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CHAPTER 13

TÜRKİYE AND THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL ORDER: A CONJUNCTURAL STUDY OF ITS INFLUENCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO MULTIPOLARITY

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Abstract

Multipolarity has undoubtedly become a central dynamic in shaping the trajectory of international relations. Within this broader context, Türkiye has emerged as a significant actor, leveraging its status as an active G20 member and its unique geopolitical position that bridges Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. What are the reciprocal effects between multipolarity and Türkiye's strategic positioning, and how does Türkiye's influence drive the course of multipolarity? This article employs a conjunctural analysis approach to examine multipolarity through the specific case of Türkiye. Existing literature on multipolarity identifies this phenomenon as a key feature of contemporary global politics, characterized by escalating conflicts, expanding multi-vector foreign policy strategies, and the increasing importance of South-South cooperation. Our conjunctural analysis shows that Türkiye has actively engaged with these trends, balancing its residual Western ties with an emergent multi-vector foreign policy, particularly since the 2010s. It has set a global example in diplomatic mediation, humanitarian aid, and several initiatives promoting peace, stability, and prosperity, such as the Middle Corridor, the Development Road, and the Zangezur Corridor. Within this framework, Türkiye's deepening partnership with Azerbaijan stands out as a concrete expression of multipolarity in action: their military integration, trade and energy connectivity, and emerging green diplomacy illustrate how South-South cooperation between middle powers can generate new regional poles of influence and reinforce post-hegemonic multipolar restructuring. Overall, Türkiye's leadership status, constructive approach, and responsible conduct-together with its deepening strategic partnership with Azerbaijan-will be crucial in curbing global conflicts and advancing inclusive global governance amidst growing geopolitical rivalries.

Keywords

Conjunctural Analysis, Multipolarity, Multi-vector Foreign Policy, South-South Cooperation, Azerbaijan-Türkiye Relations

Introduction

World politics has been experiencing tectonic shifts amidst intensifying geopolitical rivalries, prompting heightened debates about the emergence of a new Cold War and its potential escalation into World War III (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2022; Amalaraj, 2024; Lazaroff, 2024; Racker, 2023; Routley, 2022). Given these circumstances, it is difficult to overlook the fact that multipolarity has emerged as a dominant force in shaping the overall trajectory of international relations (Gürcan, 2019b). Notably, Türkiye has emerged as a significant actor in this multipolar world, leveraging its status as an active G20 member, its possession of the world's 8th largest military (Global Firepower, 2024), and its unique geopolitical position that bridges Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, with access to crucial sea and land routes. Against this backdrop, the present article employs conjunctural analysis to explore the role and significance of Türkiye and its relations with Azerbaijan in the evolving multipolar setting. In what follows, we will begin by elucidating our methodological framework and exploring how the literature explains the rise of multipolarity. We will then turn to an analysis of how multipolarity influences Türkiye's strategic positioning and the role Türkiye plays in shaping its trajectory. Finally, we will examine the case of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations as a concrete expression of South-South cooperation, highlighting how their military integration, trade and energy connectivity, and emerging green diplomacy exemplify the dynamics of what we call "post-hegemonic multipolarity."

Methodological and Conceptual Framework: Making Sense of Post-Hegemonic Multipolarity as a Conjunctural Phenomenon

Before delving into this inquiry, it is imperative to elucidate the conjunctural analysis method and review the literature that seeks to understand multipolarity. In qualitative case studies, the field is to a great extent dominated by the process-tracing approach and its variants, which mostly stem from the positivist tradition (Checkel & Bennett, 2015; Henne, 2021; Mahoney, 2012; Pickering, 2022; Ruffa, 2020). This approach revolves around ambiguous concepts such as Bayesian hypothesis testing, social mechanisms, and path dependency (Beach, 2017; Punton & Welle, 2015; Shaffer, 2015). Conjunctural analysis, on the other hand, offers an alternative methodological approach, particularly well-suited for examining environments of conflict and crisis, such as those seen in multipolarity. Ontologically and epistemologically, conjunctural analysis departs from the variable-focused causality of positivistic approaches, instead emphasizing reciprocity and historicity, with a more nuanced and contextual focus on the reciprocal complexity of historical specificities and circumstances (Gürcan & Otero, 2025). Within this framework, conjunctures can be defined as historical periods in which particular trends, forces, hostilities, and contradictions converge, such as those during the Keynesian and neoliberal eras, the (post)Cold War period, the COVID-19 conjuncture, and the Trump era. The first step in conjunctural analysis involves identifying the primary dynamics and forces shaping the conjuncture and their interrelationships. This is supplemented with an analysis of critical moments of crisis and conflict. In Türkiye's case, for example, these moments include the beginning of the United States (U.S.) military withdrawal from Iraq in 2007 and the Great Recession in the late 2000s, the Arab Spring movement, the 44-Day War in 2020, the Palestine (TÜBA, 2023) and Ukraine conflicts (TÜBA, 2022), and the 2016 failed coup attempt in Türkiye, among others. The second step entails analyzing the dialectical interactions, or reciprocity among the *dominant* elements characterizing this conjuncture, the residual elements inherited from previous conjunctures, and the *emergent* elements that signal newly emerging trends (Gürcan & Otero, 2024).

In this research, conjunctural analysis will be deployed to analyze multipolarity based on the individual case of Türkiye. In the 1990s, multipolarity was a relatively marginal topic within academic discourse, often portrayed as an emerging trend complementing the prevailing unipolar world order. For example, Huntington's (1999) "uni-multipolarity" thesis suggests the current international system is shaped by a

single superpower, i.e., the U.S., alongside multiple significant powers, within diverse civilizations. This setup implies that, despite slowly growing opposition from nations like France, Russia, and China, cultural differences might hinder their coalition-building, making it less strenuous for the U.S. to engage in this system than during its unchallenged superpower era. On the other hand, Kupchan (1998) recommends that the U.S. should prepare for its diminishing dominance by fostering “regional unipolarity” in North America, Europe, and East Asia. He also introduces “benign unipolarity,” where a dominant regional power influences less powerful regional areas through mutual agreement, leading to stability and reduced competition within the region.

The early 2000s marked a significant shift, as discussions surrounding multipolarity gained considerable momentum. In contemporary international relations literature, multipolarity is increasingly recognized as a dominant trend shaping world politics, whose impact on global interactions is examined through three interrelated contexts, namely the intensification of conflicts, the emergence of new patterns of international cooperation and multilateralism, and the strengthening of regional dynamics. Relatedly, Weaver’s (2011) “balanced multipolarity” describes a scenario where powers are evenly matched, preventing any single state from exercising hegemony, potentially leading to a stable and peaceful order among states via new mechanisms of cooperation. In turn, Geeraert’s (2011) “multi-layered polarity” divides the multipolar world into two tiers: the top tier dominated by the U.S. and China, and the second tier comprising regional powers like India, Brazil, Russia, and major European countries. These regional powers are influential in specific issues but lack the comprehensive power of the first tier. In a similar vein, Kausch’s (2015) “competitive multipolarity” describes the shifting dynamics in the Middle East, marked by a decline in U.S. and European influence and the increasing roles of Russia and China, along with intensified Iranian-Saudi rivalry and the emergence of regional “swing states.”

This being said, scholars also acknowledge that competition and rivalries are not the sole outcomes of multipolarity, and under certain circumstances, multipolarity can even generate positive outcomes and exhibit constitutive features. For instance, Efstathopoulos (2016) introduces “reformist multipolarity,” suggesting geostrategic rivalries can lead to reformist outcomes. His study on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations shows a shift towards a multipolar decision-making process with established and emerging powers committed to global economic stability, consensus on the WTO’s role, and emerging states adopting a reformist stance. In a similar vein, Pieterse (2018) argues that multipolarity signals a new phase of “multipolar globalization,” characterized by increased South-South trade, a decline in U.S. financial dominance, China’s rising financial initiatives, and a global move away from the Washington Consensus. Hadano (2020) emphasizes the importance of multilateralism in the evolving multipolar system, acknowledging that while states may not always share interests, multilateralism remains crucial for coordinating policies and lending legitimacy to decisions. The literature highlighting the constitutive features of multipolarity and South-South cooperation is also extended to the role of regional dynamics in multipolarity. In this regard, Acharya’s (2009) “regiopolarity” suggests that emerging powers will remain rooted in their regional contexts, challenging both established and rising powers’ global projection capabilities. Garzón’s (2017) “decentered multipolarity” highlights how regional dynamics contribute to a more interconnected international system, moving away from traditional regional or hub-spoke models.

Building on Radhika Desai’s (2013) influential geopolitical-economy framework, Gürcan (2019b) offers a more comprehensive, systematic, and nuanced understanding of multipolarity, defining it as a post-hegemonic condition where economic, political, and military power is more equitably distributed among multiple significant global actors. His notion of “post-hegemonic multipolarity” (Gürcan, 2020c) as an earlier phase underlines the relative decline of U.S. global leadership without any single power achieving parity or surpassing the U.S. Moreover, multipolar powers do not prefer to directly confront the U.S., nor do they openly challenge U.S.-centered international mechanisms, unable to develop coherent alternatives to neoliberalism and other Western hegemonic frameworks. Instead, they actively participate in these dominant

structures, as exemplified by Türkiye's continued North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership, while simultaneously creating alternative mechanisms, which often intertwine, intersect, and compete with each other (e.g., the Türkiye-led Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and its Eurasian counterparts). In this context, "post-hegemonic regionalism," exemplified by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean State (CELAC), emerges as a key mechanism boosting South-South cooperation and regionalism (Gürcan, 2019a). Certainly, Türkiye is involved in several post-hegemonic mechanisms in Eurasia, as will be further discussed in the next section.

Elsewhere, Gürcan and Otero (2024) view post-hegemonic multipolarity as a conjunctural phenomenon, emphasizing the need to move beyond the traditional state-centric conflict paradigms. They highlight the international cooperation dimension of multipolarity, particularly emphasizing South-South cooperation as one of its most crucial aspects, where regional mechanisms are supplemented with global governance initiatives such as the BRICS+ and the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) as "the largest development and globalization program worldwide" (Thees, 2020, p. 1). Integral to the BRI's investments is the China-led AIIB as the world's first multilateral development bank (MDB) dedicated to infrastructure. As will be explored in the next section, Türkiye is involved in both mechanisms.

Furthermore, Gürcan and Otero's conceptualization of "post-hegemonic multipolarity" in *conjunctural* terms underscores the dynamic and historically contingent aspects of multipolarity characterized by its bottom-up and top-down dynamics. The top-down dynamics of multipolarity speak to inter-state competition and South-South cooperation, where smaller powers also assume crucial roles alongside great powers. Regarding the bottom-up dynamics, Gürcan and Otero underscore the global crisis of neoliberal capitalism and the rising demands of social movements that began globalizing in the 1990s, such as the alter-globalization movement. These movements call for limiting U.S. interventionism and developing alternative economic systems to neoliberalism. Gürcan and Otero note that amidst the power vacuum generated by these converging crises and rising popular movements, contender states are deploying similar demands, pushing them further on the global agenda. They portray social movements as key actors and economic crises as key drivers of multipolarity. Intriguingly, the unprecedented rise of the Latin American left in the 2000s and its organic ties to the alter-globalization movement, from the 1994 Zapatista uprising to World Social Forums, as well as how the Arab Spring movement led to the intensification of regional rivalries amidst the power vacuum created by U.S. military retreats and the Great Recession, and how the global migrant crisis, as a major repercussion of this movement, fueled Russia-supported right-wing extremism in the West, epitomize the dialectical reciprocity of top-down and bottom-up dynamics (Gürcan & Otero, 2024). In Türkiye's case, the Arab Spring movement has played a crucial role.

In view of this literature, it is possible to refine our research questions by investigating how Türkiye is taking on a more prominent role in South-South cooperation and pursuing an increasingly autonomous foreign policy. Additionally, we will explore how Türkiye navigates its relations with the U.S. and its dominant international mechanisms, as well as its responses to conflicts, rivalries, crises, and popular movements within the conjunctural context of post-hegemonic multipolarity.

Türkiye as a Key Actor of Post-Hegemonic Multipolarity

As an *emergent* trend in the current conjuncture, Türkiye's adoption of multivector policies coincides with two significant developments: the beginning of the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq in 2007, and the transformation of the 2007 subprime crisis into a worldwide "Great Recession." These events marked the onset of both global and regional power vacuums, emboldening regional powers, including Türkiye, to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy (Gürcan, 2019c).

A notable landmark in this context was the “One Minute” crisis in 2009. Türkiye’s mediation between Israel and Syria from 2004 to 2008 ended abruptly with Israel’s Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in December 2008, shortly after trilateral talks. This incident, among others, fueled public support for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and generated strong Western resentment, especially after Erdoğan’s confrontation with the Israeli president at the World Economic Forum in 2009 over Gaza’s offensive. Moreover, Iran’s nuclear policy has been a significant point of contention between Türkiye and the U.S. While Washington urged Ankara to impose sanctions on Iran to curb its nuclear power ambitions, Türkiye advocated for diplomatic solutions. In 2010, after Tehran’s agreement with Brazil and Türkiye, Ankara voted against new sanctions in the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Türkiye’s alleged assistance to Iran in evading U.S. sanctions after the 2011-2012 period became a critical issue (Almuedo, 2011; Curini, 2021).

In a similar vein, the Arab Spring further shaped Türkiye’s foreign policy. The discovery of hydrocarbon deposits in the eastern Mediterranean became a source of dispute as Türkiye asserted claims to resources near Cyprus. In Syria, U.S. support for the YPG against ISIS significantly strained relations with Türkiye, which was concerned about the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous region. A similar situation was observed in the Libyan crisis, where Türkiye backed Libya’s internationally recognized Government of National Accord as opposed to the U.S.-backed Khalifa Haftar. In 2019, Türkiye adopted its “Blue Homeland Doctrine” (Gürcan, 2020a) to reclaim its sovereignty in the Eastern Mediterranean against the backdrop of growing multipolarity and the further militarization of the Arab Spring process. Additionally, Türkiye’s support for Turkic peoples, exemplified by backing Azerbaijan against Armenia, and its role as a defender of the Muslim world, have boosted President Erdoğan’s popularity in the Middle East but also led to U.S. resentment. As regards Azerbaijan, the 44-Day War in 2020 marked the beginning of a new era in the South Caucasus, which led to the liberation of Azerbaijan’s previously occupied territories (Üste & Aydin, 2022). The role of Türkiye in this conflict was immense, a decisive factor without which Azerbaijan’s victory might not have been possible (Neset et al., 2023). Even though Armenia was long seen as a traditional ally of Russia as one of its main security and energy providers, meanwhile, Russia refrained from providing active support to Nikol Pashinyan due to his rapprochement with the U.S. and other Western countries, while improving its relations with Azerbaijan. In this context, Türkiye’s active support for Azerbaijan’s cause contributed to the multipolarization of world politics (Gürcan, 2020b).

Therefore, one should note that the “post-hegemonic” character of Türkiye’s multivector policies, as the dominant feature of the current conjuncture, is particularly exemplified in its active support for Azerbaijan at the expense of U.S. regional interests and its balanced approach to Russia, a stance perceived by the U.S. as contradictory to Türkiye’s NATO membership. Additionally, Türkiye has maintained its economic and diplomatic ties with Iran despite intensified sectarian rivalries arising from the Arab Spring. This nuanced foreign policy underscores Türkiye’s strategic autonomy and its efforts to navigate complex regional dynamics while challenging traditional alliances and geopolitical expectations.

Similarly, the attempted military coup in July 2016 and Türkiye’s subsequent purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system significantly strained U.S.-Türkiye relations. The U.S. argues that the S-400 system is incompatible with NATO defenses and poses a risk to the secrecy of F-35 stealth jet technologies, leading to U.S. sanctions on Türkiye’s defense procurement agency in December 2020. Furthermore, Türkiye’s broad cooperation with Russia, including energy projects and conflicting roles in regional disputes, has complicated its relationship with the U.S. Despite occasional support for Ukraine against Russia and loose compliance with Western sanctions against Russia, Türkiye’s actions have cooled its traditionally strong military ties with the U.S., prompting the U.S. to strengthen its alliances with other regional partners such as Greece, the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, and Israel (Curini, 2021). In the late 2010s, moreover, Türkiye’s outreach policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean resulted in intensified diplomatic interactions and mutual high-level visits involving regional countries associated with multipolarity, such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nicaragua (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Türkiye, 2024).

Türkiye’s contribution to multipolarity extends beyond bilateral relations to include humanitarian assistance, peace mediation, multilateralism, and South-South cooperation. According to the 2023 Global

Humanitarian Assistance Report (Urquhart et al., 2023, pp. 34, 37), Türkiye stands as the world's top donor of humanitarian assistance by %GNI and the second-largest donor in absolute terms (\$7.2 billion in 2022), outranking several traditional Western donors, such as the U.S., Canada, and Germany.

As a *residual* aspect of the current conjuncture of post-hegemonic multipolarity, from 2002 to the onset of the Arab Spring, Turkish foreign policy had mostly remained within the orbit of the U.S.-led international system, with a strong emphasis on Türkiye's active mediator role and conflict avoidance (Gürcean, 2019c). In the post-Arab Spring period, Türkiye continued its mediator role inherited from the 2000s, evolving into a key actor of multipolarity since the 2010s. It took the lead in the creation of the Mediation for Peace Initiative and the Group of Friends of Mediation within the UN, which was also replicated within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Türkiye's efforts were also expanded from the Middle East to the African region, engaging several countries like Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Within the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Türkiye spearheaded the creation of the Contact Group of Friends on Mediation in 2018 (Demirkıran & Demir, 2023; Sofos, 2022). In engaging Africa, Türkiye deployed a critical discourse that explicitly rejects Western-centred Orientalist and neo-colonial approaches to the African continent. According to Ahmet Kavas (2024), President of the Association of Researchers on Africa, Türkiye has assumed a balancing role between Asia and Europe through its engagement with Africa, which challenges the neo-colonial legacy of Western powers. In the Ukraine crisis since 2022, moreover, Türkiye emerged as the first and only mediator, adopting a neutral stance that "balance[s] being pro-Ukrainian without being openly anti-Russian" (Ambrosetti, 2024, p. 367). These concrete efforts resulted in the success of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in restarting grain exports out of Ukraine's Black Sea ports (Ambrosetti, 2024).

Türkiye's active contribution to multipolar multilateralism is strongly observed in its engagement with the European Union (EU) and NATO, which is also a crucial *residual* aspect of the current conjuncture. In March 2024, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan reiterated Türkiye's ongoing commitment to its strategic objective of EU membership (Tekin, 2024). As part of its multivector foreign policy, Türkiye also continues to play a pivotal role within NATO, maintaining its status as a key member of the alliance. Meanwhile, during the 2024 NATO Summit, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned against a potential NATO-Russia confrontation, vocally criticized certain NATO members' provocative attitude toward Russia, condemned Israel's atrocities against Palestinians in Gaza, targeted some NATO allies continued support for the PKK and FETÖ, and reiterated Türkiye's interest in joining the SCO and the BRICS+ by emphasizing that Türkiye views these organizations as contributing to world peace rather rivalling NATO (Amalaraj, 2024).

Equally important is Türkiye's contribution to the governance of international migration in response to the global refugee crisis since the Arab Spring. Türkiye, as the world's largest refugee-hosting country, has firmly committed to assisting EU efforts to prevent irregular migration (Kaya, 2023). According to Antonio Guterres, then UN High Commissioner for Refugees and now UN Secretary-General, Türkiye's hospitality and generosity have set a strong example for other countries dealing with the refugee crisis (Daily Sabah, 2015). Within the UN, Türkiye's efforts and collaboration are often seen as "a global best practice" (Revel, 2020, p. 2).

As regards multipolar multilateralism and South-South cooperation, one should also note that Türkiye takes an active part in the China-led BRI with its involvement in the AIIB and its own initiative called the Middle Corridor. Importantly, Türkiye stood as the second-largest beneficiary of AIIB loans in 2023 (O'Farrell, 2023). As for the Middle Corridor, this initiative consists of a multimodal route that bridges China and Europe, encompassing 4,256 km of rail and 508 km of sea transit. It stretches from the China-Kazakhstan border to Europe, traversing Kazakhstan, crossing the Caspian Sea, and passing through Azerbaijan and Georgia. In Georgia, the corridor bifurcates, with one branch coursing through Türkiye, beneath the Bosphorus via the Marmaray tunnel, and the other snaking under the Black Sea towards Ukraine and Romania. Freight trains plying this corridor can reach Europe from China in an average of 20-25 days (Agayev, 2023). Notably, the Zangezur Corridor project, emerging as a potential extension of the Middle Corridor after the 44-day war,

could enhance the strategic significance of the South Caucasus region as a transport hub, particularly in light of the escalated tensions following the Russia-Ukraine war and the interruption of the Northern Corridor (Agayev, 2023). Indeed, Türkiye is acutely aware of the Zangezur corridor's strategic potential to reshape regional transport dynamics and fortify its global position as a pivotal link between Asia and Europe.

One should factor Türkiye's ambitious Development Road Project into the equation of the BRI and the Zangezur Corridor. The Turkish Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure plans to invest \$5.8 billion in a 615 km-long railway and \$2 billion in a 320 km-long highway. The Development Road project, continuing with investments from the Turkish and Iraqi governments, aims to connect India, East Asia, and the Persian Gulf to Europe via the Great Fav Port, starting with railway and highway connections. This project will play a significant role in transporting goods arriving at the port from major countries such as China and India (Çalkaya & Bodur, 2023). In Zangezur's case, this corridor could act as a vital link connecting the Mediterranean and the Middle East with Asia.

Addressing a question on the Development Road, Abdulkadir Uraloğlu, Türkiye's Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, clarified, "The Development Road is not an alternative to the Suez Canal; we are creating a different route, not a competitor. We have completed the necessary technical studies to connect around 130 km of railway and 300 km of highway from Türkiye to our national network. This route in Iraq involves the construction of approximately 1,200 km of dual-lane railway and highway. Our vision for this corridor is not to compete with the Suez Canal, but to provide a different route. The Development Road is a crucial project supporting the Middle Corridor. It will significantly facilitate the transport of goods from West Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East to Europe and Central Asia" (Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Türkiye, 2023). This being said, one should also note that this initiative, along with the Zangezur corridor, would play a pivotal role in expanding the reach of China's BRI at the expense of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), announced at the 78th UN General Assembly in 2023 and planned as a countering strategy to the BRI. Undoubtedly, the Gaza crisis has significantly undermined the prospects of the IMEC and underscored the growing importance of Türkiye's initiatives supporting China (İstihbarat ve Güvenlik Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2023; Sabah, 2023).

The Middle Corridor and its broader significance for multipolar multilateralism also concern the Türkiye-led OTS, established on October 3, 2009, as an international organization that brings together countries with significant Turkic-speaking populations. Its purpose is to promote political, economic, and cultural cooperation among its member states in various fields, including trade, investment, transportation, energy, culture, education, tourism, and science and technology. This organization serves as a platform for dialogue and coordination among its members on regional and global issues of common concern (Gürcan, 2022).

One could argue that the OTS's formation and development are shaped against the backdrop of post-hegemonic multipolarity. The OTS Istanbul Summit in 2021 expressed solidarity with the Turkish Cypriot people and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in the role of an observer state in the process of converting to full membership status. The TRNC's full membership would pose a significant challenge to the U.S. and its Western allies, which have been isolating this country for over 60 years. Furthermore, the Turkic World 2040 Vision adopted by the OTS highlights the importance of reducing foreign currency dependence and protecting against external financial penetration based on mutual interests, while emphasizing the significance of the Middle Corridor and its integration into the BRI. The OTS's integration into China's BRI via the Central Corridor would dramatically accelerate multipolar multilateralism and South-South cooperation in a post-hegemonic direction (Gürcan, 2022).

Türkiye-Azerbaijan Relations as an Emblematic Case of South-South Cooperation in Post-Hegemonic Multipolarity

As noted above, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations have become a prominent example of South-South cooperation within the framework of post-hegemonic multipolarity, where regional alliances are reshaping global power structures. In this evolving geopolitical order, their partnership transcends mere bilateral ties, serving as a model for regional solidarity in the face of shifting global power dynamics. With this in mind,

this section is organized into three main sub-sections. The first traces the rise of post-Cold War South-South cooperation, with a focus on the OTS and how Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations serve as a driving force within this organization. The second sub-section highlights joint projects, such as the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, the Middle Corridor, and the Zangezur Corridor, demonstrating how Ankara and Baku establish strategic connectivity. The final sub-section analyzes Türkiye and Azerbaijan's deepening defense partnership, trade, and reciprocal investments, emphasizing how these bilateral ties exemplify post-hegemonic multipolarity by strengthening autonomy from Western and Russian dominance.

South-South Cooperation and Regional Mechanisms

In the wake of the Cold War, emerging states of the Global South increasingly sought alternative avenues for collaboration beyond traditional North-South paradigms. South-South cooperation, emphasizing mutual support, shared development experiences, and regional solidarity, became a defining feature of this period. This approach encouraged newly independent states to establish mechanisms that could address common political, economic, and cultural challenges while reinforcing regional resilience (Dolu, 2019).

In this context, especially countries in Eurasia with shared linguistic, historical, and cultural backgrounds recognized the strategic value of institutionalized cooperation, paving the way for multilateral frameworks that would both consolidate their collective influence and facilitate coordinated development initiatives. Indeed, the OTS was established in response to the cultural affinity and strategic potential of Turkic-speaking countries that gained independence in the Caucasus and Central Asia after the 1990s. Initial efforts centered on cultural and linguistic collaboration, culminating in agreements such as the establishment of the Turkic Council in 2009, which laid the groundwork for structured multilateral dialogue. Over time, the organization evolved from a forum for symbolic unity into a platform addressing tangible political, economic, and security issues. By consolidating member states under a shared framework, the OTS sought to enhance regional stability, facilitate joint development projects, and position the Turkic-speaking states as an influential actor in broader Eurasian and global affairs (Akçapa, 2023).

Building on this framework, the OTS also leverages strong bilateral relationships among its members to promote deeper regional cooperation. A case in point is the partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, whose historical, cultural, and linguistic ties have naturally positioned them to play a leading role within the organization. Their shared Turkic heritage and centuries-long interactions have created a foundation of mutual trust, enabling them to act as catalysts for regional integration. Through the OTS, Ankara and Baku align their political, economic, and cultural agendas with other member states, creating a network of collaboration that spans from the South Caucasus to Central Asia (Abdul, 2025). This strategic alignment is not merely symbolic; it translates into coordinated policy initiatives, trade agreements, and cultural programs that reinforce stability and connectivity across the region. Furthermore, by actively mediating and facilitating dialogue among member states, Türkiye and Azerbaijan serve as pivotal actors in resolving disputes and fostering collective approaches to security, energy, and infrastructural development.

Moreover, Azerbaijan's growing interest in green energy cooperation marks a strategic reorientation of its energy diplomacy, with initiatives extending both within the OTS and beyond, notably through deepening partnerships with Türkiye and the EU. Within the OTS framework, Azerbaijan has spearheaded efforts to institutionalize renewable energy collaboration, as reflected in the Bishkek Energy Ministers' meeting of September 2024, which emphasized joint projects, regional supply chains, and the establishment of a Green Technologies and Enterprises Center. At the same time, Azerbaijan has positioned itself at the heart of transregional projects such as the Black Sea Submarine Cable Project, designed to transmit electricity generated from its underutilized Caspian wind and solar capacity to European markets, thereby diversifying supply away from fossil fuels. Complementing these initiatives, the Caspian Electricity Transmission Project, pursued jointly with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, aims to integrate regional grids, expand cross-border trade, and ultimately connect Central Asia and the Caucasus to Europe's green energy corridors.

Importantly, the Azerbaijan-Türkiye-Europe Green Energy Corridor further consolidates Baku's role as a bridge between the Turkic world and the EU, with Ankara serving as a pivotal transit partner (Alizada, 2025).

Energy and Infrastructure Connectivity

The evolving partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan has progressively extended beyond traditional political and military collaboration, encompassing critical areas such as energy security and infrastructure development. This expansion is exemplified by landmark projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway and the TANAP, which hold strategic significance not only for the two countries but also for the broader integration of regional transportation networks and the enhancement of energy security. Echoing the infrastructure-oriented approach of China's BRI, these projects serve as key components in the emerging connectivity architecture of Eurasia, facilitating the connection of Central Asian states to European markets (Kazanci, 2025). In doing so, they open new avenues for trade and energy flows while simultaneously strengthening the institutional capacity of the OTS. Further advancing this momentum, the "Middle Corridor" initiative exemplifies how joint diplomatic and logistical coordination between Türkiye and Azerbaijan is creating an alternative route in global supply chains stretching from China to Europe, thereby reshaping the geostrategic balance in Eurasia (Dünya, 2025).

In addition to the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway and TANAP, projects such as the Zangezur Corridor further demonstrate the Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership's commitment to building a comprehensive and resilient infrastructure network. These efforts not only enhance east-west connectivity across the Turkic world but also align closely with the logic of the BRI, prioritizing transcontinental integration through strategic investments in logistics and energy transit. The integration of multimodal transport routes-including rail, road, and maritime links-within the framework of the Middle Corridor reflects a deliberate strategy to position the Turkic geography as a pivotal bridge between Asia and Europe. Ultimately, this multifaceted collaboration is not only reshaping regional dynamics but also elevating the OTS as a key platform for economic, political, and infrastructural coordination in Eurasia's evolving geopolitical landscape (Rehimov, 2023; Tarhan, 2024; Yılmaz, 2025).

Military and Economic Aspects of Türkiye-Azerbaijan Relations in a Post-Hegemonic Context

The concept of post-hegemonic multipolarity in international relations describes a period where the absolute dominance of a single hegemonic power comes to an end, giving way to multiple actors who form distinct centers of power and interact with one another. As Gürcan and Otero (2024) point out, this process is historically contingent and dynamic, meaning there are no fixed or permanent balances of power. Instead, the structure of the international system and the positions of its actors continuously evolve in response to historical events, competing interests, and shifting alliances. In this context, the developments in the relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan following the Karabakh conflict provide a clear example of this dynamic, multipolar reality. The outcome of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War significantly reshaped the geopolitical landscape and further strengthened the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which is grounded in shared culture and identity (Aliyev, 1994; Şamiyeva, 2018, p. 6). These developments can be viewed as part of a broader historical trajectory: since the early 1990s, Türkiye has consistently opposed international restrictions on Azerbaijan, assisting Baku in overcoming embargoes and advocating for its legitimate claims in global arenas. In turn, Azerbaijan has shown political solidarity with Türkiye—for instance, by launching direct flights to the TRNC in 2005 as a symbolic endorsement of Ankara's position on the Cyprus issue (Gurbanov, 2025; Karayel, 2024).

As a significant indicator of the evolving relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, the numerous memoranda of understanding and joint declarations signed in recent years clearly demonstrate the two

countries' mutual trust and commitment to cooperation. These agreements extend beyond the political and military spheres, encompassing multidimensional areas such as trade and energy collaboration. For example, the 2021 Shusha Declaration is one of the most significant documents formalizing comprehensive cooperation between the parties. The declaration paved the way for the transition from a "strategic partnership" to an "alliance" between the two countries (Rehimov, 2022).

Building on the foundations laid by the Shusha Declaration, the post-Karabakh period has witnessed a remarkable intensification of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations across multiple domains. Beyond defense and security cooperation, the two states have pursued deeper economic integration, exemplified by joint energy projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor and coordinated infrastructure initiatives that enhance regional connectivity (Rehimov, 2025). Cultural and educational exchanges have also expanded, reinforcing the shared linguistic, historical, and societal ties that underpin the bilateral relationship. Furthermore, diplomatic coordination on regional and international platforms has become more pronounced, with both countries aligning their positions on issues ranging from regional stability to energy security. This multifaceted approach illustrates how the post-Karabakh era has not only consolidated existing strategic partnerships but also propelled Türkiye and Azerbaijan toward a more institutionalized and resilient alliance, reflecting the adaptive and dynamic nature of post-hegemonic multipolarity.

Certainly, these developments are built on a robust foundation of cooperation that has deepened in the recent past, reflecting the growing strategic convergence between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Militarily, the 2010 Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement elevated ties by committing both states to mutual defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter. The same year, the establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council institutionalized joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing, and defense industry collaboration. Türkiye's transfer of drone technology proved decisive in Azerbaijan's 2020 Karabakh War victory, while defense cooperation expanded with the localized production of armored vehicles and sniper rifles, as well as trilateral security coordination through the 2014 Nakhchivan Declaration with Georgia. Such initiatives underscore Türkiye's central role in Azerbaijan's military modernization and regional security posture (Taghiyev, 2025).

Economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye has developed steadily since Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, evolving into one of the most comprehensive bilateral partnerships in the region. The legal and institutional foundations were laid by the 1992 Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force in 1993, providing the framework for trade and investment. The creation of the Azerbaijan-Türkiye Joint Economic Commission (JEC) in 1996 further institutionalized cooperation, enabling regular high-level coordination on trade, energy, and investment. Co-chaired by the Azerbaijani prime minister and the Turkish vice president, the JEC remains the central mechanism for deepening economic ties, most recently reaffirmed by the 2021 Ankara meeting, which produced a new action plan for expanding bilateral cooperation (Taghiyev, 2025).

In 2021, trade volume reached \$4.6 billion, with Türkiye ranking as Azerbaijan's second-largest trading partner. Turkish imports from Azerbaijan primarily consist of oil and gas, while Turkish exports include construction materials, textiles, agricultural products, and machinery. The 2020 Preferential Trade Agreement reduced tariffs on 15 product groups, particularly in agriculture, textiles, and chemicals, encouraging diversification beyond hydrocarbons. As of 2021, nearly 4,800 Turkish companies were operating in Azerbaijan, many actively participating in reconstruction projects in the Karabakh region. Similarly, Azerbaijan has become a leading source of foreign capital in Türkiye, with nearly 2,000 Azerbaijani-owned firms operating in the Turkish market. Between the mid-1990s and 2021, direct investments from Azerbaijan into Türkiye amounted to over \$20 billion, while Turkish companies invested an estimated \$12 billion in the period 2002-2020. The lion's share of Azerbaijan's capital flowed into hydrocarbons, while a smaller portion supported sectors such as finance, manufacturing, and tourism. One of the clearest symbols

of this presence is the STAR Refinery in İzmir's Aliağa region, inaugurated in 2018 with an investment exceeding \$6 billion, which remains the largest single foreign investment ever realized in Türkiye (Karayel, 2024; Taghiyev, 2025).

Overall, the significance of Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations for post-hegemonic multipolarity lies in how their military, economic, infrastructure, and increasingly green energy cooperation collectively reconfigure regional and global power dynamics beyond Western or Russian dominance. In military terms, Azerbaijan-Türkiye military cooperation has reshaped regional security by enabling middle powers to alter regional balances independently of NATO or Russia, reinforcing a more inclusive multipolar order. Similarly, their economic and energy ties, centered on pipelines and large-scale investments, diversify Europe's energy supply and enhance both states' autonomy. Last but not least, emerging green energy corridors extend multipolarity into sustainability and climate diplomacy, positioning Azerbaijan and Türkiye as pivotal actors linking the Caspian and Europe while elevating the OTS as a global player.

Conclusion

The literature on multipolarity highlights its emergence as a defining trend in world politics, marked by three interconnected yet occasionally conflicting trends: international conflicts and geopolitical rivalries, the rising popularity of multi-vector policies among developing countries, and increased South-South cooperation, including regionalism. Our conjunctural analysis indicates that Türkiye has not remained immune to these trends, particularly since the 2010s following the Arab Spring movement. While Türkiye continues to maintain close ties with the West, reflecting the residual legacy of the current post-hegemonic conjuncture, it has also embraced a multi-vector foreign policy, emphasizing the emergent aspects of this global conjuncture.

Certainly, Türkiye has not been a passive actor in the face of post-hegemonic multipolarity but has emerged as one of its key players. The hallmark of Türkiye's rising position is its adoption of a responsible, rational, and balanced foreign policy. This approach enables Türkiye to play a constructive and leading role in addressing global issues exacerbated by multipolarity, such as conflicts and migration. As such, Türkiye has set an international example by bearing the brunt of the migration crisis, demonstrating responsible conduct in crises like those in Palestine and Ukraine, and avoiding alignment in the West-Eurasia rivalry. Instead of favoring a Cold War-style bloc mentality, Türkiye has focused on its contributions to global and regional governance. Despite unjust exclusionary actions from the West, Türkiye has maintained its relationships with NATO and the EU, while also engaging with emerging initiatives from developing countries, including the BRICS+, the BRI, the SCO, and the AIIB.

Additionally, through the OTS, Türkiye has been playing a significant role in fostering cooperation among developing countries and advancing global governance. Türkiye has also played a leading role in global humanitarian aid and mediation efforts, launching concrete initiatives aimed at fostering global peace, stability, and prosperity, including the Middle Corridor, the Zangezur Corridor, and the Development Road. In an era where the possibility of a third world war is increasingly discussed, Türkiye's stance will be crucial in curbing global conflicts and geopolitical rivalries. Its approach will be key to advancing global governance within a more inclusive framework.

In the meantime, Türkiye's close partnership with Azerbaijan provides a striking case study of how multipolarity materializes in practice. The bilateral relationship extends beyond cultural and historical affinities to encompass trade and defense integration, energy security, infrastructure development, and emerging green energy cooperation. These initiatives not only reinforce South-South cooperation but also contribute to the creation of new regional poles of influence that reshape the global balance of powers at the expense of conflicts and rivalries. As such, the Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership stands as an emblematic example of how middle powers can act collectively to drive post-hegemonic multipolarity forward.

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