating that domestic institutions or strategic culture of a country determine the way that these states respond to the international stimuli means that the change of a government or state leaders will not alter the official policies of a state in any way as they would also behave in accordance with the strategic culture of their state. More interestingly, if one is to examine the perceptions of state leaders, then this prompts us to, as Jervis (2017) argues, apply decision-making analysis to the bureaucratic level which would lose its distinctiveness from the individual level of analysis. Therefore, including numerous intervening variables made their theory lose its uniqueness and rather made it a combination of other arguments by also lacking parsimony.

Another type of neoclassical realism also benefits from multiple levels and strives to explain states' foreign policy behaviors by examining the impact of the domestic political coalition over how these countries perceive the systemic signals. To elaborate, for instance, Mark Brawley (2009) argues that the responses of Great Britain, France and, the Soviet Union to the resurgence of Germany after the First World War were divergent because of the difference between the domestic political coalitions in their countries. However, as mentioned above, Brawley's theory misrepresents the causes of their foreign policy behaviors by neglecting or oversimplifying the impacts of the imperfect nature of the international stimuli or the influence of the individuals' perceptions. To overcome aforementioned problems of neoclassical realist theories, Jervis (2017) offers his two-step model in which he emphasizes the significance of the individuals' perceptions and beliefs while also

factoring in the flaws of the international information available to these statesmen (pp. 28-31). Despite agreeing with Jervis's arguments in his model, I argue that state leaders' fundamental human drives in the form of the need for security, wealth and more importantly the envy for higher social status must be examined to explain a country's foreign policy behavior. In other words, rather than examining the state leaders' perceptions as intervening variables to systemic stimuli, I will analyze this relation in the "opposite way" and scrutinize the systemic consequences of individuals' perceptions and natural tendencies. Before discussing this in detail in the third chapter, state-level theories will be examined to discuss their explanatory power within the foreign policy analysis literature and to demonstrate why I put more emphasis on the individual-level than the state-level dynamics.

### **2.3 State Level Theories**

The difference of state level theories from neoclassical realist theory is that they analyze the systemic consequences of state-level actors like bureaucracy or domestic institutional structure rather than deeming them as intervening variables to the pressures from the international system. In other words, while the starting point or independent variable is the international system for neoclassical realists, it is in the opposite way for the state-level theorists (Ripsman et al., 2016).

Although Waltz puts all societal and governmental factors into his second image, Jervis (2017), to have a clearer classification of factors that are considered to be influential in foreign policy behavior, divided this level into two to as domestic determinants and the bureaucratic politics. However, before examining the arguments of the scholars who analyzed these two levels which are internal dynamics of the state or the societal factors, we also need to, in order to have a holistic

comprehension of the literature, briefly analyze the theories that endeavored to construe states' foreign policy behaviors by either black-boxing or paying little attention to the governmental or societal factors. In fact, a few of these theories have been influential for decades and regarded as mainstream international relations theories. Without a doubt, realism is the most influential school of thought among many as it has been a significant stimulus to the emergence of other thoughts. The realist school is considered to have its roots from Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Hobbes's *Leviathan* (Machiavelli, 1995; Hobbes, 1985). However, Morgenthau (1948) made an important contribution with his seminal work *Politics Among Nations* in which he examined international politics after the Second World War and arrived at the conclusion that the laws in the international politics have their roots in human nature and the states always pursue the policies that maximize national power to protect their national interests which frequently results in international conflict (pp 4-15).

Contrary to Morgenthau and other realist thinkers, philosophers like Immanuel Kant (2015) claims that the perennial peace among states is possible with the law between nations, civil constitutions and universal hospitality. This thought is believed to be the stimulus for democratic peace theory which will be discussed in the theories on societal factors. Despite revising this theory, many other scholars adhered to the idea that the international conflict is not inevitable by arguing that countries either are in need of peace or they are capable of protecting it. On the other hand, the constructivist theory has a relatively shorter history in international relations literature, as it was introduced by Nicholas Onuf by addressing the socially constructed nature of the international system (1989). However, Wendt's influential article in 1992 represented the core assumptions of the theory in which he argues that

the characteristics of the international system that other paradigms have taken as given, is socially constructed during the ongoing process in the international structure (1992). Scholars of this thought established related theories on the state-level as several of them argued that states act upon their identities in their national security policies, while many others endeavored to discover whether ideas and divergent cultures shape countries' perceptions towards the international system (Katzenstein, 1996; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). Despite not completely rejecting these ideas, I follow Lebow's hypothesis that the expression of human nature varies from culture to culture. That is to say that although ideas, identities and, cultures are significant factors in countries' foreign policy behaviors, these only alter the way people express human nature or the way they understand their natural motivations. For example, he asserts that social status or standing is a fundamental human drive but while dying in a war is a great honor for a culture, it gained a completely different meanings in different cultures and different times. Therefore, although human nature is the same for all people, its reflection varies. (Lebow, 2008). Nonetheless, before discussing this thoroughly, covering other state-level theories will be helpful in demonstrating why I argue in favor of Lebow's theory.

### **2.3.1 Theories on Governmental and Institutional Level**

The theories on governmental and institutional factors probe the processes within the decision-making group or between numerous institutions in a state to understand the foreign policies of countries. Graham Allison (1971), in his path-breaking article, introduced the rational actor model of decision-making processes. In this model, he treats governments as unitary and completely rational actors. In other words, governments are believed to have the ability to sort their choices according to cost-benefit scale and choose the option that ranks highest in terms of this actor's

specified goals. However, by addressing the limitations of this model, he also offers possible two alternative explanations of the causes of states' actions. The first alternative is about the argument that the decisions of a state are triggered or determined by previously established procedures of a country's organizations. These organizational routines can only be changed incrementally which is why, for instance, the processing of the intelligence during the Cuban missile crisis took so long. The second alternative explanation scrutinizes the internal structure of the bureaucratic body. Put differently, considering numerous actors in governmental bodies, this explanation argues that it is rather a competitive game in bureaucracy and people's positions define what they might and must do. Applying this to the Cuban missile crisis, Allison argues that this argument explains why while the minister of state department opted for diplomatic solutions, soldiers put forth the complete wipeout option (pp. 699-702). These two explanations provoked other scholars to develop related arguments which expanded the discussion and enriched the literature on state-level theories.

Related to Allison's first alternative model on organizational routines, numerous scholars established theories on the impacts of institutions on the foreign policy agendas of countries. A part of these scholars is referred to as rational institutionalists since they argue that people are eager to create institutions because the institutional setting is believed to be a useful tool in reducing uncertainty and having accurate cost-benefit calculation to maximize benefits of the country. In other words, a country's domestic institutions are established to have systematic foresight in the international system and to be able to choose the optimal way from a fixed set of preferences. However, Kenneth Shepsle (2006) criticized this approach by losing its touch with political reality and being built on assumptions that are not on what the



reality is but on what scholars preach it to be. He, rightly so, stresses the importance of bounded rationality in the foreign policy decision-making processes and states that equalizing these processes with behavioral economics is inaccurate because of psychological limitations like loss aversion or framing effects.

On the other hand, Ronald Rogowski (1999) argues that the characteristics of institutions determine the foreign policy of countries because they shape the way that national interests are defined. Moreover, he believes, a country's strategic choices can only work in its own institutional settings. However, he concludes that this approach prompts one to think about the representatives of the institutions and addresses the need to comprehend these individuals' guileful perceptions (pp. 120-4). Although there are many other institutionalist theories that also probes the impacts of presidential-parliamentary systems or congresses, it is rather inept to discuss each of them as they would yield no result for the purpose of this study without addressing people's perceptions.

Secondly, in addition to Allison's bureaucratic politics model, various state-level arguments have been established to discuss the ways that bureaucracies affect countries' foreign policy agendas. Halperin and Clapp (2007), for example, strived to demonstrate bureaucrats' tendency to reflect their departmental stance and advocate, with *grooved thinking*, the policies in line with the interests of their departments. As this argument cannot be applied to a myriad of countries because of their authoritative nature, Hermann et al. endeavored to establish a framework that serves as a theory selector and demonstrates the conditions under which one theory or another can be applied rather than establishing a distinctive theory. Believing that other theories on the bureaucracy are very US-centered, they established a theory-selector framework that demonstrates which theories can be useful in understanding

foreign policy behaviors in which conditions (Hermann et al. as cited in Stein, 2004). They scrutinize the decision-unit that is involved in the process of foreign policy decision-making and state that whether the decision unit is a predominant leader, a single group or a coalition matters and, in fact, determines the foreign policy action of a country (Hermann et al., 1987). They argue, for instance, if an individual leader is the only actor that defines a nation's national interests and thereby its foreign policy agenda, then personality theory must be applied to trace the decision-making process. A caveat is in order since they do not incorporate the fundamental human drives and believe that the theories on personality can explain an individual leader's decision if its goals are well-defined. For instance, two completely different personalities might have the desire for wealth, power or higher social status which might prompt both of them to involve in concurrent actions or the actions with concurrent motivations. That is why, I argue, although it offers a comprehensive guide for foreign policy analysis literature, this framework overlooks certain factors that might affect foreign policy processes.

Another argument on the impact of bureaucracy addresses certain psychological limitations that might arise within a group of bureaucrats. Although these limitations might happen in numerous forms, an important example is that if there is a pressure towards unity in the group, bureaucrats with divergent ideas avoid expressing these thoughts not to deviate from group consensus. As Janis (1973) conceptualizes it, groupthink is the tendency to seek concurrence within cohesive groups. More importantly, these groups might find themselves in an atmosphere in which all group members overestimate their country's power which can encourage risk-taking in the international system. Nonetheless, Paul Hart (1990) demonstrates its limitations by demonstrating that the members of bureaucratic groups generally

discuss issues on a bilateral basis rather than coming together as a group. Moreover, he also agrees that the set of preconditions for groupthink is rarely met and the risk that is generated from groupthink is not high (p. 235). Therefore, even though this explanation can accurately explain the foreign policy decision-making processes, it only covers a small number of cases. All in all, although all these theories on governmental and institutional factors might explain several cases in foreign policy decision-making processes, there is still value in analyzing societal level theories to comprehend the literature exhaustively.

### **2.3.2 Theories on the Societal Level**

A wide range of state-level theories also locates the roots of a country's foreign policy behavior in societal-level factors like public opinion, domestic politics or coalitions. As mentioned before, there is little doubt in saying that one of the oldest among such theories has its roots in Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (2015). In fact, democratic peace theory attracted a lot of attention that at one-point Levy (1988) stated that it is almost an empirical law in international relations (p. 654). Early propositions of democratic peace theory put forth the idea that an ever-lasting peace would be possible if countries adopt a constitution that grants all citizens equal rights in electing their governments and a cosmopolitan law between states. The general argument is that the statesmen who are accountable for a state's foreign policy behavior opt for diplomatic means to prevent possible international conflicts and war losses as the outcomes of an international conflict decrease a government's public vote (Tocqueville, 1988). Yet, it is criticized severely by many scholars in the following years from different angles. While many believe that the loose definitions of democracy and war have been manipulated to demonstrate a non-existent trend, many others pointed out several empirical examples from history to assert its

erroneousness by calling it a myth (Pugh, 2005; Layne, 1994). More importantly, I argue, a democratic country might not consider another one as democratic which is why one must acknowledge the significance of individuals' misperceptions in countries' foreign policy agendas.

On the other hand, deriving from the abusing of rally round the flag effect, the diversionary theory of foreign policy focuses on the impacts of an international war on the public support of the governments. The main assertion is that the state leaders consciously initiate international conflict to retain popular vote. Put differently, political leaders go to war to divert the public's attention from the internal problems of their country and support their government in times of war (Levy, 1989). The most recent example of that is the time when the military government in Argentina started a war against the United Kingdom to alleviate public dissent stemming from the economic problems in the country. However, many criticisms were directed to this theory and one of which questions the rally round the flag effect as many wars in the international system resulted in even more public dissent (Morgan & Anderson, 1999). As opposed to that, Lewis Coser (1998) counted conditions for the rally round effect like some minimal level of social cohesion (pp. 93-5). Nonetheless, even if these ambiguous assumptions reflect the reality, this theory, at best, only achieves to explain rare circumstances in the international politics and is inadequate in analyzing various other processes of foreign policy decision-making.

In addition to these political approaches to societal theories, there are also a vast amount of economic societal theories. It is an undeniable fact that Marxist-Leninist theories of international relations are some of the most discussed in the existing literature. Its relation to societal level theories derives from the idea that the

capitalist class in the society abuses the state apparatus for its own interests which also puts the burden of this process on the poor people or the proletariat in society (Marx, 2008). More importantly, Lenin (1999) argued that these capitalist systems tend to collapse in the absence of certain policies which prompts capitalist class to adopt imperialist policies to the state's official strategies. In order not to collapse, this class leads its country to international conflict with imperialistic desires to retain their profits which generally results in wars. As opposed to that, however, several scholars assert that the wars are also dangerous for the capitalist class in the society because aggressive imperialist policies not only harm the proletariat but also the bourgeoisie. Moreover, continuous burdens of war on the proletariat might result in adverse circumstances for the government in democracies and thereby for the capitalist class (Schumpeter, 1951). Later, Snyder (1991) explained the reasons why the low-income portion of the society does not rebel against their governments by putting forth the strategic myth argument. The main idea of this argument is that the coalition of key internal groups in a country selectively uses history or country's experiences to rationalize their behavior and establish a strategic myth that manipulates the society and ensures social cohesion. Nonetheless, I believe, Snyder's delineation of a completely irrational society and a perfectly rational elite group cannot reflect the reality which is why one needs to analyze statesmen's irrational and non-material desires that might either stem from their experiences or, in fact, from the human nature. Therefore, together with economic and political concerns, one also needs to consider the non-material desires of people before discussing why nations engage in wars or attempting to explain nations' foreign policy behaviors in general.

Social identity theory (SIT) is another societal level theory that relates to social psychology and can be a useful tool in explaining the short-comings of the aforementioned theories. The reason is that it pertains to the root causes of people's imperfect perceptions stemming from their desire for non-material concerns and general tendencies of individuals and, thereby of society and the nation as a whole. It originates from the social psychology discipline and its foundational assumptions are about the value that people attach to the membership of a group (Tajfel, 1978b). The reason why the commitment to a collectivity is important for the individuals is that they define their identity by their membership to certain groups and they manage to have self-esteem with the social status of their groups compared to others (Turner & Tajfel, 1986). This has been applied to international relations with the idea that countries' endeavors for memberships to elite clubs like the European Union, having a great power status or numerous examples of their entering to wars are caused by their concerns for higher status for international hierarchy and by people's desire for self-esteem. Although this theory is considered to be a societal level theory because of its emphasis on people's tendency to compare themselves with others and also because the social status is bestowed collectively in a society, its assumptions are originated from individuals' drive for higher status. Yet, as the international system is a society of states, this drive has systemic consequences and has impacts on nations' foreign policies since the struggle for the membership of elite clubs in the international system or engaging in a highly costly war as a result of dissatisfaction with national status might be the results of the human nature. However, its propositions and definitions of concepts like status or prestige will be examined thoroughly in the third chapter as this theory represents the core of this study. Before explaining such concepts and theoretical grounds of this study, theories on the

individual-level will be covered to demonstrate the explanatory power of the individual level and why human nature and individuals' perceptions are important in explaining foreign policies of nations.

## **2.4 Individual Level Theories**

The aforementioned state and system-level theories arrive at a consensus on the idea that black-boxing the internal structure of a state does not reduce the explanatory power of their theories or scrutinizing the impact of individuals will not enhance our understanding of foreign policies of nations. Thus, for decades, scholars of international relations developed theories that paid little attention to the impacts of single individuals within bureaucracy or that argued the impacts of individuals are irrelevant to the final decision or outcome in the international system. In fact, despite touching upon the impacts of individuals, foreign policy analysis and international relations theory literature did not attach significant weight to individuals until the 1960s. Starting with Snyder, Bruck and Sapin's work on decision-making processes, attention towards individual-level explanations has started to grow and their book arguably has paved the way for many scholars to analyze foreign policies of countries by exploring the impacts of individuals within the states (1962).

Dissatisfaction with the existing theories prompted scholars to question why similar countries that were under the same circumstances ended up having divergent foreign policy agendas. Answering this question, while many scholars put emphasis on psychology or personalities of the key individuals within states, many others drew attention to human nature or individuals' beliefs deriving from experiences. Before reviewing these theories on individual-level, however, rational model of individual-level will be discussed to demonstrate how, for instance, other psychological or poliheuristic models diverge from it and determine a theory that, as Levy and

Thompson (2011) put it, can be used as a standard against which the arguments of other models can be clarified (p. 129).

Levy and Thompson (2011) refer to rational model theories of individual level as a normative framework that delineates how the foreign policy agendas of nations ought to be molded rather than how they actually are constructed (p. 130). That is why introducing the rationality argument will be useful to indicate the core arguments of other theories by emphasizing their critiques to that. General understanding of the rational model portrays decision-making processes as procedures within which actors can specify their goals and means to reach them, predict possible outcomes as results of their actions and accurately perceive the intentions of other states in the international system. However, this understanding of actors or rational decision-making processes can be debunked with numerous empirical examples and be falsified by showing the non-linearity of the developments within the states and within the minds of decision-makers. Put differently, individuals might have a predetermined or undetermined set of goals, not have the ability to determine the best option among many or not have the flawless perception to comprehend the intentions of other parties. The majority of decision-making theories have been established to reveal mentioned short-comings of the rational model of the decision-making framework and explain how individuals and factors stemming from the individual-level change these processes.

Mintz (1997) offers a multi-staged theory in which he demonstrates how political leaders' perceptions are manifested in a country's foreign policy agenda and how these decisions are made in step-by-step psychological processes. He argues that the statesmen typically have a large spectrum of goals within which one might find objectives ranging from the ones about domestic politics to ones pertaining to



international military campaigns. Facing a crisis or a problem in international politics, statesmen explore possible strategies to respond to this situation. While searching among these scenarios, these leaders adopt non-compensatory evaluation and eliminate all alternatives that might be harmful to an important objective in their agenda. For example, in a country where the economic conditions are problematic and therefore became gradually the key objective within a certain period, statesmen eliminate all strategies that might come with extra costs to their economy without scrutinizing the impacts of these alternatives on other dimensions like politics or reputation. In the second step, among the remaining alternatives, these leaders choose a strategic option by making a rational and compensatory evaluation to discover the scenario that can bring the best expected utility. Applying this theory to three major crises at different times, Özdamar and Erciyas (2019) argue that Turkish statesmen, for instance, chose an uncharacteristic option in 1974 by organizing a military intervention in Cyprus because of the fact that these leaders eliminated unsatisfactory strategies for the most important objective of the time and chose among the remaining alternatives by making calculations that were in line with expected utility maximization. However, Mintz argues that at the second stage of decision-making processes, leaders choose rationally from the remaining alternatives which might not be accurate given the fact that these leaders might have their personalized agendas that have been shaped by their beliefs, images and, experiences.

Together with impacting a nation's foreign policy agendas, statesmen's beliefs can also be one of the determinants of a national image. Kenneth Boulding (1959) defines national image as basically a lie or a perspective distortion of truth that is shaped by a country's history and shared experiences and is also influenced by

the powerful individuals like national leaders as they are the representatives of this national image. Ole Holsti (1967), while discussing the cognitive dynamics of decision-making processes, offered the idea that an individual's belief system which is composed of accumulated knowledge about self and the world, impacts the perceptions of leaders and thereby the foreign policy of countries (p. 30-31). By exemplifying this with John Doster Dulles's image of the Soviet Union and how it affected American foreign policy, he endeavored to demonstrate how effective a leader's dichotomous understanding as images of enemy and self-directed the US's actions during the Cold War. Along with the importance of images of enemies, statesmen's self-image or the perception towards own national identity is also argued to be significant in a country's foreign policy behavior. For example, while discussing the reasons why Russia and Turkey followed different paths in reaching the same regional leadership goal, Köstem (2018) claims that political elites' different national identity conceptions shaped the way they pursue foreign economic policies towards their region. That is to say that, in addition to the impacts of the leaders' perception of others, their self-images or national identity conceptions are also important in the determination of national foreign policy agendas.

Nevertheless, prospect theory brings about a distinct view to the discussion about self-image to explain how people react to risks and opportunities and how this relates to the international relations and decision-making processes. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) summarized the main argument of this theory by stating that the people are hurt more by actual losses rather than forgone gains. That is why they tend to perform *risk aversion* with respect to gains and *risk acceptance* with respect to losses. However, gains and losses might gain quite distinct meanings for every person because of the fact that each of them has a unique *reference point*. What is

meant by reference point is that people determine a status quo level peculiar to a certain individual which refers to the point where this individual has neither gains nor losses. More interestingly, sometimes individuals might determine a reference point that is superior to their status-quo, like an aspiration level, which can result in taking higher risks because of the misperception of their reference points. This theory relates to international relations as the statesmen figure out the reference points of their countries within the society of states and approach to the threats and opportunities in the international system accordingly. Levy (1992) finds this theory illustrative particularly for the dynamics of the international system as the patterns that the prospect theory offers are more evident than the propositions that many other theories put forth in the international relations (p. 227). To elaborate, for instance, he gives numerous examples like Arab political leaders' decision to initiate a war against Israel in 1973 to show how these leaders were dissatisfied with their situation and endeavored to recover the losses from the war in 1967. More interestingly, this war also demonstrates how Israel edited its reference level, and therefore its status quo, which is why it fought hard to defend its new status quo (Stein, as quoted in Levy, 1991). Nevertheless, which factors are influential for countries to determine their reference point is not discussed thoroughly in the literature and to this puzzle, I believe, there are many answers like aforementioned arguments on ruling elites' conception of national identity or experiences stemming from a country's history and culture. As it is a useful tool in explaining how countries understand self-image, perceive their status in the international system and act accordingly, prospect theory will be explained in more detail in the following chapter.

The bulk of the individual level theory literature is constituted of misperceptions stemming from numerous factors ranging from beliefs to overestimation of self or

even to threat perceptions which, I believe, can supplement the human nature argument. In other words, although I believe several of the mentioned psychological or cognitive processes alter the way that leaders perceive and react to the situations in the international system, they only change the way that leaders express their desires or needs stemming from human nature. Although numerous arguments on the nature of human beings have been discussed in the literature, Lebow's grand theory is the most consistent one in connecting human nature with the national identities and which is also supported by countless historical examples. In his theory, Lebow (2008) addresses the importance of human nature in understanding international relations and locates the reasons for myriads of incidents in the international system at the individual level, although it is not a theory on individual-level. He introduces three fundamental human drives which are *spirit*, *appetite* and, *reason*. While spirit stands for people's desire for honor and standing, appetite is about the individuals' endeavor for wealth and comfort. Reason, Lebow argues, controls and regulates the first two drives to ensure stability in one's life. Applying this to international relations, he exemplifies myriads of occurrences from the history and convincingly demonstrates how these human drives might have systemic outcomes. Moreover, although emotions and their impacts on foreign policy analysis are an important part of the literature, he incorporates emotions like fear to his theory without regarding these feelings as fundamental drives but rather a response to the problems in other drives like appetite and spirit. More importantly, his grand theory incorporates and complements many other grand theories like Marxism by addressing appetite or constructivism by stating that the expression of these fundamental drives might vary from culture to culture. Therefore, I believe, his theory has the most explanatory power in explaining the actions of international actors and it is not a theory of an

analysis of the parts but an approach to the foreign policies of countries as a whole which have micro-foundations in human nature. All in all, in this study, I argue that Turkish foreign policy has been driven by the desire for spirit or higher standing in the international hierarchy and Turkish statesmen determined an aspiration level that is well-above Turkey's recognized standing in the international society which prompted Turkish state to pursue highly risky foreign policy agenda and face with devastating outcomes. Therefore, while benefitting from Lebow's grand theory and prospect theory in explaining the motivational background of the Turkish foreign policy, I will utilize social identity theory, as mentioned above, to explain the strategies that Turkish government employed in its quest for higher-status.

Although these theories, key concepts and their applications to international relations will be analyzed exhaustively in the following chapter to explain the theoretical grounds of this study, many other theories were briefly discussed to demonstrate why I agree in favor of the explanatory power of the individual level and why these mentioned theories are helpful in understanding the dynamics of the international system and the circumstances in it. Being cognizant of the fact that level-of-analysis typology has certain shortcomings in explaining today's international dynamics, I still think it is a useful framework to categorize the literature and discuss the explanatory power of theories in each image.

To sum up, after explaining the concepts of these three complementary theories and their main assumptions to introduce the theoretical grounds of this study, in the chapters 4 and 5, I will strive to show why Turkish foreign policy has been driven by a status-seeking agenda that was expressed according to Turkish statesmen's beliefs and ideas. As I argue that Turkish statesmen determined Turkey's reference point well-above its recognized standing after its relative economic and political success, I

will demonstrate how this resulted in Turkey's engagement in risky actions during and after the Arab Spring. Finally, I will examine how Turkey's unrecognized standing aspiration level within the international society prompted Turkey to change its strategy to pursue its goals by benefitting from social identity theory.

### **CHAPTER III: CONCEPTUALIZATION, THEORIES, AND METHODOLOGY**

Having discussed international relations theories, theories on foreign policy, and nature of international politics, I concluded in favor of the explanatory power of individual-level while not overlooking the relative impacts of other levels, their intersections, and the grey areas that are not within any of these levels. Besides underlining the importance of first-image, I demonstrated how mentioned three theories, being Lebow's theory on status, prospect theory, and SIT, can be applicable to numerous important cases in Turkish foreign policy. Emphasizing certain theories on international politics and their complementarity in explaining foreign policies of countries necessitates explaining their main arguments, related literature, concepts, and introducing the methods that will be used to demonstrate the tools with which I will link the mentioned theories with the practice. However, before conceptualizations, explanations of theories and introduction of the methodology, how the literature on status approaches the level-of-analysis framework, and establishes their hypotheses accordingly will be examined briefly to comprehend the starting point of the existing literature. This chapter will explain main propositions of the aforementioned three complementary theories, related concepts and how these theories will be utilized to examine the determinant of Turkish foreign policy throughout the thesis.

The literature on honor and status discussed numerous questions pertaining to the motivations behind countries' status concerns, the puzzle that is about whether it is a tool for an ultimate end or it is an end in itself, the circumstances within which the status concerns matter the most and many related issues. Much the same as the variety of the questions, "status" has been discussed and examined at numerous

levels of analysis. Renshon (2015) attributes the absence of consensus on a certain level between scholars of this literature to the problems stemming from the reference group and the identification of individuals with the states (pp. 671-3). To elaborate, the specification of the reference group to compare with is a problem, which means that whether an individual or a state is threatening the status of the actor is not determined. Moreover, whether it is the status of statesmen or the state in general at stake is ambiguous, which led scholars to test their hypotheses within all three levels of analysis.

Although research on honor, glory, status, and standing dates back to ancient times, scholars' references to what can be called "levels" have a relatively short history. Julian Pitt-Rivers (1965), a distinguished social anthropologist, considers honor as the value of a person for himself or herself, but also the value that society attributes to this individual (p. 21). Applying this to international relations, his argument can be interpreted in a way that might refer to all three levels and even to the combination of them. However, by proposing that honor is a manifestation of human sentiment in conduct and the evaluation of this conduct by others, he addresses the sentiments of individuals, people's perceptions, and thereby implicitly refer to the significance of the individual level (1968, p. 503). On the other hand, while discussing status inconsistency, Midlarsky and Midlarsky (1976) stress the importance of national decision-makers by demonstrating how the feeling of frustration of unmet status desires might lead to international conflict (p. 373). Their argument centers the policy-makers to their theory and underlines the considerable impacts of these individuals. Besides, as mentioned before, social identity theory, which is closely related to status literature, is considered to be a societal-level theory because the status is bestowed by the society, not by the individual itself and an



individual or a state compare themselves with others within this society. However, Abrams and Hogg (1988) address individuals' identification with the groups while striving for self-esteem and argue that group phenomena are felt at the individual level. Therefore, although individuals, either states or the decision-makers, cannot achieve positive distinctiveness without the approval from the society, its motivational ground comes from individuals' psychological needs. That is not to say, however, that other factors at the system or state level have no impact or relevance to status considerations of states, considering the socially constructed nature of status in the international system, but rather to give more weight to the individual level because of human nature constitutes the motivational ground of status discussions. For instance, Volgy and Mayhall (1995) link the impacts of the status inconsistency to certain conditions in the international system. However, they implicitly acknowledge that the discrepancy between the deserved status and accorded status can be seen and felt by foreign policy makers, and thereby, attempts to change the status quo in the international system is dependent upon the policymakers' dissatisfaction with the existing international hierarchy (pp. 67-8).

Besides, many others that explicitly refer to the significance of the foreign policymakers' perceptions and psychological needs in the status objectives of states. Although putting the emphasis on individual-level has been criticized with reductionism by many scholars, Ellemers et al.'s (2002) argument on the relation between the group and an individual might clarify the reasons behind their emphasis on the individual level. While examining group dynamics and commitment to collective identity, they come to the conclusion that a threat to a group is processed and felt by the key individuals within this group, and thereby responses to these threats are generated as a result of these individuals' psychological processes (pp.

178-9). Applying this kind of thought to international politics, Wendt argues that statesmen or the decision-makers of the state experience state emotions on the state's behalf (2004). Therefore, the states behave as if they are persons and thereby the impact that individuals have on a country's foreign policy is undoubtedly significant. Paul et al. (2014) also acknowledge that status competition recurs on the individual level and people's identification with their states is the reason why people's desire for self-esteem has significant impacts and systemic consequences (pp. 17-19). More interestingly, benefitting from SIT in his research, Wohlforth (2009) admits that although the underlying theory is a group level, pieces of evidence and causal relationships cannot be analyzed without scrutinizing perceptions of key elites (p. 34).

Along with these scholars, numerous others also believe that status concern occurs as a result of an interaction between psychological processes and international politics, and therefore states' status concern cannot be understood without analyzing the interactions of multiple levels (O'Neill, 1999; Dafoe et al., 2014). However, scrutinizing the motivational ground of foreign policy decisions, they put more emphasis on policymakers as their arguments do not overlook the fact that it is the individuals who make choices with regards to the product of these interacting multiple levels. Besides, reviewing the literature on status and honor, Renshon (2015) concludes that even though IR scholars base their arguments on so-called "group-level" theories, they all analyze individuals' status goals or, in other words, establish their theories starting with the most fundamental human motives. Therefore, he believes that most scholars put more emphasis on decision-makers while discussing states' status concerns and agrees with these scholars by stating that threat to the group's or state's statuses are transmitted to the individual or the

statesmen (p. 671). That is to say that although status is a social phenomenon and cannot be comprehended and obtained without the social context in which it is embedded, the reason why I argue that the individual level is important is that I refer to the motivational background rather than the nature of status.

Therefore, as it will be discussed later, one's status determined in a social context and one's membership in a nation is a determinant of its status which is why examining all three levels are important to comprehend the key decision in foreign policies of countries. However, stressing the importance of individuals is not to overlook the social nature of the status but to argue that myriads of occurring in the international system are mainly the reflection of human nature. What is even more intriguing is Lebow's argument that even the emergence of nation-states is the result of human nature as people are eager to have positive distinctiveness between "us" and "others". However, he argues, this constructed nature of the international system was seen as a norm from numerous scholars which led to misleading theories in the international relations literature. His critiques of other theories will be discussed later as these criticisms cannot be comprehended without introducing his theory.

Lebow (2008) offers another view on the problem of level-of-analysis and argues that there are no horizontal levels like the literature has been discussing and if one is to liken these domains to a geometrical figure, it can only be fractals (p. 52). What he means by that is what happens in one level replicates in the same patterns in other levels at different orders of magnification. However, he also argues that order and disorder come about in the same way to all levels which is when reason gains or loses control over other fundamental human drives. Therefore, he implicitly refers to how all three levels are being impacted by three drives that are immanent in all human beings, and therefore rooted in the individual-level. Following Lebow, I also

believe that all levels have considerable impacts on each other and these levels are not the same. However, the way that the states and individuals interact in the international system is determined relatively more in individuals' perceptions, psyche, and experiences, and therefore if one is to understand the foreign policies of countries, analyzing the statesmen or the key decision-makers might yield to better comprehension. Besides his critique of the level-of-analysis framework, he brings a wider criticism to the theories and paradigms like realism, liberalism, and Marxism. These criticisms and where Lebow's theory stand within the existing literature cannot be comprehended without introducing the propositions of his theory and concepts that are germane to status concern within states' foreign policies.

### **3.1 Earlier Works on Honor and Status in International Relations**

The literature on status and honor dates back to ancient times as Homer is believed to be the first philosopher to study on honor. Thucydides, although having been misinterpreted or interpreted in various ways, is also one of the first people to recognize how honor and standing can become an important component in people's decisions. Inspired by these philosophers and their perceptions towards human nature and politics, Lebow established a theory on what he calls "spirit". Before introducing Lebow's understanding of status-related concepts, that is built on mentioned philosophers' teachings, other scholars' early endeavors to apply status and honor to international relations will be examined to demonstrate the difference of Lebow's conceptualization of honor and his hypotheses about decision-making processes from which I will benefit to examine major decisions in the last two decades of Turkish foreign policy.

In the late 1950s, A.F.K. Organski (1958) introduced a research program and a theory on power transition in the international system that refers to the rising powers in the international politics and recurrence of the dissatisfaction stemming from these processes. However, as discussed before, his theory links the dissatisfaction of a challenger only with the material benefits it receives from the system. As opposed to that, I argue, countries might also be dissatisfied with the non-material possessions like their status within international hierarchy. Another argument on status and dissatisfaction was put forth in the early 1960s by Johan Galtung (1964). Borrowing from sociology discipline, he applied a person's dissatisfaction with its social status to international conflict and argued that status dissatisfaction, or status inconsistency, might result in aggression and thereby in wars. Although numerous scholars had been referring to status and honor while discussing international politics, a robust research program did not emerge and stimulation of these studies for further theoretical and empirical research remained limited in the 1960s. In fact, at the beginning of the 1970s, Wallace (1971) stated that the literature is inadequate in bringing conclusive empirical examples for status hypotheses or in establishing theories that have the potential to reflect the realities of international politics (p. 23). Nonetheless, he then went on to equalize the achieved status of a country with its material capabilities like population or steel production and completely ignored other non-material status dimensions like moral or cultural superiority claims of states. Moreover, he only addressed the capabilities of countries rather than the perceptions of a country of its own and others' capabilities which is more impactful in a country's foreign policy decision making (Wohlforth, 1987). That is to say that the status inconsistency remained undertheorized, failed to stimulate further interdisciplinary research, and to demonstrate the impact of status in

international politics. However, within the last two decades, scholarly attention on status in the international relations discipline arose again which brought about myriads of reconceptualization, theories, and empirical testing of hypotheses.

### **3.2 Conceptualization**

The literature on status started to regrow as Dafoe et al. (2014) demonstrated in their study that the number of articles that refer to status in international relations started to increase again after the late 1990s (p. 373). Regathering of the scholarly attention brings along various conceptualizations of key terms within status literature and multifarious theories that are built around these concepts. Because of the fact that the status literature has numerous related concepts like honor, status, prestige, reputation, and recognition, confusions might arise as these terms are being used interchangeably in different societies and in daily life. That is the foremost reason why scholars' discussion on the meanings of these concepts is important to understand their theories and my argument in this study. Apart from explaining the differences between these terms, I wish to analyze the variation of scholars' perceptions of the same concepts. Although they are not miles apart in their conceptualizations, there are certain nuances or weighing differences that result in the changes in their propositions and their theories on the functioning of international politics. More importantly, as I believe Lebow's theory is a useful tool in explaining the motivational grounds of Turkish foreign policy, his conceptualization of some of the mentioned terms must be introduced to clarify his theory and the reasons why I will benefit from it to explain several agendas within Turkish foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

IR scholars have either borrowed these concepts from other disciplines like sociology and psychology or developed new ones by being inspired from earlier scholars of international politics. Dafoe et al. criticize borrowing from other disciplines and simply applying it to IR as they believe that the interaction between, for instance, psychological processes and structural factors might ramify the processes within international politics. While acknowledging the differences between the psychological processes and international developments, I believe that human psychology, social relations, and human nature have significant systemic consequences which is why borrowing terms and even theories from other disciplines is valuable. In fact, the appliance of certain theories like SIT or prospect theory proved to be beneficial in advancing our comprehension of international relations. More importantly, two important sociologists, Weber and Durkheim drew parallelism between the international politics and societies which is why they then built theories on social status and international politics (Weber, 2009; Durkheim, 2013). Therefore, either borrowed, inspired, or original; discussions on the aforementioned concepts are stimulating for our understanding of international relations.

As it is one of the key concepts in my study, I will first review the discussion on the characteristics of the term “status” to show its relation and also distinction from other concepts. In this study, status refers to the shared acknowledgment of a certain state’s standing on numerous international hierarchies like wealth, culture, morality, weapon industry, or even diplomatic clout. These aspects or hierarchies and their manifestation in the international system are infinite and change across cultures and between different eras. Conceptualizations of status generally include three characteristics which can be termed as its positionality, its social nature, and its

variance across cultures. To begin with, the *positionality* of status refers to the fact that one's status depends on how much more or less of status a person or a state has compared to others (Wohlforth, 2009). A state's statuses in various dimensions are its positional rankings in the different aspects of international hierarchy. Put differently, the scramble for higher status in the international system is relative as, referring to the glory or status of people, Hobbes observed "if all men have it, no man hath it" (1642/1991, p. 5). That is to say that as status, or rather high-status in the international hierarchy, cannot be enjoyed by everyone, many international conflicts arise or, for instance, unnecessary expenditures are being made as a result of status concerns of countries (Paul et al., 2014, p. 9). Yet, relativeness or positionality has also been discussed in the literature as scholars argued that countries do not compare themselves with all other countries as it might result in perennial dissatisfaction with the status quo. In other words, as Renshon (2017) puts it, states perceive themselves in a ranking competition with a small number of states, a status community, or a reference group, to be able to achieve self-esteem or satisfaction (p. 22). Dafoe et al. (2014) refer to this as "targeted" comparisons with the countries that have similar status or standing in numerous social hierarchies (p. 379). How these status communities or reference groups are established is another puzzle that relates more to prospect theory literature which is why it will be examined later in this chapter. More importantly, the positional nature of status is closely related to the reasons why status matters for countries and social identity theory which will also be discussed thoroughly to explain the importance of status in international relations.

Status is also *social*, or rather, status is being attained with the acknowledgment by other actors in society. O'Neill (1999) explains this by arguing



that status depends only on behavior commonly known and to be publicly observed (p. 89). The self-proclaimed status will not grant social status to states in international society as other states must accept the legitimacy of this claim for this state to obtain this claimed status (Hurrell, 2006). It is only actors' voluntary recognition of a state's standing within international status hierarchies that grant that state a higher-status (Kemper, 1991, p. 378). Therefore, as Bull (2012) argues, higher-status countries or great powers are recognized by other state leaders and people of these countries with the belief that these countries have certain special rights and duties in the international system. For a state to be known as a great or a middle power, these states not only must have sufficient material or symbolic capabilities for these statuses in the international system but also must be acknowledged by others as a great or middle power. Levy (2014) summarizes this by stating that for a state to have a higher standing or a certain status in the international system, this state both need major capabilities, foreign policy activity in a wide region, a broad geographical sweep, and most importantly, recognition by other states. As numerous studies on *recognition* are related to the social nature of status, I will discuss the difference between status and recognition to overcome the conceptual confusion. While explaining one of his fundamental human motives - spirit-, Lebow (2008) argues that spirit is the competitive quest for recognition (p. 47). That is to say that it is a quest for all people and countries to achieve socially acknowledged high-status in their social milieu. In other words, recognition can be understood as an end of status competition and as other actors' voluntary deference or collective attribution of status on a state. Thus, although status and recognition refer to different phenomena, these concepts are closely related to each other.

Another characteristic of status is its *cultural* nature. The manifestation of status varies across cultures and times. Therefore, what constitutes a source of status can change with time and with cultural differences. For instance, while the closeness of a country's king to God determined its status in history, a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council became an important source of higher-status in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Neumann, 2014, p. 85). On the other hand, a disregarding act or an act that impedes an actor's status in the past can become a source of status in the following years. As Pitt-Rivers (1968) indicates, the theater was a shameful occupation in the past while being an actor or an actress in a theater can be honorable in the modern world. Lebow (2008) also addresses change in the manifestation of the universal need for high-status across cultures and times and criticizes grand theories of international relations with being the products of specific historical and cultural circumstances rather than bringing a timeless understanding of international relations. Although his critiques of mainstream IR theories will be covered after introducing his theory, his take on the cultural nature of status is important as he states that one needs to examine both human psychology and culture to comprehend state leaders' motivations (p. 48). He is inspired by several Greek philosophers' studies to establish a grand theory on status and emphasizes that these philosophers' concepts and how these concepts are manifested differ across different societies and cultures (2008, p. 16). Sharing a similar view, Renshon (2017) argued that it is not clear to find a universal sign of status concern because different cultures and time periods have numerous divergent ways of expressing their status desires or what they believe to enhance their status (p. 123). Therefore, anything might confer status in different time periods and what people or states perceive as a source of status might

change which is why it is important to comprehend today's status markers to explain the foreign policy agendas of countries.

Like status, the understanding of *honor* also changes from culture to culture and, in fact, the importance of honor also varies across societies, cultures, and times (O'Neill, 1999, p. 244). However, despite their similarities, differentiating honor from status is key to understanding the reasons of constant changes of status markers and differences of the aspects that confer status across cultures and time periods. Lebow (2008) defines honor as a universal drive for self-esteem and a term that is inseparable from status and hierarchy (p. 64). The difference between honor and status is that honor determines the nature of statuses in different cultures or times and who fills them. Weber (1968) brings a similar argument by arguing that honor is a code of conduct associated with a status community or a status group (as cited in Paul et al., 2014, p. 16). Therefore, following the code of conduct of this group can be referred to as an honorable act while the opposite way would dishonor the actor. Following these social norms or attaining honor are often achieved by performing selfless and sacrificial actions. These social norms or honor are mechanisms to prevent powerful actors' careless exploitation of the weaker ones and are tools for maintaining hierarchies when a lower-status actor disrespects the privileges of a higher-status actor (Lebow, 2008, p. 65). However, unlike status, honor can lose its meaning and importance within thin societies when the ones who violate the social norms or aforementioned mechanisms of these societies can get away with their behaviors. At such times, standing or nature of status become more based on material capabilities. On the other hand, honor brings responsibilities to countries and, the ones who achieve to fulfill these demanding roles and responsibilities legitimize their rank in the status hierarchies (Lebow, 2008, p. 65). Paul et al. (2014) resemble honor

to “face” and argue that members of a society or countries in the international system may lose it if they fail to live up to their role expectations (p. 16). Therefore, one can either lose or win honor as it is not a competitive task like status. All in all, one needs to discern the difference between status and honor, and also comprehend how they are related in order to comprehend cultural differences of status markers.

*Prestige* is another term that is closely related to status but corresponds to a different phenomenon. Onea (2014) underlines that prestige is not identical to status; while status refers to the rank an actor occupies in a group or society based on its overall performance in numerous status dimensions, prestige is only one of these dimensions that refers to success in peace and war (p. 133). Markey (1999) offers a similar argument on prestige and argues that it is public recognition of admired achievements and successes (p. 158). For instance, a way for countries to gain prestige is through symbolic ways like success in the Olympic Games or in the space race. The success in these symbolic competitions can grant these countries prestige as others will undoubtedly recognize these achievements in the international arena. Therefore, prestige refers to “a group’s or a society’s perceptions of its own attitude toward an individual based on something this individual is or did” (O’Neill, 1999, p. 244).

On the other hand, a country’s *power* is also different from its status and prestige, and these possessions of a country do not always increase or decrease parallel to each other. Mostly used understanding of power was posited by Baldwin (1979) as he argues that power is equal to a country’s influence to make other actors in the international system perform certain actions that they otherwise would not do. However, I agree with Lebow’s criticism of this definition as he argues that power is only a component among numerous others that determine a country’s influence

(2008, p. 557). For instance, O'Neill argues, aforementioned concept "prestige" or admiration to an individual generally leads to the increase of a certain actor's influence within its groups or society. That is to say, that power is not the only source of influence and therefore, it is inadequate to equalize power with influence. Power is related to but different from the status of a country as it is not the power itself that grants status to countries but recognition or perceptions of others towards a country's performance in numerous material and symbolic hierarchies are and, Lebow argues that perceptions of a country's standing or, rather, status of a country can lag behind the actual capabilities (2008, p. 23).

Finally, *reputation* of a country is different from its status due to several reasons. As Dafoe et al. (2014) argue, these two terms have been thought to have similar meanings because of semantic confusion (p. 374). However, reputation pertains to past behaviors or habits of an actor and refers to the belief about the behavioral tendency of an actor based on its past behaviors. For instance, reputation for resolve is a widely used concept in international relations literature which means a reputation or behavioral tendency of a country to not back down in its conflicts or disputes with other countries (Huth, 1997). This kind of reputation is obtained after several incidents in a country's past within which this particular country did not back down which then gave other countries the belief that it will behave in the same way in the future. Besides, while reputation is in the control of the actor, status, as discussed, is social and bestowed by other actors within a group or a society. Although reputation and status are two distinct concepts, certain reputations like the reputation for resolve are argued to be indispensable for countries with high status in the international system. Also, status is influential in a country's reputations since the international society's expectations from a high-status country would be higher

which will also shape reputational inferences (Dafoe et al., 2014, p. 375-376). Therefore, despite their relatedness, these two concepts refer to quite different phenomena in international relations.

Along with these terms, several others, which are of relevance to status literature, must be introduced to clarify the aforementioned arguments and to be able to explain the following hypotheses. *Status marker* is the first of these terms which means positions or possessions of countries that symbolizes the high-status of a country or deference from others in the society. Paul et al. (2014) define it as a concretized form of status recognition which, for today's international system, can be exemplified as permanent membership in UNSC, inclusion in international problem-solving or mediation groups, or even hosting international sports events like the Olympic Games (p. 10-11). For example, Lilach Gilady (2018) argues that countries purchase redundant goods like aircraft carriers or adopt costly policies like initiating space programs that are status markers in current international relations or that they believed to concretize their status in the international system (p. 117-120).

*Status signaling* is another term that is helpful in understanding states' status claims in the international system. It refers to states' signaling of their status assertions or putting in a particular standing claim for where they see themselves within the international status hierarchy. Paul et al. (2014) argue that states perform status signaling in numerous different ways including the rhetorical position of a country, diplomatic activity, or acquisition of status symbols like aircraft carriers (p. 21-22). For instance, countries like Turkey and India initiated extensive foreign aid programs and increased their diplomatic activities within their foreign aid recipient areas. These foreign policy acts are important indicators of where this country wants itself to be in the international hierarchy, which can also be conceptualized as the

country's status signaling. Status signaling can be vitally important for the international society as it can pave the way for anxiety within other states and can even result in international conflicts since status is a positional good. For instance, several countries' endeavors for status signaling during and after the Syrian civil war bring several countries against each other and even resulted in hot conflict between states. Therefore, status signaling is an important concept in understanding states' desires for acquiring higher-status and also in comprehending where states see themselves within the international status hierarchy or where they aspire to be.

All in all, as this study is on status concerns in International Relations, explaining the differences between these terms was important before introducing three theories that I will utilize to explain Turkish foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As these concepts are widely used in status literature and scholars of IR have not come up with certain definitions of them, and often use them interchangeably, introducing my conceptual interpretation is essential to explain the theories and my arguments clearly throughout this study. Therefore, while explaining why I believe in the explanatory power of the individual level in the second chapter was a preliminary step to explain my claim for the complementarity of the three individual-level theories, conceptualization and explaining the differences between the related concepts are also important in introducing the arguments of the theories to which I now turn.

### **3.3 Lebow's Cultural Theory of International Relations**

Being inspired by Greek philosophers and their texts, Lebow (2008) established a grand theory in his book *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* in which he brings several hypotheses pertaining to fundamental human motives and

their consequences or reflections in the international system. His theory incorporates not only arguments on states' or actors' behaviors within their society but also the constitution of these actors. As explained before, he scrutinizes the systemic consequences of human nature by arguing that even the constitution of states or international relations is rooted in people's desire to have positive distinctiveness between "us" and "others". Immanuel Kant (1784) addressed the same desire of human beings by arguing that the "us" can only be preserved at the expense of "others" (p. 45). In other words, this distinction that is stemming from individuals' motives made nation-states and the ideology of sovereignty seem like a natural or a given phenomenon in the international relations literature (Bartelson, p. 220-226). However, Lebow's theory goes beyond only exploring how these entities are constituted or their roots and encapsulates numerous hypotheses on the nature of human beings, its systemic consequences, and how these consequences are manifested differently in different times and cultures.

There are three fundamental human motives that govern human behavior to which Lebow refers as *spirit*, *appetite*, and *reason*. All three motives cause a different set of behaviors and all of them have their own objectives rather than being merely an instrument for the others (p. 26-27). Appetite stands for people's urges for biological needs and divergent expressions of these needs. Plato (as cited in Lebow, 2008) brings a dichotomous understanding of appetite as being the ones that are necessary like food or water and the ones that are not, like having beautiful dresses or bigger shelters (1996, 439b3). One cannot avoid food or water as Lebow refers to as these are people's needs that they are unable to deny and they benefit from their satisfaction. Therefore, appetite has an end in itself although it can be used as an instrument for the other motives since people can abstain from a myriad type of



appetites to achieve others. Lebow exemplifies appetite by evoking the times of King Midas and demonstrates how wealth, and thereby appetite, was sought as an end itself while he does not overlook the fact that the desire for the appetite is to a great extent determined socially (p. 46). Rousseau (1761) acknowledges this by arguing that certain luxuries are pursued to achieve standing or prestige that these material goods confer. Thorstein Veblen (1899) instigated a body of research by accentuating the aforementioned arguments as he argued that people purchase conspicuous goods to draw attention to their wealth which is eventually a tool for a higher-status in their society. Therefore, although appetite can be explained as a human motive that is an end in itself, it is often an instrument for other desires of people.

Reason is another fundamental human motive that has its own independent objectives. Lebow separates reason from its modern instrumental understanding and conceptualizes it as a distinct human motive which leads people to comprehend the purpose of life and the nature of happiness (p. 126). Nonetheless, the modern understanding of reason perceives it as a tool to satisfy our appetites. As David Hume (2012) recognizes, “reason became the slave of passions” because of the fact that the modernity oversimplifies human motivations. However, it must be understood as an end in itself and as a human motivation that controls and prevents the excesses of the other two motives, appetite and spirit, while cooperating with them towards its end (Lebow, 2008, p. 47). Similarly, while Aristotle explains the reason as a motive that teaches people to abstain from the excesses of the other motives and to stand on the mean between two ends of the scale in everything, Hegel understands reason as an important phenomenon that saves us from the yokes of other desires and helps people to realize their full potential (Ameriks & Clarke, 2000; Hegel, 2015, p. 144-152). Therefore, as opposed to today’s common understanding

of it, reason has its own objectives and governs the other two fundamental human motives rather than being merely a mean to reach them.

Spirit is the last fundamental human motive which can be represented as the root cause of the universal need for self-esteem and people's desire for higher status. It arises as a result of people's psychological need for feeling good about themselves or, in other words, the need for self-worth (Lebow, 2008, p. 61). It is a competitive quest for recognition and higher-status. As explained before, spirit, or rather status, is social and it can only be achieved by being successful in the aspects that are valued by the society within which a particular actor lives and through recognition of these successes by the actors whose opinions are important within this society. However, much the same as with reason, modernity marginalized people's concerns with virtue and status which resulted in numerous scholars' treatment of it as being merely an instrument rather than an independent objective (Taylor, 1989). For instance, Lefèvre and Sawicki (2006) argue that attaining a positive image through high-status is essential for having a higher impact within the political arena. On the contrary, Marcel Mauss (2002), rightly so, argues that obtaining recognition from superiors or having higher-status can help people to reach emotional satisfaction just for the satisfaction itself rather than being used as a tool for other motives (p. 270). Thus, following Lebow, Mauss, and Wohlforth, I treat spirit as an independent objective which people and leaders desire to achieve in order to eventually have self-esteem.

Although status is bestowed by other actors within the society, people also have a subjective sense of their own status or, rather, belief about their own standing within status hierarchies. The difference between accorded status and own belief about deserved standing might result in frustration and anger. Apart from anger, Lebow (2008) dwells on another emotion which is *fear* and which he believes to

arise when reason loses the control of spirit or appetite (p. 88-90). While, for instance, the ultimate objective of appetite is satiation, the objective of fear is to ensure security by using power as an instrument. Therefore, although fear is not a fundamental motive for humans, it can impact human behavior if reason would lose control over other motives. However, how emotions like fear or motives like spirit are linked to international relations and can be impactful in states' behaviors will be explained while introducing social identity theory later in this chapter.

All three human motives are present in each particular time of human lives. However, the degree to which these motives are influential differs across times and cultures. For instance, while, in ancient Greece, wealth was used only to achieve honor, riches, and having more wealth was thought to be the most important objective within France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. More importantly, Lebow states, today's epoch that we live in is dominated by people's desire for standing rather than the other two motives (p. 75). Modernity, contrary to numerous other theories, reconstructed the meaning and the importance of wealth or appetite and made it an instrument to achieve standing. While Rousseau touches upon the same argument as he regards being viewed favorably by others as the most important passion of modernity, Adam Smith asserts that people are in need of being noticed with approbation (Rousseau, 1761; Smith, 1822). This is also why it is important to discuss the status-seeking elements in countries' foreign policies in today's world as standing or spirit is believed to be the dominant motive in our epoch. On the other hand, as discussed before, spirit and other motives are cultural and how they are being expressed across societies and times vary (Lebow, 2008, p. 104-8). Anything can confer status at different times and places which is why theorizing on a given structure would be erroneous. To this end, I benefit from Lebow's theory as it is built

on process rather than a structure. Bergson and Andison (2010) drew attention to the same problem in numerous scholars' understanding of international relations by arguing that their delineation of the international system is just a snapshot that captures only a moment or a period which is why they perceive the structure as stable rather than changing (p. 232; quoted in Lebow, 2008, p. 59).

Lebow brings a similar criticism to numerous mainstream IR theories by arguing that while realist scholars erroneously argue in favor of the unchanging nature of the international system, liberal scholars' arguments belong only to one epoch and they mistakenly believe in their ideal-world rather than explaining the real dynamics of the constantly changing international system (p. 74-6). Also, for instance, realist scholars misperceive the nature of the international system as they regard anarchy as the norm and survival as one of the most important objectives of the states. That is to say that these theories are either focus on one motive or the other and that makes these theories inaccurate and incomplete. Lebow (2008) argues that while liberalism and Marxism are built on appetite, realist scholars delineate the international system as a fear-driven structure (p. 92). However, as opposed to what realism and other mainstream theories expect, people may in certain times be eager to risk their survival or wealth to gain higher-standing. Therefore, as Wohlforth (2009) argues, these theories are built on dubious assumptions on human motivations (p. 29). For instance, in myriads of societies, dying honorably in a war has been considered to be better than living a long life. To sum up, the mainstream IR theories both misread the nature of the international system by taking the dynamics of their epoch as given and neglected other motives of human beings which paved the way for their oversimplified delineation of international relations.

Yet, although I have been discussing the impacts of fundamental human motives on states' foreign policy behaviors, there are certain questions that remain unanswered like why these motives matter for states or how these motivations, human emotions, and psychologies are linked to states that are unable to feel emotions.

### **3.4 Why Status Matters in International Relations and Social Identity Theory**

How can individuals' desire for self-esteem be impactful in states' foreign policy behaviors and human nature or psychology be linked to states' motivations? Answering this question is important because, as Onega (2014) questions, states cannot feel emotions like individuals and it is uncertain how these emotions become impactful in states' policies. SIT offers an answer to this puzzle as its foundational propositions pertain to the value that people attach to the membership of a group. According to Tajfel (1978b), the commitment to a group matters for people because their identities are being shaped and, in fact, constituted with their memberships to these collectivities like social groups or nations (p. 63-4). While individuals endeavor to have self-esteem with the confirmation of their success and standing within the group in the valued aspects, they also manage to gain status with their group identity by comparing the groups that they identify with to the others that have similar standings (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As mentioned before while introducing "status communities", the individuals are prone to engage in the comparisons after which they are more likely to prevail and to have higher-standing in the aftermath of this comparison (Abrams & Hogg, 2006, p. 21-22). Therefore, individuals' identification with their states prompts them to feel ashamed if their state loses a comparison with another state and to have self-esteem if their states prevail. However, how

individuals' psychologies can be impactful in states' foreign policy behaviors must be explained by analyzing the links between individuals and states.

As Wohlforth argues, the question of why status matters for states can be answered by referring to social psychology discipline and SIT (2009, p. 35). Applying SIT to international relations, one might argue that individuals' emotional commitment with their states through identification make their states' standing and status important for them as their states' outrivaling of others would enhance their self-esteem. More importantly, as Onea (2014) argues, because of the fact that the state leaders are the chief representatives of their states, they identify with their countries and are even more sensitive to the status of their nations than their citizens (p. 131). Besides, as the leaders of states need to appeal to the public opinion and powerful domestic coalitions, they are compelled to protect and enhance their states' statuses for their and the citizens' self-esteem and, thereby, for the longevity of their government within the country (Wolf, 2011, p. 46-7). Moreover, nationalism is also argued to be originated from the leaders' and citizens' national affiliations and motives for self-esteem as scholars, such as Lebow and Greenfeld, claim that people of a nation seek enhanced self-esteem through the victories of their country and lose self-worth when their country faces with setbacks (Lebow, 2008, p. 40; Greenfeld, 1992). Therefore, state leaders endeavor for protecting their countries' statuses within the international society which is one of the reasons why human nature has systemic consequences.

However, countries' responses or the strategies that they employ differ in accordance with divergent conditions. As one of the propositions of SIT, Tajfel and Turner (1979) offered three different responses that countries tend to perform according to the conditions with which they face in the international system. These

responses are *social mobility*, *social creativity*, and *social competition*. Social mobility refers to the condition when a particular country strives to emulate the behaviors of the members of an elite club in order to be admitted to the group and thereby enhance its status from within the existing status hierarchy (Larson & Shevchenko, 2014, p. 38). However, for this response to be performed by a country, the doors of these elite groups must be open for new members (Tajfel, 1978a). For instance, countries' efforts to join the EU can be given as an example of social mobility strategy. However, if these countries are unable to join these elite clubs or their standings within the international system are not acknowledged by the society of states, they would perceive the status hierarchy in the international system as illegitimate. That would prompt these states to adopt social competition strategies that refer to countries' attempts for outperforming the other states in several rankings of statuses in order for the higher-status countries to recognize these states' newfound positions in the international system (Turner & Brown, 1978). The Cold War or the Sino-Soviet Split are two of the most examined cases that can be given as examples to social competition. Finally, if status hierarchies are believed to be stable and legitimate, the countries may also adopt social creativity strategies by finding a new criterion for comparison in which they may have higher standing (Lemaine, 1974). I argue that the Turkish state performed all these three strategies within the period between 2002 and 2020. That is another reason, together with explaining the links between individuals' behaviors with states' acts, why SIT is a useful tool in construing Turkish foreign policy.

Nevertheless, although SIT proposes that countries compare themselves with relevant comparison groups to gain self-esteem, rising states, from time to time, determine other states with much higher standing to compare themselves with.

Additionally, while prospect theory offers that countries determine their reference point around the status quo in the international system, these rising states frame their reference point well-above their actual standing which may prompt them to take higher risks and exercise social competition as their aspired standings are not recognized by the international society. Why these countries compare themselves with much higher-status countries and how one can empirically demonstrate if a country determined a reference point well-above its standing will be explained as I believe it is important to explain certain anomalies in Turkish foreign policy.

### **3.5 Prospect Theory and Status Signaling**

As I discussed in the second chapter, prospect theory is a useful tool in explaining foreign policy behaviors of countries which also contains certain elements that can be help examine the self-image of a country. Its main proposition is that countries are risk-averse with respect to gains and risk acceptant with respect to losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). However, what represents gains or losses for a country depends on itself as each country has a different reference point around which it determines its gains and losses. Nevertheless, at times, countries frame their reference point well-above status-quo which might lead the key individuals in these countries to have a constant perception of loss from their aspiration point and, thereby, prompt them to take higher risks in the international system (Greve and Levy, 2018, p. 156). While there are several reasons for these misperceptions, the most relevant one to the Turkish case is about a rising state's expectations of positive future outcomes. In other words, certain rising state leaders might believe that their country will be able to compare themselves with the countries that have a much higher status in the international system as their rise is inevitable and their pace would catch up with many high-status countries. This misperception is argued to be



impactful in many countries' highly risk-taking foreign policy agendas in the international system.

The process within which a country starts to misperceive its standing within the international system and frames its reference point above status-quo can be traced by scrutinizing its status signals. As introduced before, status signaling reflects where a country perceives itself or demonstrates its status claims to international society. That is to say that a change in a country's status signals can be interpreted as a change in its self-image, identity, or its reference point. Since status signaling can be performed through numerous channels like rhetorical positioning or acquiring aircraft carriers, a country's perception of its own standing can be analyzed by looking at its actions or its perceptions by either examining the countries' endeavors to acquire status markers or the rhetoric of its leaders. Therefore, one's self-image or identity is a major determinant of its behaviors which is why clarifying the links between identity and fundamental human motives is essential.

### **3.6 Identity, Ontological Security and Fundamental Human Motives**

The identity of a country or an individual is an important component of my thesis as it is related to people's desire to have the distinction between "us" and "others" and, thereby, to gain self-esteem by these comparisons or by their rankings within these constructed hierarchies. That is the foremost reason why there are parallels with my interpretation of Lebow's argument and ontological security theory. Ontological security theorists argue that states, together with their physical security, strive to protect their ontological security or, in other words, the security of the self and their identity (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). The identity of an individual or a state is built through relationships with significant others and maintained by

routinizing these relations. Moreover, Jefferson et al. (1996) argue that the cultural environment is also an influential factor in the constitution of states' identities and behaviors (p. 2-8). However, it is important to note that Lebow's understanding of identity and the impact of culture on identity is different because the focus of his argument is on the fundamental human motives as he (2008) says:

I pursue a more restrictive, and admittedly limited, approach to identity that focuses on human goals. Individuals and their societies place different values on appetite, spirit and reason and channel their expression in different ways. These choices are a major determinant of identity. [...] culture generates identity in a double sense. It emphasizes some motives and downgrades others and regulates the ways in which approved ones should be developed and expressed. It does the same for the spirit by defining the activities that gain esteem and the routes and mechanisms by which it is achieved and celebrated. [...] So, motives are an important constituent of identity, and identity is important because it determines our interests, and interests in turn inform behavior (p. 563).

Therefore, Lebow pictures a process within which fundamental human motives shape identities of individuals and states which eventually control the behaviors of these actors. That is to say that, I argue, individuals or states desire to protect their identity as this helps them to reach to the ends of these three fundamental human motives, especially of the spirit.

To sum up, in the second and third chapter I endeavored to explain the theoretical propositions of my thesis and to show while certain theories fail to explain states' behaviors by either misreading international relations or neglecting essential components of it, other complementary theories constitute an argumentative mosaic which, I believe, have great explanatory power. However, without demonstrating whether certain actions of countries are motivated from the arguments

that I explained above or without explicitly showing that the changes in the behaviors of an actor are originated from the propositions of these three theories, my arguments cannot go beyond being mere speculations.

### **3.7 Linking Theory with Practice: Overview of the Methodology**

It is not sufficient to only analyze the actions of a state to comprehend the motives behind these actions and foreign policy behaviors. The reason behind that is although behaviors of an actor might give some clues about the motives of it, myriads of motivations or perceptual differences might result in the same action. Therefore, it is essential to examine both the actions and perceptions of a state to comprehend its motives behind its policies.

As status is ascribed or attributed good, it is hard to measure countries' statuses and their ranking within numerous status hierarchies. However, measuring countries' standings would not generate fruitful results as my argument is about status-seeking element in Turkish foreign policy, Turkish state leaders' determination of its reference point, and its satisfaction with its status within the international system, which are measurable. Firstly, to discern whether spirit or status-seeking elements occupy a place in Turkish foreign policy, I will scrutinize its actions and foreign policy agenda and how these policies change throughout the process starting from 2002 until 2020. Gilady (2018) argues that countries' adoption of costly and excessive policies and the acquisition of conspicuous status markers demonstrates to what extent these countries are concerned with their position (p. 50-4). As status markers or symbols must be limited in number to confer status, acquisition of these goods like aircraft carriers or adoption of policies like space

programs in today's world can be costly and can be corroborative evidence that the status-seeking concerns are present in its foreign policy agenda.

Secondly, to discern where the state leaders determined their state's reference or aspiration point to be can be understood by the changes in the status signaling of a country. As status is signaled both rhetorically and through the acquisition of status-markers, I will examine state leaders' statements to demonstrate their perceptions and Turkey's endeavor for acquiring status-markers or adoption of ambitious policies to show their status-seeking actions. Therefore, to discern the status-seeking elements in Turkish foreign policy, the changes in the reference point of Turkey, and the changes in its leaders' satisfaction with its standing, I will utilize process tracing methods to disclose the connections and changes between chaining events. Collier (2011) argues that process tracing is a tool for drawing causal inferences which helps scholars to address the causality between the events and the reasons behind these changes (p. 824). However, to prove the causality between events, one needs diagnostic pieces of evidences which is why I will navigate primary sources like leaders' statements and various secondary sources.

All in all, in the next empirical chapters, by utilizing process tracing methods, I will argue in favor of the explanatory power of these three complementary theories. I will show the changes in Turkish foreign policy by tracing the causality between the chain of events and argue that while Turkey was exercising social mobility and social creativity before 2011, it employed social competition strategies in the aftermath of the Arab Spring as its leaders determined a reference point well-above its deserved standing which led the Turkish state to pursue over-ambitious risk-taking strategies to not lose their believed rank in the international system.

## **CHAPTER IV: STATUS-SEEKING ELEMENTS IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY BEFORE THE ARAB SPRING (2002-2011)**

Just as much as introducing the theories and their propositions, it is also essential to show the coherence between the aforementioned theories and practice. Thus far, I have laid out the reasons why I argue in favor of the explanatory power of the individual-level in the analysis of the foreign policies of countries and introduced three complementary theories that I believe to be useful in explaining Turkish foreign policy under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. Without demonstrating the evidence that corroborates the propositions of these theories, my arguments in the theoretical chapters would be imaginative and, at best, mere speculations. That is why I reserved the next two chapters to empirically demonstrate the status-seeking elements in the Turkish foreign policy agenda, its motivational grounds that are rooted in the key individuals' perceptions, and the reasons for the change in its strategies and ambitions after the Arab Spring.

The reason why I chose the Arab Spring as a turning point for Turkish foreign policy is that it represents a chain of events within which Turkey realized that its status claims were not being recognized by numerous global actors. Turkey's desire to become an influential regional power was invalidated and its long-lasting policies in its region and the global arena were broke down (Araş & Akarçeşme, 2012, p. 47). Although it is not the only event that frustrated Turkey's ambitious status claims, its duration corresponds to the time when Turkish policy-makers started to believe that Turkey's deserved status is not recognized by the international society. While Turkish foreign policy-makers achieved to determine a reference point that is close to the status-quo at the beginning of the 2000s, it incrementally moved away from that point and eventually resulted in Turkey's highly risky social competition

strategies in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Therefore, I argue, the Arab Spring was proved to be a defining moment for a major transformation in Turkish foreign policy as while Turkey was pursuing social mobility or creativity strategies and deeming the international hierarchy as legitimate, it started to employ social competition strategies because Turkish misperception of its standing within the international system or erroneous framing of its reference point prompted the key individuals to take highly risky actions both in its region and in the international arena. I will follow a chronological order and start with analyzing the Turkish accession process to the EU in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is one of the first major foreign policy agendas that the AKP government endeavored to expedite in its first years.

#### **4.1 The EU Accession Process as a Social Mobility Strategy**

According to Lebow (2008), the universal drive for self-esteem makes all the people admire and try to emulate the skills of others that are considered praiseworthy by society (p. 15). Social mobility strategies of countries are major manifestations of the drive for the spirit in the international arena as it refers to countries' endeavor for mimicking the behaviors and adopting the values of an elite group to be accepted as a member. Although one can address numerous events that demonstrate the impact of the drive for the spirit in Turkish foreign policy, the EU accession process was one of the few major social mobility strategies that the AKP government pursued in the 2000s. Accession to the EU occupied a major place in the AKP's foreign policy agenda when it first came to power in 2002 and its policies towards reaching that goal indicate to what extent Turkish foreign policy was driven by the desire to join this elite club and, thereby, for self-esteem.

Europeanization and the modernization projects were nothing new to Turkish society because the state elite, in the early years of the Republic, formulated being recognized as a European and a modern country as the ultimate objective of the country. However, the formal process that paves the way for a country to be European started in 1959 for Turkey. Examining the history of relations between Turkey and the EU is helpful to comprehend the differences within this process in the 2000s. Shortly after the signing of the Rome Treaty, which is the founding treaty of the European Economic Community (EEC), Turkey applied for Associate membership in 1959. Turkey's application was approved in 1963 with the Ankara Agreement which also started a process with the goal of establishing a customs union between the EC and Turkey. More importantly, this three-step process is deemed in the Ankara Agreement as major progress in the way to Turkey's full membership to the EC. However, after the signing of the association agreement, the relations between Turkey and the EC entered into a roughly 20-years period within which both sides experienced political problems and skepticism towards the other side which decelerated Turkey's process towards having a full membership. One of the most important developments within these years occurred in 1978 when, the then Turkish Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit unilaterally suspended the Ankara Treaty with the justification that the customs union would damage Turkish economy by putting it in a market that it cannot compete with (Müftüler-Baç, 2005, p. 20). However, although the 1982 military coup worsened the relations, Turkey applied for a full-membership in 1987 after the coming of a civilian government to power. Even though the Custom Union agreement was signed in 1995, the relations once again entered into a problematic process in 1997 until 1999 because of the fact that the EU's decision of not including Turkey to the list of candidate countries in the Luxembourg Summit.

As Wood (1999) argues, this generated a sense of disappointment and wrath both in the public and among the Turkish political elites (p. 103). Put differently, this frustrated Turkey's status objectives in those years which is why the Turkish government responded with anger and explicit reference to its autonomy. Turkey stated that they will no longer discuss the Cyprus Problem or human rights issues with the EU as these are considered as domestic affairs of Turkey. Besides, Mesut Yılmaz, the then Prime Minister, stated that Turkey's pursuit of membership to the EU was not worth the humiliations in these summits (Park, 2000, p. 35). Lebow (2008) accurately addresses these kinds of reactions from countries by stating that the spirit craves autonomy as it is essential to this goal and it responds with anger to humiliations and any impediment to autonomy (p. 15).

Two years later in 1999, Turkey, Öniş (2000) argues, paradoxically emerged as a candidate country for full EU membership at the Helsinki Summit which generated a new wave of optimism within Turkey (p. 464). Although the EU stated that Turkey is destined to join the EU in the summit, it was made clear that the accession negotiations can only begin if Turkey is to fulfill the political aspects of the Copenhagen criteria. The Copenhagen criteria are the conditions of the EU that the member states determined in the summit in Copenhagen in 1993 which is argued to be the primary factor that instigated a reform period in Turkey starting from 1999 (Aydın-Düzgit & Keyman, 2007; Öniş, 2009).

Although several reform packages that pertain to civil code and freedom of expression were adopted in 2000 and 2001, Müftüler-Baç (2005) observes that a major breakthrough in Turkey's EU membership journey came after the AKP government acceded to power (p. 25). When AKP first came to power, the EU accession process was, in fact, the sole remedy with which it can appeal to the public



and ensure national gratification by aiming for membership in an elite club. Even before the elections, as the chairman of AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emphasized that their political party will endeavor to save Turkey from its current status as a “ghetto country”. More interestingly, he stated that although Turkey is eager to engage in cooperation with Iran and Russia, these countries cannot be alternative models for Turkey as the EU represents the only exemplary for the Turkish nation (“Erdoğan: AB'nin alternatifi yok”, 2002). Therefore, these statements indicate that the AKP’s political elites prioritized the EU membership in the foreign policy agenda and perceived the EU as the only model to whose level Turkey must endeavor to reach. To this end, the AKP government initiated a series of constitutional reform packages to reach political aspects of Copenhagen criteria.

As the political aspects of the Copenhagen criteria pertain mostly to the principles of liberty, democracy, rule of law, and respect for fundamental human rights, the AKP government, in the immediate aftermath of the elections, adopted two constitutional reform packages to improve political rights in Turkey. In retrospect, these packages were the beginning of a long-lasting reform process as the parliament rewrote the one-third of the constitution to be able to reach the standards of the EU (Paul et al., 2014, p. 54). The then-president of constitutional committee Burhan Kuzu signaled the ambitious agenda of the AKP government by telling that these two packages are only a small part of their reform program and indicated upcoming major constitutional reforms (“2002’de Erdoğan”, 2011). While the EU was expressing its concerns about political problems like the role of the military in the politics, death penalty, and several other human rights issues, the AKP government was preparing tailored constitutional reforms to respond to these concerns and to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria. For instance, at the beginning of

2003, the government prepared the first of a series of constitutional reforms regarding the penal code in Turkey which aimed to improve the human rights and freedoms. In the following two years, several constitutional reforms were prepared and numerous amendments were brought into force in Turkey. While several of these reforms aimed to decrease the role of the military in the politics and jurisdiction by abolishing State Security Courts and decreasing the representation of the military in the state institutions, many others achieved to rescind the laws that limited human rights and granted new freedoms to Turkish people.

The literature on Turkey's accession process to the EU agrees upon the idea that these particular reforms were adopted primarily because of the EU's conditionality (Müftüler-Baç, 2005; Narbone and Tocci, 2007; Öniş, 2009). Following their arguments, I believe that the reform packages in the first term of the AKP government were prepared and operationalized primarily to be able to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria and enter into the EU which is an elite club in the international system. Put differently, these reform packages were a component of the AKP government's social mobility strategies. The reason why I argue that the EU accession process was a social mobility strategy is that, as mentioned above, the key individuals in the AKP government were continuously referring to the need for a rise in Turkey's international status and the government was adopting these major reforms that are tailored to the conditions of the EU. More importantly, Larson and Shevchenko (2014) argue that the countries that pursue social mobility strategies emulate and strive to imitate the values and behaviors of the member state in an elite club and, thereby, to have a higher status in the existing status hierarchy (p. 38). Turkey was clearly endeavoring for emulating the values of the EU and for not behaving in a way that might clash with the values of the union. For instance, in May

2004, the AKP government initiated a reform package that proposes applying the articles of the international treaties rather than the national laws in a possible event of contrast between the national and international law. In addition, in September of the same year, although the AKP government prepared a proposal to criminalize adultery in Turkey, it was withdrawn as a result of the strong reaction from the members of the EU. Besides these developments, the emulation and aspiration were also apparent in the rhetoric of the key individuals as they repeatedly underlined the shared values of Turkey and the EU (“Erdoğan: AB değerlerini paylaşıyoruz.”, 2003). These were some of the many clear manifestations that the AKP government put the directions of the EU above its intended agendas and did not prioritize its Islamic roots, and a reflection of to what extent the status of the country was important to the foreign policy makers in Turkey.

On the other hand, as Lebow (2008) argues, the need for self-esteem makes us admire and emulate the behaviors and skills of others that are considered laudable by society (p. 15). To demonstrate how the values and behaviors of Turkey and the EU were similar to each other, in 2004, Erdoğan told that “There is no big difference between us. We have what they have and they have what we have. The only difference is: One is Hans and the other is Ahmet, Mehmet” (“Erdoğan: AB işi tamam”, 2004). In October of the same year, the European Commission offered accession negotiations to Turkey which was welcomed with great enthusiasm both in Turkish politics and the society. Moreover, in the regular reports on Turkey’s progress towards accession, Commission of the European Communities (CEC) was specifying the continuous improvements in Turkey’s process towards fulfilling the political aspect of the Copenhagen criteria (CEC, 2003; 2004; 2005). Erdoğan interpreted these developments in the way to the EU membership as Turkey’s finding

of its true place in the international system and among the modern nations (“Erdoğan’ın 13 yıl önceki”, 2017). Therefore, he was implicitly referring to Turkey’s satisfaction with its status in the international hierarchy in these years and was trying to appeal to Turkish people and ensure social cohesion by addressing the rising status of the Turkish nation as a whole.

Apart from the political aspects of the Copenhagen criteria, the EU was also pointing out the economic conditionalities for the membership. The economic aspects of the Copenhagen standards were categorized under different subsets ranging from a functioning market economy to the ability to compete with the markets of the EU members (Faucompret & Konings, 2008). Recently coming out of a major crisis in 2001, the Turkish economy was struggling at the beginning of the first term of the AKP government. However, as Müftüler-Baç (2005) argues, the AKP government had two important advantages to implement economic reforms quickly: one being its opportunity to form a majority government and the other is inheriting the economic reforms and stabilization programs that were designed by Kemal Dervis, the previous Minister of State in charge of the economy (p. 25). The AKP government achieved to adopt a series of economic reforms in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria which ended up with almost globally unmatched rates of economic growth in its first and second terms. Referring to these years, Öniş (2006) argues that the economic success of the new government was primarily caused by the EU’s economic conditionality and the commitment of the AKP government to fiscal discipline and reforms (p. 253-4). Between 2002 and 2008, the Turkish economy grew with high rates amounting to a 40% overall increase in its GDP and Turkey achieved to be among the countries with the highest growth rates in the world (İnsel, p. 115-7). Along with the acknowledgment of Turkey’s

democratization process, the EU was also reporting its recognition of the improvements in its economy. In CEC's yearly reports on Turkey's accession process from 2002 to 2006, the commission observed and reported major or limited progress in almost all economic criteria (CEC, 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006). These developments and start of the full membership negotiations were perceived by the Chief EU Negotiator Ali Babacan and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as Turkey's eventual success in the way to reach its "potential" and acknowledgment of Turkey's new standing within the international status hierarchy after its great economic and political revolution. For instance, Babacan commentated on the beginning of the accession negotiations by saying: "Turkey transformed into a nation that is incomparable with its past and Turkish accession process to the EU is not only a beginning of a new era for the EU but all the world" (Directorate for EU Affairs, 2005). That is to say that the key individuals in Turkey were referring to Turkey's rising status in the international system and expressing their gratitude as a result of the acknowledgment of its new standing by the EU.

Nevertheless, at the end of 2005, the EU's offer to have an alternative partnership with Turkey rather than accepting it as a full member of the union became a devastating frustration to Turkey's status claims. In the aftermath of a series of major reforms, this development was almost proof for Turkey that the doors of the EU were closed which resulted in the weakening of commitment to these reforms (Noutcheva & Aydın-Düzgit, 2012). Although Turkey continued to initiate several reforms in the following years, the EU accession process lost its primacy in Turkey's foreign policy agenda after 2005 (Yılmaz, 2014, p. 306). SIT proposes that if the boundaries of an elite club are closed to new members and the status hierarchy appears to be stable to a particular individual or group, it may

exercise social creativity strategies by identifying new agendas on which they may rank higher and, thereby, search for alternative ways to have a higher status in the international system (Lemaine, 1974). The major agendas in Turkish foreign policy in the aftermath of 2006 until the Arab Spring, after the EU's suspension of eight negotiation chapters, are the manifestations of Turkey's endeavor to find new ways to have a higher status in the existing international status hierarchy. Oğuzlu (2012) argues that the AKP government lost its commitment to the EU accession process after 2005 and endeavored to continue its modernization or "Europeanization" quest with agendas other than the EU accession (p. 232-7). Therefore, Turkey's EU membership agenda lost its priority for the foreign policy makers (Öniş and Yılmaz, 2009), and these key individuals changed the direction of foreign policy by adopting several other major foreign policy agendas towards various regions which is why I argue that Turkey exercised social creativity from 2005 until 2011. Together with the changing of the foreign policy agendas, the key individuals' perceptions, that are reflected in their rhetoric, towards the EU accession process are also corroborative evidence of the fact that while Turkey was exercising social creativity until the Arab Spring, foreign policy makers started to adopt social competition strategies after 2011. For instance, on 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, Erdoğan's speech demonstrated that Turkey would strive to improve its status with different agendas other than the EU accession process as he stated that Turkey had been facing with the signals of recognition within its region and globally, and might continue its advancement by renaming the Copenhagen political criteria as Ankara political criteria and Maastricht criteria as the İstanbul economic criteria (Ferik, 2015). While the EU accession process and Turkey's fulfillment of these criteria slowed down until 2011, Turkey started to lose its political and economic advancements and to slowly run the tape

back in the aftermath of the Arab Spring which corresponds to the time when the country pursued social competition strategies (Yılmaz, 2016). Even at one-point, Turkish political elites considered a referendum on Turkey's EU accession process which could have ended its more than 50-years-long endeavor to be a member of the EU ("Erdoğan'dan AB konusunda", 2018). While Turkey's social competition strategies, highly risky foreign policy agenda and misperception of its own standing within the status hierarchy of the liberal international order will be discussed in the next chapter, its pursuit of new foreign policy agendas like Turkish foreign aid must be discussed beforehand in order to show the transition to social creativity strategies and explain how Turkey's rise created a misperception and excessive optimism about the following years which eventually resulted in the adoption of an over-ambitious and risky foreign policy after the Arab Spring.

## **4.2 Social Creativity Strategies between 2006 and 2011**

### **4.2.1 Turkish Foreign Aid**

Even more than the foreign policy agendas themselves, the changes in these agendas and the key individuals' rhetoric are more explanatory of Turkey's perception towards the legitimacy of the status hierarchy within the liberal international order and its satisfaction with its standing in this hierarchy. After 2005, Turkish foreign policy elites did not engage in a direct contestation with the leading states of the liberal international order. Rather they were in search of different foreign policy agendas with which they could increase Turkey's status in the international system, and ensure social cohesion within the country.

Referring to the late 2000s, Lebow (2008) argues that for many people in the West and the East, Muslim and Christian, the standing of their country started to

depend on their countries' commitment to the actions that they consider to reflect the divine will (p. 490). Regarding the Turkish case, I believe Pınar İpek's (2015) argument is complementary to Lebow's argument in explaining Turkish foreign policy as she states that the foreign policy elite's intersubjective understanding of Turkey's historical roots and cultural proximity with its region constituted shared normative values which became influential in Turkish foreign policy. Following these claims, I argue that a blend of these motives prompted Turkish foreign policy makers to adopt a major foreign aid agenda that has been mostly directed towards the countries with majority Muslim population. Therefore, the foreign policy makers identified a new status dimension in which Turkey might rank higher and also satisfy the status concerns of its society. That is to say that although the spirit was an end in itself for Turkish foreign policy makers, it was also utilized as a tool to satisfy the society. Besides, as the spirit craves autonomy, this was also a step to signal that although Turkey has been an aid-recipient country for decades, it achieved to be self-sufficient and even have the resources to donate to other countries. In fact, in his speeches, Erdoğan frequently signals that Turkey earned its autonomy back by paying its debt to IMF and that Turkey now is a donor country that has the highest volume of foreign aid in the world compared to per capita income ("Erdoğan: Türkiye'yi demokraside bir üst lige çıkardık", 2019).

While Turkish foreign aid agenda and institutional capacity were established before the AKP government's accession to power, revitalization of these institutions became possible after 2005. Although the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) was established in 1992 to accelerate the developments of the Turkic-countries that became newly independent after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its activities remained relatively limited in those years (Köstem, 2017).



However, TİKA's activities started to increase especially in Africa and the Middle East after 2005 which roughly corresponds to the time after the suspension of Turkey's EU accession chapters. This policy incrementally evolved into a major foreign policy agenda that aimed to bring higher status within Turkey's region as the AKP government was striving for recognition as a regional power (Oğuzlu, 2020).

Having initiated a new policy under the name of humanitarian diplomacy, Turkish foreign policy elites endeavored to rank the country highly in this newly identified status dimension that is pertaining to morality. However, Altunışık (2014) argues that Turkey was not trying to be seen as a country that reproduces traditional donor-recipient hierarchies (p. 335). In fact, Turkey tried to avoid the accusations about the exploitation of the African continent and endeavored to demonstrate the "altruistic" motives or "mutual benefits" in its policies (Belder & Dipama, 2018). That is why its aim has been to demonstrate the nontraditional nature of its agenda by delivering foreign aid on-demand and in a different way. Parlar Dal and Dipama (2019) categorize such acts as social creativity policies by arguing that these strategies permit states to demonstrate the uniqueness of their policies (p. 669). Therefore, Turkish foreign policy makers endeavored to demonstrate the distinctiveness of foreign aid policies by the volume and type of foreign aid. After the revitalization of TİKA, Turkish Official Development Assistance (ODA) increased exponentially as the amount rose from 85 million dollars to 2.5 billion dollars until the Arab Spring, and almost 10 billion dollars to this day (TİKA, 2018). As already mentioned, in its yearly reports, TİKA demonstrates that they prepare projects according to the needs of the particular aid-recipient country which is why while TİKA's projects have been more infrastructure and education oriented in the Middle East, they have been preparing mostly sanitary projects in Africa. In addition

to it, the difference of Turkish foreign aid was that TIKA run its projects with its own personnel which allows Turkey to monitor the effectiveness of its foreign aid agenda (Murphy & Sazak, 2012). The amount, regional direction and the type of the foreign aid were frequently emphasized by the Turkish foreign policy makers to show their unique “moral and humanitarian” foreign policy agenda towards its region which aimed to ensure its stability and development as a regional power and also to underline Turkey’s place among the top donors in the world in terms of the amount. For instance, Erdoğan, in one of the speeches in the following years, stated that Turkey is the top donor in the world in terms of the amount and Turkey, unlike numerous other Western institutions that have been delivering foreign aid to the least developed countries, left its mark on these least developed countries with a foreign aid model that is peculiar only to Turkey (Directorate of Communications, 2019a).

The foreign aid policy of Turkey was also an act of status signaling or rather it reflected Turkey’s status claims in the international system. As Paul et al. (2014) argue, one of the ways that states perform status signaling is diplomatic activity and these activities give clues about the ranking that the state leaders locate their countries to be at. Therefore, the Turkish foreign aid agenda uncovered Turkey’s regional power status claims or was a manifestation of Turkish status signaling in the international system. In fact, signaling of regional power status became even more obvious when Ahmet Davutoğlu was appointed as Foreign Minister in May 2009. In his book *Strategic Depth*, Davutoglu (2001) proposes a series of arguments regarding Turkey’s specificities that are derived from Turkey’s history and regional unique advantages. According to him, these specificities bring Turkey a distinct identity which is why the country has certain responsibilities towards its geopolitical spheres ranging from the Middle East to the Balkans and is destined to act as a regional

leader with its active diplomacy. Davutoğlu's application of his "Strategic Depth Doctrine" to Turkish foreign policy overlapped with Turkey's ongoing social creativity strategies and, as Grigoriadis (2010) argues, his ambitions within the international system were not atypical for the majority of the AKP political leadership (p. 4). Although Davutoğlu's doctrine accorded with the AKP's ongoing policies, his particular understanding of Turkey's foreign policy has changed the policies of TİKA and Turkish foreign policy in general (Altunışık, 2014).

Having initiated certain agendas like "zero problems with neighbors" or "proactive peace diplomacy", Davutoğlu (2010) designated new directions for the Turkish foreign aid as he argued that TİKA was mostly needed in reaching the goals of these agendas. That is the foremost reason why while the share of the Middle East within the Turkish foreign aid rose from 5% in 2008 to 22% in 2010, the MENA region received almost all of the Turkish foreign aid in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (TİKA, 2008; 2019). These policies were in turn met with relative recognition of Turkey as a significant actor within the regions that Turkey pursued active foreign policies at. For instance, in 2008, Erdoğan was received to the summit of the African Union (AU) as an honored guest as a result of Turkey's policies in the region (Şahin & Çevik, 2015, p. 182). Moreover, while Turkey joined the African Development Bank in the same year, the AU declared Turkey a strategic partner (Özkan, 2010). On the other hand, according to the opinion surveys that Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) conducted in the Middle Eastern countries, the opinions towards Turkey were becoming increasingly positive and, in 2013, Turkey became the first country to be perceived as the political and cultural leader of the region (Akgün & Gündoğar, 2013). Moreover, opinion surveys that were conducted on the verge of the Arab Spring with thousands of people in the Middle Eastern

countries show that more than 70% of the people were believing that Turkey was becoming more influential in the region day by day (Akgün & Perçinoğlu, 2010).

Nevertheless, although Turkey's foreign aid policy seemed to help improve its status within its region, the Arab Spring and its aftermath became a period within which Turkish status claims were continuously frustrated. I argue that Turkey's status claims were repudiated by major powers and countries within the region because Turkish state leaders determined a reference point well-above its deserved status. As I already mentioned, following Greve and Levy (2018), I argue that this misperception or "grandiose delusion" was derived from Turkey's future expectations. These high expectations are rooted also in Turkey's certain other policies that reinforced Turkey's rise and recognition in the international system and also Turkish foreign policy makers' quixotic perception of this rise. Levy (1996) summarizes this by arguing that:

The changes that induce these framing effects may be gradual rather than sudden. Consider a situation in which A is slowly gaining in power at the expense of B and the two states try to negotiate a settlement over a conflict between them. It is possible that A might frame its reference point at some future asset level based on the assumption of the continued improvement in its position, treat any point short of that aspiration level as a loss, and be willing to undertake inordinately risky actions to reach its target position (p. 191).

Eventually, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Turkey performed social competition strategies and adopted a highly risky foreign policy agenda. Nevertheless, before discussing Turkey's social competition strategies, I will demonstrate the reasons why Turkish foreign policy makers fell into the false sense of greatness by discussing other policies or recognitions of Turkey in this chapter.

#### **4.2.2 Non-permanent Seat in the UNSC**

Recently, the policies of middle or rising powers within elite clubs and the ways that these actors' endeavors to have higher status with these policies have been discussed in the literature (Larson, 2018; Naylor, 2018; Parlar Dal & Dipama, 2019; Parlar Dal, 2014, 2019a, 2019b). While several scholars argue that the rising powers pursue collective status strategies in these elite clubs, many others claim that certain rising powers strive to establish a parallel order from within the liberal international order. Parlar Dal and Dipama (2019) designate social creativity as the driver of the behaviors of several countries within G20 and demonstrate how these countries utilize South-South development cooperation as a status marker and as a part of their social creativity strategies. Similarly, I argue, while Turkey's non-permanent membership in UNSC is the result of its social creativity strategies within the African continent, its foreign policy agenda within the UNSC is also a part of Turkish social creativity strategies.

Turkey has been a non-permanent member of the UNSC several times in its history although the last time was 1961 before the elections in 2008. Although Turkey ran for non-permanent membership in the 1970s and 1980s, it failed to have a seat in the council. That is why it was perceived as a major success in Turkish foreign policy and as a return for its efforts especially within the Middle East and Africa since 2005 (Kireççi, 2009). Turkey's non-permanent membership became a source of status and helped the Turkish nation to have more self-esteem as the foreign policy makers underlined that the symbolic meaning of the seat demonstrates the recognized global status of Turkey from which both the policy makers and every citizen should be proud of ("Turkish officials hail", 2008). Although the UNSC can be categorized as an elite club, I argue that Turkey's run for membership was not a

social mobility strategy both because of the way that Turkey was elected and also of its behaviors within the UNSC.

The reason why I argue that Turkey's policies in the UNSC can be categorized as social creativity strategies is because of the agendas it offered to the UN, its voting behavior, and the official rhetoric of Turkey in the council. As explained before, one of the ways to pursue social creativity strategies is to demonstrate the distinctiveness or efficiency of their own policies compared to others. Even before its election as a non-permanent member, Turkish foreign policy makers were pointing out the multicultural nature and the unique history of Turkey and picturing Turkey as the only potential country that can understand and resolve the problems of its region (Gül, 2007). At the first minute when Turkey was elected as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, the then Foreign Minister Ali Babacan stated that "Turkey will bring its own perspective to the UNSC and we will definitely bring our independent, but globally recognized foreign policy style to the council" ("Türkiye BMGK", 2008). That is to say that Turkey started its membership with official rhetoric that pointed out Turkey's "prospective unique policies and its distinct perspective". Moreover, Turkey continued its "moral" foreign policy agenda in the UNSC to rank higher in this new dimension and to reach its regional power status by promising to be "the voice of Africa" and paying special attention to issues of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the African continent (Özkan, 2008; Aral, 2009). During its membership, Turkey set the agenda for future conferences on LDCs and endeavored to contribute to the development agenda of the UN. Eventually, in 2011, Turkey held the Conference on the Least Developed Countries in İstanbul and strived to draw the attention of the UN member states to the problems

of the African continent, or the LDCs in general (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), n.d.).

Apart from Africa, Turkey also demonstrated its sensitivity to the problems and development agendas of the Middle Eastern countries in the UNSC. Together with Erdoğan's speech in the conference of World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos in which he signaled Turkey's sensitivity towards the issues of the countries with major Muslim population and Turkey's role as "the protector of oppressed", Turkey's voting behavior for the UN resolutions also reflects its pursuit of regional power status and its endeavor for the demonstration of its "moral" foreign policy agenda in the international level. Although Turkey's voting trend aligned with the Western bloc states in the UNSC, Turkish foreign policy makers dissent from them on the issues regarding the Middle East (Ilgit & Özkeçeci-Taner, 2013; Sever & Gok, 2016). Turkish desire has been to be the leader and chief negotiator between its region and the West as it also held numerous talks as a mediator between Syria and Israel before its non-permanent membership. During its term in the UNSC, especially on the Palestinian question, Turkish officials tried to assume the same role and responsibility to act as the representative of its region. For instance, while, in the first meeting to which Turkey attended as a member of the UNSC, Turkish Foreign Minister criticized the council severely on the issues regarding Israeli troops' presence in Gaza by stating that the council and its resolutions did not protect the victims, Turkey held several meetings on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process during its term in the UNSC. (Aral, 2009; "United Nations International Meeting", 2010).

Although its voting behavior, agendas, and official rhetoric manifested its desire to be perceived as the leader of its region, Turkey's direct contradiction in 2010 with most of the Western countries during its attempt to act as a negotiator

between Iran and the West on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was one of the first clues that Turkish officials started to frame Turkey's reference point above status-quo or rather Turkey's status desire went beyond its region. Put differently, Turkey's vote in the UNSC regarding Iran's uranium enrichment and foreign policy acts regarding the Iran nuclear deal was a signal of status claims of Turkey and a manifestation of Turkish foreign policy makers' perception of Turkey as a country that can have the mediator role in the global issues or a country that can pursue policies that go against the great powers of the status hierarchy in the liberal international order. Before examining how repudiation of Turkey's aspiration point prompted it to engage in highly risky foreign policy after the Arab Spring, I will analyze another identity like the aforementioned "the voice of voiceless" identity, *the Turkish model*, which guided Turkey's policies before and during the uprisings in several countries in the Middle East. In fact, Parlar Dal and Erşen (2014) argue that the Turkish model dates back to 1990s when it was presented as a model of development for the newly independent Turkic Republics. Referring to the Turkish model during 1990s, Köstem (2017) argues that it was "representative of the transformation in Turkey's foreign policy goals" (p. 730). Following him, I argue that Turkey's attempts for leadership in the Middle East in the 2010s have also been helpful in examining its foreign policy objectives.

#### **4.2.3 Turkey as a Model Country for the Middle East**

Lebow (2009) emphasizes that the fundamental human motives and the different values that individuals or societies place on these motives are major constituents of identity. Referring to Greeks, for instance, he argues that honor was a significant constituent of identity and prompted them to establish a concept of Hellenic "us" against the barbarian "others" (2009, p. 219). To this point, I argued



that honor and status have been major constituents of Turkish identity and have examined several status-seeking policies of Turkey that constituted distinct identities ranging from “European” to “the voice of the voiceless”. While desiring to have similar identities with higher-status countries was referred to as social mobility strategy, endeavoring for being a unique example or ranking highly in a distinct dimension like “morality” was counted as social creativity strategy. On the verge of the Arab Spring, Turkey once again started to be viewed as a “model” country for the emerging democracies of the region. Scholars of IR have been debating on the meaning of “Turkish model” for years as it is a concept that was emerged in the early 2000s (Altunışık, 2005; Tepe, 2005; Bâli, 2011; Göksel, 2012; Rane, 2012). However, this ascription or identity was revitalized at the beginning of the Arab Spring and the term was reconceptualized according to Turkey’s recent political activism and economic performance. Dede (2011) argues that this perception towards Turkey was ingenerated incrementally due to multiple factors like Turkey’s ability to have the balance of Islam and democracy, sustainable economic growth, and regional impact. That is why I argue that Turkish foreign policy makers’ embracement of this identity can be explained as the continuation of social creativity strategies since this identity was symbolizing Turkey’s distinct successes, leadership role in its region and its unique ability to act as a belt between the East and the West both geographically and normatively.

The Arab uprisings were sparked in Tunisia and spilled over numerous other countries in the MENA region intending to topple down the oppressive regimes and getting rid of low standards of living. At the onset of the Arab Spring, there was great optimism regarding the future of the uprisings and the possibility of their success to achieve democratic liberalization in the region (Bayat, 2013). The Arab

Spring was a recreation of the order in the MENA region and Turkish foreign policy makers believed that Turkey must play an active role in the creation of the new regional system in order to realize its regional power status aspirations (Aras & Akarçeşme, 2012, p. 45).

Status signaling is a relevant concept to analyze and explain Turkey's stance and policy agenda at the beginning of the Arab Spring. As Pu and Schweller (2014) argue, status signaling can be conceptualized as a message for the status claim that transmits information to other actors in order to change or maintain their perceptions towards the sender's status. As mentioned in the third chapter, status signaling can be also exercised through diplomatic activities and demonstrated through rhetoric. That is why Turkish foreign policy makers frequently addressed Turkey's support for the liberalization struggle of the opposition groups and pictured Turkey as a locomotive for the democratization process in its region which insinuated Turkey's regional power status aspirations. As Öniş (2012) argues, although Turkish foreign policy makers were reluctant to pick sides at the beginning of the Arab Spring, Turkey adopted a unilateral pro-active foreign policy towards the region in a short period of time. For instance, Erdoğan started a series of visits to the countries including Egypt when the then President Mubarak was ousted from power and he presented Turkey as a model of modern Islamic democracy and secularism in its region (Çağaptay, 2020, p. 171). Moreover, with its proactive policy in the second half of the 2000s, the anti-Israel rhetoric and severe criticism towards several authoritarian leaders of the region, Turkish foreign policy makers endeavored to demonstrate that Turkey is the protector of the oppressed nations and is an actor that the newly established governments must emulate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

Therefore, Turkey signaled its regional leadership claims with its official rhetoric and diplomatic activities in the region at the beginning of the Arab uprisings. Turkish foreign policy makers embraced “the model country” identity because it both reflected Turkey’s regional power desires and was a continuation of Turkey’s social creativity strategies. I argue that Turkey was still perceiving the status hierarchy of the liberal international order as legitimate and stable which is why Turkey emphasized its uniqueness by acting as a belt between the East and the West with its achievement in having a parliamentary democracy in a Muslim majority country, its economic stability and its relative higher impact in its region (“Erdoğan: Türkiye rol model”, 2011). Thus, Turkey’s uniqueness was conceptualized in its “model” identity and Turkish foreign policy elites embraced this identity to improve Turkey’s status in its region. As social creativity strategies are pursued in order to have either superiority in a distinct dimension or show the unique policies and specialties of a country, the embracement of “model” identity and adopting policies according to this identity were the reasons why I argue that Turkey pursued social creativity strategies until 2011. In fact, to an extent, Turkey’s status claims were recognized among the opposition groups at the beginning of the uprisings as several opinion polls demonstrated which were conducted by the Brookings Institution, Zogby International, and TESEV. While one opinion poll showed that 61% of people from the MENA region perceived Turkey as a model for their country, the other one demonstrated that 71% of people believed that Turkey should have a great role in the politics of its region (Telhami, 2011; Akgün & Gündoğar, 2013).

Nevertheless, Öniş (2014) argues, the early optimism was lost two and a half years after the onset of the Arab Spring due to the lack of impetus for change and resilience of authoritarian structures. As Turkey’s unilateral activism did not breed

significant results in the region, Turkey eventually adopted “reluctant multilateralism” during the course of the Arab uprisings. Although the U.S. and the EU prompted Turkey to have a more active role in Syria to topple down the Assad regime, Turkey could not live up to expectations and its ability to exert change was proved to be limited (Öniş, 2012, p. 53). However, it is important to note that the official rhetoric of Turkey and its policies both in its region and in the international system after the early stages of the Arab spring are corroborative evidence of the fact that Turkish foreign policy makers determined a reference or an “aspiration” level which was well-above its deserved standing. For instance, the then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu declared Turkey’s official stance regarding the uprisings in Syria in 2011 by offering a multilateral process between the U.S., the EU, the UN, and Turkey (“Davutoğlu’ndan Arap Baharı”, 2011). Turkish foreign policy makers were clearly equalizing the role and status of Turkey in this international crisis with a great power or an entire elite club in the international system. However, Turkish state elites’ misperceptions of Turkey’s deserved status will be elaborated by examining numerous policies including its unilateral interference to the Syrian Civil War against the wills of several great powers or even downing of a Russian aircraft. Since Turkey had been experiencing a relatively high performance in numerous status dimensions and its status was recognized during the years leading to the Arab Spring, Turkish state leaders determined a higher reference point with the quixotic future expectations which led the key individuals to believe that Turkey’s deserved status was not recognized, and thereby the status hierarchy in the liberal international order is illegitimate. This, I argue, led Turkish foreign policy makers to pursue social competition with unilateral activism and engage in highly risky agendas after 2011. Referring to the period after 2011, Ayoob (2012) stated that Turkey endeavored to

compete with global powers like the U.S. and Russia in the region which demonstrated the limits of middle power influence.

Nonetheless, besides Turkey's future expectations, there are several other factors that prompted Turkish foreign policy makers to feel a constant loss of status during these years and perceive the status hierarchy as unstable, and eventually pursue highly risky social competition strategies. For instance, the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla incident was a clear humiliation for Turkey or repudiation of Turkey's regional power status claims as the foreign policy makers have been picturing themselves as the sole protector of the Islamic nations against Israel (Demirtaş-Bagdonas, 2013). As Saltzman (2015) argues, this incident became a matter of honor or humiliation for both sides because of Turkey's demand for an apology. The Middle East is considered to be an honor-based region or, rather, people place more value in the spirit in this environment which is why demanding and delivering an apology has been closely related to people's or states' self-esteem (Barakat, 1993). Although Israeli Prime Minister apologized to Erdoğan for the killing of Turkish citizens after 3 years, Turkish state elites, I argue, experienced a feeling of status loss during this period as they pictured Turkey as the leader of Palestinian-Israeli conflict and as a regional leader. Apart from the perceptions of Turkish state elites, the change in the perceptions of the people in the MENA region also became a factor for Turkey's perception of further status loss. As Turkish foreign policy makers aspired for the regional power status, the recognition from the people of the region reinforced their status claims. However, Turkey's interference in the domestic affairs of these countries was perceived as a humiliation by the people and Turkey's recognition as the model or leader country in the MENA region was slowly disappeared in the following years (Akgün & Gündoğar, 2013). Lebow (2008),

referring to the failure of the U.S. in the Iraq War, argues that one of the reasons was the perceived subordination of the Iraqis to Americans (p. 476). In fact, although Saddam killed thousands of Iraqis, they opposed the American occupation because of the fact that they believed Saddam to be “one of them” unlike Americans. Turkey’s active foreign policy in the region was increasingly being perceived as a subordination since, at one point, Erdoğan deemed the problems within Syria as “the domestic affairs of Turkey” (“Erdoğan: “Suriye iç meselemiz”, 2011). On top of Turkey’s misperception of its own status, the actual loss of recognition further pushed Turkish foreign policy makers to pursue risky foreign policies to regain the status and close the perceived huge gap between the deserved and ascribed status. Lastly, I believe, the Arab Spring corresponded with the time when the great powers of the liberal international order faced with problems like the 2008 Financial Crisis or the eurozone crisis which was another factor that made Turkish state elites to perceive the status hierarchies as unstable, and thereby to start to pursue social competition strategies. Although these policies will be examined in the fifth chapter, Erdoğan’s speech during the eurozone crisis was the first clue of Turkey’s social competition strategies as he invited European countries to join the “TLzone” instead of staying in the Eurozone (“Eurozone yoksa TLzone kurarız”, 2012). Put differently, Turkish foreign policy makers started to try outperforming high-status countries in relevant dimensions of comparison as they were perceiving the status hierarchy as both unstable and illegitimate.

To sum up, Turkish foreign policy elites perceived the status hierarchies as increasingly unstable and illegitimate, and started to believe that a huge gap occurred between the deserved status of Turkey and the status accorded to it during the Arab Spring. However, where these key individuals perceived Turkey to be at within the

international status hierarchy and why Turkey pursued a highly risky foreign policy could only be understood by relating Turkey's overambitious foreign policy acts during the Syrian Civil War and its particular foreign policy agendas until today to desire for spirit. The next chapter turns to Turkey's overambitious foreign policy agendas after the Arab Spring and analyzes the motivational grounds of these policies.

## **CHAPTER V: STATUS-SEEKING ELEMENTS IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE ARAB SPRING (2011-2020)**

The Arab Spring marked the time when the international society noticed that Turkey's status claims and its leaders' perceptions of Turkey's position within the international system are more ambitious than they anticipated. More importantly, it also corresponded to the time when the Turkish state elite realized that their status claims were not recognized by the leading states of the liberal international order. Turkey's economic and political rise, and its relative recognition within its region and in the international organizations were misread by the state elites and brought about quixotic expectations for the future of the country. Levy (1996) refers to this misperception as *reference point bias* which describes the situation when the key individuals frame the status of their country around an expectational or aspiration level. Since status is ascribed by the society within which a particular actor lives, these aspiration levels of rising actors are not recognized. Therefore, this misperception brings about a continuous feeling of status loss because of the nonrecognition that prompt states to engage in highly-risky policies to reach their aspiration levels. Put differently, as these states compare themselves with much higher-status states because of the reference point bias, the state elites believe that their states' status is illegitimately not recognized by the international society. That is why, I argue, Turkey started to pursue social competition strategies in the aftermath of the Arab Spring as the foreign policy makers framed their reference point above the status quo and believed that Turkey's deserved status was not recognized illegitimately.

Besides, although individuals accommodate to the gains in a very short time, they do not reframe their reference point according to losses quickly (Jervis, 1992).



To elaborate, while the leaders of a rising state renormalize or get used to its newfound position in the international system if their state gains status, they do not accommodate to losses which is why nonrecognition of their aspired status might result in a long-lasting period within which the rising state perform social competition strategies. That is the foremost reason why Turkey has been pursuing social competition strategies for almost a decade and pursue highly-risky foreign policy agendas. The change in Turkey's status claims was also discussed by several scholars and Turkey's aspirations as a regional power and a global actor were started to be scrutinized by the relevant literature in recent years (Tanasković, 2012; Kardaş, 2013; Parlar Dal, 2016). For instance, Kardaş (2013) argues that Turkey adopted an ambitious global agenda in recent years and embarked on a series of major foreign policy agendas that went beyond its immediate neighborhood. These policies prompted Turkey to claim responsibility in global issues and to question various characteristics of the liberal international order (p. 637). Moreover, Aydınli and Mathews (2020) argue that Turkey is a country with great aspirations, and the Turkish government "envisions a much larger status for the country in international politics" (p. 14). Addressing the internationalization of Turkish higher education, they also argue that Turkey experienced status inconsistency because of a gap between the Turkish state elites' aspirations for Turkey's status and the status bestowed by the international society.

Consequently, I argue, the status inconsistency or Turkish state elites' dissatisfaction with the status ascribed to Turkey resulted in social competition strategies and directed Turkish foreign policy agenda into a highly-risky path. According to Lebow (2008), this misperception is derived from the excess of the spirit (p. 78). Put differently, rising state leaders' ill-timed expression of anger is

caused by the uncontrolled spirit which is self-destructive. Onega (2014) argues that the pinnacle of statecraft for the rising powers is to achieve higher status than the states that it compares itself with without having to fight for it, and adds that this pinnacle is not frequently attained (p. 126). I argue that Turkey became one of these rising powers that pursued ill-timed competition in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and engaged in several conflicts because of the misperceptions towards its own deserved status and legitimacy of the international status hierarchy.

## **5.1 Social Competition Strategies**

### **5.1.1 The Syrian Civil War**

Turkish foreign policy throughout the ongoing Syrian Civil War has been increasingly evolving into a unilateral agenda and self-destructive endeavor in many ways. As examining the whole process of the ongoing Syrian Civil War will not be fruitful in demonstrating Turkey's status-seeking policies, I will discuss several critical junctures to show how Turkish status concerns were the drivers of these major changes and why Turkey ended up pursuing several risky and ambitious foreign policy agendas. Before the Arab Spring, Syria was one of the countries within which Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy became relatively successful. Moreover, the AKP government invested a lot in the country and Bashar al-Assad and established strong political and economic ties with Syria between its accession to power and the Arab Spring (Taşpınar, 2012). These were some of the reasons why Turkey was reluctant to pick sides or engage in multilateral military operations in the Arab countries. Put differently, the state elites were worried about the possibility of the gradual decline in Turkey's impact and recognition within the Middle East at the onset of the Arab Spring. In fact, Turkish state elites remained relatively quiet and noninterventionist to the uprisings within Tunisia, Bahrain, and

also in Libya until the NATO-led intervention. However, as discussed in the fourth chapter, when the protests spilled over to Egypt and several other countries within the region, the foreign policy makers realized that Turkey's regional leadership claims will be questioned if Turkey was to continue its passive attitude towards the region (Öniş, 2014). Moreover, Oktav (2015) argues that the state elites abandoned non-interference policies to ensure Turkey's place at the negotiation table that will determine the new regional order.

Although Turkey's participation in multilateral operations at the beginning of the Arab Spring was rather passive, Turkish foreign policy makers changed this attitude and even strived to establish multilateral initiatives to ensure its leadership role in the region. As the Turkish state elites framed the country's reference point above the status quo, they surmised that Turkey would be able to accelerate the democratic transition process through its initiatives in the international system. In fact, Turkey signaled its ambitious status claims to the international society by its diplomatic activities directed towards the Middle East and particularly Syria. For instance, after Erdoğan's tour in several countries in the region, in 2012, Turkey hosted the summit of "Friends of the Syrian People Group" in İstanbul and Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan invited the member countries to unite under a single voice to protect Syrian people ("Syria opposition presses", 2012). The aim was to lead the voice of these countries and to be recognized as an influential actor in the issues concerning the Middle East and Syria. Taşpınar (2012) argues that this foreign policy stance was not driven by Islam or Western values but it was prestige-oriented and driven by a sense that Turkey never gets the respect it deserves (p. 133). Besides, he argues, Turkish foreign policy makers were shaping the foreign policy behaviors in a way that it increasingly revolved around the idea of Turkish grandeur and glory. That

is why these prestige-oriented or status-seeking policies created a chain of misperceptions which are stemming from the feeling of grandeur and constant dissatisfaction with the ascribed status. For instance, at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, even though regional influential countries like Iran and Russia were supporting the Assad regime, Turkish foreign policy makers believed that Bashar al-Assad's days in power are numbered and will be toppled down in a short period of time after Turkey's call to the international society for an intervention ("Davutoğlu Esad'a ömür biçti", 2012).

Nonetheless, Turkey's perception of its own influence in the Middle East and in the international system in general was proved to be erroneous. Despite the fact that Turkish state elites strived to help Syrian opposition and draw the attention of the international society to the need for a political transition in Syria, they failed to trigger a major change in Syria and gather support from the international society. For instance, Turkish state elites invited the Syrian National Council (SNC), which was the general representative of the Syrian opposition, to several meetings regarding the future of Syria to help this organization to be recognized internationally and allowed them to have their headquarters in İstanbul (Abramowitz & Edelman, 2013). Moreover, as the armed wing of the opposition was fragmented into myriads of units, Turkey helped them to establish a centralized leadership by organizing a conference in Antalya and monitoring the elections for the leadership members (O'Bagy, 2013). Turkey invited security officials from several countries like the U.S. and France to this meeting to ensure multilateral support behind the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Eventually, the U.S. officially announced a financial aid package for the FSA in 2013 and joined Turkey to give military education and to supply military equipment to these militias. Despite these developments, Turkey could not achieve to incite the

political change and have long-lasting support in its endeavor for a regime change. In the following months, the U.S. started to pursue “leading from behind” policies and increasingly withdrew its support from the SNC and thereby from Turkey’s policies (O’Bagy, 2013). Moreover, the U.S. remained passive about Turkey’s call for the establishment of a “no-fly zone” in northern Syria. Put differently, Turkey’s Western allies like the U.S. and European countries did not commit further than the aforementioned endeavors and Turkish state elites believed that these countries did not unite behind Turkey’s policies which repudiated its deserved status within the international society (Ifantis, p. 22). In fact, in the following years, Erdoğan explicitly declared Turkey’s frustration by stating that “the West left Turkey alone” (“Erdoğan: Batı Türkiye’yi”, 2016). However, Erdoğan’s policy advisor İbrahim Kalın reconceptualized this situation as “precious loneliness” which implied Turkey’s growing alienation from the Western countries and Turkish foreign policy makers’ tendencies towards unilateral foreign policy agendas (Kalın, 2013).

Even worse than the decreasing support behind Turkey was that several countries in the West, including the U.S., were becoming increasingly critical of Turkish foreign policy and incrementally started backing other groups within Syria. The then-Secretary of State of the U.S. Hillary Clinton’s statement signaled the upcoming disengagement between Turkey and the U.S. as she said that the opposition must include several other groups other than the SNC who have a legitimate voice that needs to be heard from the international society (MacFarquhar & Gordon, 2012). The variety of groups and the general situation in the Syrian Civil War was further complicated starting from July 2012 which is the time when all troops of the Assad regime were withdrawn from northern Syria. Although Turkey endeavored to fill this power vacuum across its borders, the Democratic Union Party

(PYD) was established in northern Syria in 2013, which created deep anxiety among Turkish foreign policy elites about the future of the region and Turkey's position within it (Park, 2015). The reason behind this is that Turkey regarded PYD as the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) with which Turkey has been struggling for decades and that the consequences of the PYD's possible future bid for autonomy across Turkish border would be disastrous for Turkey's regional leadership aspirations. The rift between Turkey and the West started to grow further at the beginning of 2014 when ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) swept across Syria and captured several areas that were once under the control of PYD. Several officials of the U.S. blamed Turkey by not being precautionary and not taking preventive steps against ISIS. The then Vice President of the U.S. Joe Biden held Turkey responsible for being rather lenient to ISIS and not taking necessary actions against the diffusion of the jihadists into Syrian territory (Usher, 2014). He even stated that Turkey was the problem behind the unhindered expansion of ISIS.

On the other hand, although Turkey had been pursuing a "peace process" with the PKK during these years, it ended when the PKK attacked Turkish military personnel which made the elimination of the Syrian branch of PKK more vital than ISIS for Turkey's regional position (Salih, 2015). This prompted Turkey to prioritize the elimination of the People's Protection Units (YPG), which was the military branch of the PYD, as the foreign policy elites frequently stated that the PKK and the YPG are the same for Turkey (Directorate of Communications, 2019b). However, this corresponded to the time when the U.S. started negotiations with the YPG to fight against ISIS and started providing them with air support and arms. Erdoğan strongly criticized the U.S. decision to help the YPG during these times and underlined Turkey's frustration as an important NATO member ("Kobani'ye

havadan silah”, 2014). Adopting policies against the aspirations of Turkey in the region and choosing the YPG as a partner instead of Turkey were interpreted as the repudiation of Turkey’s increasing status and humiliation of Turkish nation which became evident in the following years with Turkey’s pursuit of social competition strategies against the United States and with Turkey’s critical stance against the U.S.-led international hierarchy (Spencer, 2017). As Turkish foreign policy makers were falling into a feeling of a huge loss of status during these years because of the resilience of the Assad regime as a result of both Russian presence or the Western countries’ apathy and increasing international support behind the YPG, they adopted highly risky policies to regain its status in the following years.

Turkey started risking long-lasting friendly relations with numerous Western countries and even its NATO membership with several consecutive policies during these years. Starting from 2013, Turkey’s social competition strategies became more apparent with its diplomatic activities and official rhetoric of the country. According to Larson and Shevchenko (2014), acting as a spoiler to remind the importance of their country can also be categorized as a social competition strategy which, I argue, was exercised by Ankara for years. For instance, Turkey decided not to have an active role in US-led intervention to Syria against ISIS and initially refused to give access of Incirlik base to the coalition (Park, 2015). On the other hand, despite Russia’s support to the Assad regime and China’s vetoes in the UNSC to Turkey’s proposals on Syrian Civil War, Turkey started to have better relations with these countries as Turkish foreign policy makers were deeming the U.S.-led international hierarchy as illegitimate and accusing the U.S. with not recognizing Turkey’s deserved status. These rapprochements, I argue, were the results of Turkey’s endeavor for undermining the U.S. influence in the region and for signaling Turkey’s

autonomy and international importance for the Western countries. For instance, Turkey started negotiating a deal to deploy Chinese missile defense systems with a company that was subjected to the sanctions by the U.S. in 2013 (“Turkey to go ahead with non-NATO”, 2015). More importantly, Turkey signed an agreement with Russia to buy S400 missile systems which was met with the threats of sanctions by the U.S. and even expulsion from NATO which will be examined in detail later in this chapter. However, Turkey’s “flirtation” with Russia did not remain limited to security and spilled over to the economic and political aspects of the relations (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016). Besides the unprecedented trade volumes between these two countries, Turkey also refused to impose sanctions against Russia and did not cooperate with the U.S. and the EU. Although these policies of Turkey were frequently grounded on Turkey’s trade volume with Russia after the latter’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the importance of natural gas for Turkey within the existing literature, Turkey’s trade volume was higher with the Western nations and Turkey evidently risked all these economic relations with Russia at the end of 2015 by downing a Russian aircraft (Kardaş, 2012). I argue that these rapprochement policies were derived from Turkish foreign policy makers’ pursuit of social competition strategies. As Larson (2015) argues, the ultimate aim of the social competition strategies is to “reverse the relative positions of the groups in the status hierarchy” and this strategy can sometimes be manifested as competing for spheres of influence or acting as a spoiler. Referring to Larson, I argue that Turkey pursued social competition as the Turkish foreign policy makers adopted policies that prompted Turkey to act as a spoiler by trying to undermine the influence of U.S.-led coalition in the Middle East and to outdo this coalition in the competition for the sphere of influence in Syria by developing closer ties with Russia. This became even



more evident when Turkey, Russia, and Iran initiated the Astana Peace Process in January 2017 which will be examined later in this chapter.

### **5.1.2 Downing of Russian Aircraft and the Astana Peace Process**

Contrary to the ongoing alignment between Turkey and Russia, on 24 November 2015, Turkish military forces downed a Russian aircraft based on the alleged violation of the border without informing Turkish authorities about the path of the flight. This incident was undeniably shocking for both the international society and Russia because the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia had been improving for years. Several scholars argued that even though this was a border violation, the decision to shoot down the military aircraft was not normal (Szénási, 2016). In fact, this was the first time after over 50 years that a NATO member country downed a Russian airplane. Several pro-government newspapers portrayed the downing of the aircraft as a demonstration of power as “New Turkey” and the incident as a matter of “national pride” (Özçetin & Baybars-Hawks, 2018, p. 42). Russia’s growing presence in Syria constituted a problem for Turkey because these were, I argue by referring to prospect theory, perceived as the loss of status in the Middle East since the foreign policy makers have been picturing Turkey as the leader or model of its neighboring nations. Put differently, Turkish foreign policy makers’ decision to risk a war with Russia and shoot an aircraft was influenced by their reference point and motivated by a desire to prevent the growing influence of Russia as they believed Turkey’s standing to be declining for four years in the Middle East and endeavored to prevent further losses of Turkish status in its region by signaling its status with a risky decision. Levi and Whyte (1997) make a similar argument about Japan’s decision to attack Pearl Harbor and argue that Japan went into war to avoid what was perceived by them as certain losses.

On the other hand, regarding this incident, Lebow's argument (2008) makes much sense in linking Turkey's decision with the desire for status as he argues that if a country experiences a prior humiliation, this feeling makes public and leaders more willing to use force to regain recognition or take revenge. That is why it is also necessary to examine the downing of Turkish F4 aircraft based on border violation in 2012 by Syria. This incident was attributed to Russia by several sources and the decision was argued to be made by Russian state elites (Yaakov & Staff, 2012). Considering the fact that the causes of the use of forces by both Turkey and Russia were the same, this can be arguably attributed to Turkey's desire to take revenge on its earlier humiliation. In the aftermath of the Turkish decision to down the plane, Turkish foreign policy makers assumed full responsibility of the incident and emphasized the importance of Turkey's right to protect its airspace and Turkish sovereignty (Sharkov, 2016). In the following months, although Russian authorities demanded an apology, Turkish foreign policy makers refused to offer. This incident was one of many others that reflected Turkish foreign policy makers' framing of Turkey's reference point and their great expectations for the future as they risked war with Russia and demonstrated the importance of status in the Middle East for Turkish state elites. Nonetheless, even though Turkish foreign policy makers backed their decision in this incident and refused to apologize, Turkish-Russian relations were returned back to friendly terms in a short period of time. Although the divergent reactions of the U.S. and Russia towards the failed coup attempt of the Gülenists in July 2016 and the U.S.'s rejection of Turkey's requests for Gülen's extradition contributed to Turkey's alignment with Russia and alienation from the U.S. (Aktürk, 2019b), I argue that the actual causes lie in Turkey's regional ambitions. Çelikpala and Rüma (2019) argue that Turkey's rapprochement with Russia was possible only

because of both parties' ambition to have a great power status by demonstrating their "salience" with their policies in the Middle East against the U.S.-backed terrorist organization YPG and the U.S.-led coalition in general.

As a result of this rapprochement, in 2017, Turkey, Russia, and Iran reached an agreement on ceasing hostilities among themselves and on the creation of de-escalation zones in Syria. Although this process was started as an effort with rather limited ambitions, it evolved into a much bigger initiative over time to offer a political solution for the future of Syria. Nonetheless, Köstem (2020) argues that even though Russia and Turkey have been improving their relations due to several regional and international reasons, this alignment is "unlikely to transform into a durable security partnership due to the divergent nature of the two countries' goals regarding the future of Syria" (p. 17). In fact, eventually, Erdoğan stated in January 2020 that "the Astana Peace Talks are dead" ("Astana fell into silence", 2020). While this mediation process can be categorized as a social competition strategy to undermine the U.S.'s impact and to ensure a greater right to speak for the future of the region, it was destined to fail as Turkey's perception towards the Syrian uprisings, its objectives and ambitions in the Syrian Civil War have been conflicting with those of Iran and Russia (Cengiz, 2020). Put differently, Russia's presence in Syria has been perceived as an impediment to Turkey's "already attained regional leadership status", while it is important for Russia to have a presence in Syria not to allow the U.S. to have a higher influence in the region.

On the other hand, concurrently with the Astana Peace Process, Turkey initiated three unilateral interventions to several areas across its borders to remove the ISIS and the YPG from these areas. While the first one "Operation Euphrates Shield" was against the ISIS, the others "Operation Olive Branch" and "Operation

Peace Spring” were launched to remove the YPG from several areas. Although Turkey achieved its goals to an extent in each operation, the last one drew the most reaction from the U.S. and several other Western countries. Operation Peace Spring was initially aimed to move the YPG supporters 20 miles or 32 kilometers away from the Turkish border (Aktürk, 2019a). That is why Turkey’s operation resulted in a huge reaction both from the politicians in the U.S. and the public opinion as Turkey’s operation was directly targeting the U.S. proxy in the Middle East. Even before the operation, President Donald Trump posted what can be considered as a humiliating tweet and threatened Turkey with destroying its economy (Noor, 2019). Moreover, in the following days, Trump sent a letter to Erdoğan after Turkey’s initiation of Operation Peace Spring which contained even more humiliating words. According to Lebow (2008), the acts that are regarded as national humiliation make nations feel a loss of esteem and are frequently responded with anger. That is why Turkey’s response was furious against Trump’s words and the Turkish Armed Forces continued the operation in the following days. Although Turkey agreed on a ceasefire with the U.S. and suspended the operation, the memorandum that was signed between Russia and Turkey ensured the presence of the Turkish military with a depth of 32 kilometers (Directorate of Communications, 2019c). Therefore, while these operations limited the sphere of American influence in the region, the agreements between Turkey and Russia made it irrevocable.

Nonetheless, although these operations were launched after having a mutual understanding with Russia, Köstem (2020) questions the longevity of this alignment in Syria and whether Russia will tolerate the long-term presence of Turkish troops in the future. In fact, Putin made it clear that Russia is against the presence of foreign troops in Syria (Reuters as cited in Köstem, 2020, p. 14). As a matter of fact,

Russian-Turkish alignment in the Syrian conflict was challenged significantly in Idlib in February 2020, as dozens of Turkish soldiers were killed as a result of an airstrike.

Therefore, the long-term presence of Turkish Armed Forces through its unilateral military operations are against the long-term objectives of both Russia and the United States. Despite these dynamics and the divergence between Turkey's objectives and that of two major powers, Turkish foreign policy makers have been adopting policies ranging from downing of a Russian aircraft to launching unilateral operations which are, I argue, the results of Turkey's erroneous determination of its standing in the status hierarchy among these major powers. Even more than the policies that were examined thus far in this chapter, Turkey's decision to purchase S400 air defense missile systems from Russia was a risky status signaling policy that was driven by the desire for autonomy and thereby for self-esteem.

### **5.1.3 Turkey's decision to purchase S400 Russian air defense systems**

In March 2019, Erdoğan stated that “the issue is not Turkey's purchase of S400s, the actual issue is that Turkey has been acting according to its own will in its region and especially in Syria” (Gündoğan, 2019). In recent years, Turkish state elites have been addressing Turkey's autonomy over several policies and its determination to continue pursuing autonomous policies without having to choose between Russia and the United States or to work in coordination with them. The purchase of the S400s was one of the results of foreign policy makers' mentioned claims about Turkey's autonomous status which was met with repercussions for Turkey and backlash from NATO members. I argue that Turkey's decision to purchase the S400s is also rooted in Turkish foreign policy makers' framing of

Turkey's reference point above the status quo and can be referred to as an ill-chosen method to signal its aspiration level in the international system. Put differently, as Turkish foreign policy makers started to picture Turkey as a country that has global impact and recognition, they endeavored to signal this status to the international system with highly risky policies as it has potential to limit NATO's sphere of influence and Turkey's exclusion from its security umbrella.

To demonstrate the reasons why this decision was hazardous for Turkey, it is important to explain the meaning of Turkey's purchase of S400 Russian air defense systems for the U.S. and NATO member states. According to Egeli (2019), NATO member states have several strategic and political concerns about Turkey's purchase of the non-NATO air defense systems. One of these concerns is about the software and cybersecurity because the deployment of the Russian systems in Turkey could result in Russia's access to NATO data (p. 8). More importantly, NATO announced that these missile systems are not compatible with NATO military equipment, and employing these systems might result in irrevocable consequences. Although Turkish officials claimed that NATO and Russian systems are interoperable and can be deployed without having to integrate them with each other, this did not ameliorate the gravity of the situation for NATO members. In fact, several NATO officials insinuated the possible consequences of this policy by stating that "as much as Turkey is sovereign in making decisions, it is also sovereign in facing the consequences" ("NATO official: Turkey faces", 2017). Eventually, Turkey was excluded from the F35 fighter jet program although it was producing numerous parts of the jet for years and the delivery of several jets was scheduled in several months. However, the U.S. suspended the delivery and sent Turkish pilots back to Turkey.

In the face of major concerns of NATO and the possibility of prospective irreversible strategic losses, Turkey's unrestrained desire in purchasing these missile systems with no regard to the wills and concerns of its almost a century-long traditional security partners are questionable for many (Hoffman, 2019). Moreover, although Turkish state elites have been laying out several reasons for this decision, Egeli's (2019) comprehensive analysis demonstrates that the justifications which are about the price of S400s or the possibility of joint production are groundless. For instance, while he argues that these systems are more expensive than the missiles that European countries produce, he also demonstrates that there is no such provision about the joint production in the S400 contract (p. 15). Therefore, Turkey's decision to purchase these missile systems are not driven by material interests and proved to be a policy that resulted in material, strategic, and political losses. These are the foremost reasons, together with the state elites' rhetoric, why I argue that this was an act of status signaling which aimed to change or, for Turkish foreign policy makers, maintain the status that was bestowed to Turkey. As Xiaoyu Pu (2019) argues, status signaling in international relations symbolizes the preferred status of a country in the international hierarchy. Following his argument, I argue that, as Turkish foreign policy makers determined a reference level well-above Turkey's actual status, they signaled their preferred status which was to be among a few countries that have right to act according to its own will and act like a country that is now fully independent in taking its foreign policy decisions. Besides, defense autarky or being a country that is self-sufficient in arms production has recently been another foreign policy agenda with which Turkish foreign policy makers endeavored to make the international society recognize its "newly found position" in the international status hierarchy. Although these policies are also being utilized as a tool to enhance the self-esteem of

the Turkish society and ensure social cohesion to have a strong support behind the government, I will examine Turkey's objectives in the international system by analyzing economic nationalism and its aim for defense autarky.

#### **5.1.4 Economic Nationalism and Turkish Defense Industry**

Examining the drive behind nationalism, Greenfield (1992) argues that people have a naturally strong desire for having group memberships and national identities because these identities provide a "heightened level of self-worth". Related to this, Lebow (2008) asserts that the function of nationalism in the modern world is "to provide vicarious satisfaction for the spirit" (p. 62). As I argue that Turkish foreign policy has been driven by the desire for higher status and therefore self-esteem, Turkey's economic nationalism agenda in recent years is another corroborative policy for my hypotheses with which Turkey endeavored to enhance the national status and ensure social cohesion within the country. Although there is no consensus on the definition of economic nationalism in the literature, I will utilize Helleiner's (2005) definition as he identifies policies as economic nationalist according to the motives behind them. In other words, as he puts it, there is no specific economic nationalist policy and argues that even several liberal policies may serve a nationalist purpose.

The AKP government has been recently allocating a huge amount of financial resources to domestic firms, especially to the defense industry, intending to lower Turkey's dependence on other countries in several sectors. Under the name of "native and national economy" initiative, the government developed a nationalist stance and invested a lot in Turkey's defense industry ("Turkey spearheads major high-tech", 2019). Although these policies are nationalist in many ways, they do not impede Turkey's liberal policies and, in fact, Turkey aims to mass-produce and



introduce its indigenous products to the world market. Bitzinger and Kim (2005) explain the causes of such policies by arguing that these agendas are primarily driven by a desire for international prestige and independence. Moreover, independent defense industries are prerequisites for great power status or achievement that confirms countries' status as a great power in the international system (Bitzinger, 2003). Although these policies bring high economic costs for rising states, several of them continue their pursuit of the establishment of indigenous defense industries in order to achieve defense autarky and, thereby, international recognition.

Accordingly, Bağcı and Kurç (2017) argue that Turkey's investments in the national defense industry and the indigenous weapon system have a special place in its claim for regional leadership and in becoming an international actor (p. 40). Turkish state elites determined the year 2023 to be the year that Turkey would achieve a fully independent defense industry or, in other words, defense autarky (Presidency of Defence Industries, 2019). Nevertheless, as Kurç (2017) states, because of several reasons like the absence of strong institutions, the Turkish defense industry will most likely fail to achieve defense autarky. I argue that these ambitious economic nationalist policies are being adopted as a result of Turkish foreign policy makers' positive future expectations which resulted in Turkey's comparison of itself with the countries that have a much higher status in the international system. Pu (2019) asserts that the rising states that aspire to be a great power have a propensity to conspicuous consumptions by either purchasing luxury products like aircraft carriers or initiate expensive policies that only a few countries can afford. As an example, besides Turkey's aim for the fully-independent defense industry, Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) launched TF-X aircraft project to replace the F-16s that have been being used by the Turkish Air Forces which was deemed as an extremely

ambitious project by several sources, a project that can be completed by only a few nations (Felstead, 2019). More importantly, in 2019, Erdoğan declared Turkey's objection to the banning of nuclear weapons by saying that while Russia and the United States have thousands of nuclear weapons, Turkey must have the right to produce its own nuclear weapons and will indeed produce in the following years ("Erdoğan says it's unacceptable", 2019).

Therefore, these policies and several speeches of the politicians demonstrate Turkish foreign policy makers' beliefs about Turkey's deserved status in the international status hierarchy. Lebow (2008) conceptualizes these countries that seek to be accepted as great powers as "parvenu powers" and argue that these countries tend to be aggressive in their policies (p. 539). As I argue that Turkey is one of these countries, its adoption of unilateral ambitious policies both in the Second Libyan Civil War and the crisis in the eastern Mediterranean are corroborative evidence for Turkey's aspirations to which I now turn.

### **5.1.5 The Libyan Civil War and the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis**

Although the discussions on Turkey's most recent foreign policy agendas in the Second Libyan Civil War and crisis in the eastern Mediterranean have been revolving primarily around material gains and Turkey's material interests, I argue that these concerns, despite being relatively influential, were not the primary causes of Turkey's presence in Libya or the eastern Mediterranean. Especially Turkey's energy and security interests have been discussed in the literature and many attributed Turkey's policies in these interrelated issues to its material and strategic objectives (Malinson, Kanevskiy & Petasis, 2020; Tekir, 2020). Yet, I argue that Turkey's policies in these global issues constitute a meaningful whole with its long-lasting status-driven foreign policy.

Although the civil war in Libya erupted after the Arab Spring in 2011, it reemerged in April 2019 as a result of Khalifa Haftar's attack on Tripoli which is the capital of the Government of National Accord (GNA), the internationally recognized government. Turkey has become one of few countries to support the GNA and the only country to deploy its troops to defend the GNA against Khalifa Haftar's army ("Turkish troops deploy to Libya", 2020). As a result of its active foreign policy in Libya, Turkey has signed two deals with the GNA with which Turkey now can claim right on a larger part of the Eastern Mediterranean and deploy troops to the Libyan soil ("Newly aggressive Turkey", 2019).

Numerous countries like Greece, France, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates immediately denounced these deals and criticized Turkey's growing presence in the region. Besides, while the European Commission declared that these deals constitute an infringement for third parties in the region and rejected the legitimacy of these deals, Russia appears to be passively sided with Khalifa Haftar's army (Tekir, 2020). Therefore, Turkey's stance and military operations have been unilateral in the Libyan Civil War and are being criticized by numerous countries in the world. As opposed to the international reaction and Greece's denunciation of these deals, Erdoğan stated that "Turkey knows how to answer if Greece does not know its place" ("Disputes over energy, 2020). As the EU's stance has been naturally aligned with Greece's policies, Erdoğan's threats also heightened tensions between the EU and Turkey. The official rhetoric of the Turkish government and its unilateral policies signaled its preferred status in the region and manifested that Turkey is ambitious in its efforts to outdo the "would-be regional powers" in the Eastern Mediterranean region in the relevant dimensions, which, in this case, is the new sphere of influence.

Larson (2015) argues that social competition also entails competing for spheres of influence to enhance the status of a state. I argue that Ankara has been pursuing such policies within these issues against the aforementioned countries in the region. In other words, Turkey's ambitious unilateral policies and military presence in a highly volatile region against the wills of numerous major powers are not primarily driven by material interests but are pursued in order to make the international society recognize Turkish foreign policy makers' aspired status in the international system. However, although it might be too early to have certain arguments about the motives of countries within these issues, it is worth noting that Turkey's policies and official rhetoric in these issues create a perfect mosaic with its almost two-decades-long status-driven foreign policy.

Therefore, to sum up, in this chapter I have argued that Turkey's rise and relative recognition throughout the 2000s led to great expectations among Turkish foreign policy makers for the future. These expectations created a misperception that prompted Turkey to claim a much higher status than the international society ascribed to it after the Arab Spring. In other words, Turkish foreign policy makers framed Turkey's reference point above the status-quo or above its deserved status which created a constant feeling of status loss. That is why Turkish foreign policy makers started to believe that the status ascribed to Turkey is unfair and the international status hierarchy is illegitimate. Consequently, throughout the 2010s, Turkey has pursued social competition strategies against several countries with much higher status which prompted it to adopt both risky and ambitious status signaling policies.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Several elements in Turkish foreign policy like its orientation, activity, or regional focus have been changing or being reshaped in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While, for instance, at the beginning of the 2000s, Turkey strived to emulate the values and institutions of the EU to become a member, Turkish foreign policy makers started to put more emphasis on Turkey's autonomy in its foreign relations and their EU accession agenda lost its primacy. On the other hand, although Turkey pursued "zero problems with neighbors" policy in the 2000s, a new epoch in Turkish foreign policy was discussed with the idea of "precious loneliness". These changes in Turkish foreign policy became especially apparent after the Arab Spring which ignited extensive literature on the changes in Turkish foreign policy and the underlying reason for these shifts. However, this thesis demonstrated that although foreign policy agendas and orientation have been constantly changing for almost two-decades, Turkish state leaders' motivations have been the same within the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Utilizing Lebow's (2008) theory, the argument of this thesis revolved around human nature and especially people's desire for social status or the need for self-esteem. To elaborate, although several aspects of Turkish foreign policy have been changing and resulting in numerous incidents, all of these incidents and divergent agendas have been the results or manifestations of the same fundamental human motive. Particularly, "spirit" or the desire for high status or self-esteem has been the main driver of Turkish foreign policy and directed foreign policy makers to pursue policies that might elevate their self-worth. Connecting Lebow's theory with SIT, I explained the link between individual psychology and international politics while also introducing possible responses or strategies that countries perform to improve

their status in the international society. By using aforementioned theories, I explained why the AKP government's acceleration of the EU accession process at the beginning of the 2000s was a social mobility strategy, while its foreign aid policy or its policy agendas as a non-permanent member of the UNSC were social creativity strategies to aimed to increase Turkey's international status.

Nevertheless, as opposed to the propositions of SIT, after 2011, Turkish foreign policy makers started to compare Turkey with the countries that have much higher statuses in the international system. Eventually, Turkey started to pursue ambitious policies and the state elites took highly risky decisions which resulted in numerous self-defeating consequences like the possibility of being expelled from NATO or coming to a brink of war with Russia. To explain these behaviors, I referred to prospect theory and explained how the Turkish state elites fell into a reference point bias. To elaborate, I argue that, as a result of Turkey's rise in the status hierarchy throughout the 2000s, Turkish state leaders determined a reference point that was much higher than the status quo which brought unrealistic or ambitious expectations for the future of the country. As Turkish foreign policy makers' preferred status or aspiration level has not been recognized by the international society, they fell into a constant feeling of status loss and started to pursue highly risky policies to reach that level in the international system. Consequently, I analyzed Turkey's policies throughout the civil war, its claim for autonomy, or the most recent policies in the Libyan Civil War in this context.

Pursuing primarily status-seeking policies for almost two decades now, Turkey's inability to achieve most of its foreign policy objectives is almost unquestionable. Nonetheless, while certain strategies proved to be self-defeating or, in fact, detracted Turkey from its objectives, other policies have been relatively

successful. Turkey's social mobility and social creativity strategies lifted Turkey to a higher position in the international system and brought about international recognition on a higher rank. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Turkey was recognized as a relatively influential regional power before the Arab Spring by the countries in the region and people of these nations. However, as Turkish foreign policy makers adopted social competition strategies as a result of the misperception of the deserved status in the international system, these policies have been self-defeating and resulted in Turkey's loss of international status for years until today.

As Turkish foreign policy makers seem to still not accommodate to the losses of status in the international system and act accordingly, Turkey's pursuit of unilateral social competition policies continues. That is the foremost reason why Turkey's policies prompted it to take even more risks to prevent losses that accumulate day by day. As the losses accumulate, Turkey's tendency to take risks also rises in order to prevent these losses of status in the international system. This can be referred as "risk-escalation" or "risk-accumulation" in international relations which, I argue, can explain both Turkey's policies after the Arab Spring and many other rising powers' self-defeating unexplainable policies in the international system.

Overall, this thesis is built on the systemic consequences of human nature or, in other words, individual-level factors. That is why while the second chapter reviewed the literature on IR theories to show the deficiencies of system and state-level theories and highlight the explanatory power of the individual-level analysis, Chapter 3 introduced the propositions of theories that are used throughout the thesis, related concepts, and the research methodology. Chapters 4 and 5 brought evidence that corroborates the propositions of these three theories by examining Turkish state elites' speeches and the policies that they adopted.

The main argument of this thesis is relevant to today's international politics and has the potential to shed light on the policies of several other rising powers like China, India, and Brazil. Put differently, as the prospect of the decline in hegemonic power and rising powers' possible challenge to liberal international order has been continuously discussed in recent years, this thesis is useful in examining the possibility of China's peaceful rise, the need for accommodation of rising powers in the existing order and also in making sense of status signaling of rising powers in the international system.

Nevertheless, there are a few limitations of this research stemming from its scope and methodological difficulties. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the spirit has its own ultimate objective which is to achieve self-esteem. However, although achieving high social status and thereby self-esteem is the ultimate objective for state leaders and people in general, high status can also be used to gain material resources or to satisfy appetite. In other words, although the acts that seem to be satisfying appetite are argued to be mostly performed to achieve the goals of spirit in the modern world, occasionally the relation between appetite and spirit is vice versa. As Lebow (2008) acknowledges appetite and spirit can blend into each other in the modern world which makes it difficult to differentiate among these motives. Veblen (1899) argues that people generally do "conspicuous consumption" to impress others to have a high status in society. For example, people buy cars, houses, or pieces of jewelry to be recognized as a high-status person in the modern world. However, people seldom desire for high status to eventually have more material gain. That is why although taking into consideration other human motives might reduce parsimony in this thesis, it can help draw a clearer and more comprehensive picture of Turkish foreign policy.



Moreover, it is also worth noting that state leaders' pursuit of status-seeking policies might be also aimed to appeal to public opinion and ensure social cohesion. As the nationalities are a part of the identity for many people, their countries' high performances in certain status dimensions also elevate public opinion's self-esteem which might result in social cohesion and strong support in the elections. For example, although the AKP government's pursuit of autonomous foreign policy or claim for regional leadership is the result of leaders' motives, these policies can also be aimed to satisfy the public opinion's desire for self-esteem.

Another limitation is that this thesis covers a two-decade-long period in Turkish foreign policy which is a rather ambitious task. Starting from the beginning of the 2000s, this thesis demonstrates numerous major foreign policy agendas and argues that these policies are pursued in order to attain a higher status in the international system. However, more detailed analysis and more evidence could be provided if this thesis were to analyze a period or a particular policy. Yet, without discussing all these periods, it would not be possible to demonstrate the differences between the terms of the AKP government and explain why there are motivational continuities throughout these years. Therefore, although this can be counted as a limitation, the aim of the thesis made it inevitable to discuss a long period.

All in all, despite these limitations, this thesis brings a contribution to the literature by demonstrating the importance of other arguments and the connection of these arguments to a broader phenomenon. To elaborate, although mostly discussed interest-based arguments or the assertions about ideational motivations of Turkish foreign policy are accurate to an extent, this thesis introduces a different perspective that demonstrates both the embeddedness of these arguments in human nature and argues that these arguments neglect another fundamental human motive. Apart from

its contribution to the literature, this thesis has the potential to incite in-depth discussion on how these motives have been impactful in particular policies throughout the 2000s by revisiting the existing arguments and also to open new discussions on Turkey's most recent policies in the Libyan Civil War and the Eastern Mediterranean.

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