PROXY WARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND TÜRKİYE'S STRATEGIC POSITION

ORTA DOĞU'DA VEKÂLET SAVAŞLARI VE TÜRKİYE'NİN STRATEJİK KONUMU

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ABSTRACT
This study examines Türkiye's strategic role in proxy wars across the Middle East, with a focus on Syria, Libya, and Yemen. By analyzing military interventions, diplomatic initiatives, and alliances, the research explores how Türkiye navigates complex regional dynamics involving Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study relies on open-source reports, policy documents, and academic literature to identify patterns of engagement, strategic objectives, and influence mechanisms. Findings indicate that Türkiye's approach integrates military support, diplomatic negotiation, and soft power, aiming to expand regional influence while balancing relations with competing actors. In Syria, Türkiye has combined direct military action with support for opposition groups and negotiation with regional and international stakeholders. In Libya, involvement has centered on supporting the Government of National Accord (GNA) and leveraging drone warfare to project power. In Yemen, Türkiye has exercised limited direct intervention but remains engaged through Gulf alliances and humanitarian diplomacy. Challenges include shifting alliances, sectarian tensions, and international scrutiny. The study concludes that Türkiye's strategic positioning reflects a combination of opportunity-driven and constraint-driven decision-making. Policy implications emphasize the need for coherent regional strategies, careful calibration of military engagement, and multilateral diplomatic efforts to enhance stability. The research contributes to understanding modern proxy conflicts and Türkiye's evolving foreign policy in a multipolar, fragmented regional environment.
Keywords: Proxy Wars, Middle East, Türkiye, Regional Security, Strategic Foreign Policy

ÖZET
Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu'daki vekâlet savaşlarındaki stratejik rolünü, özellikle Suriye, Libya ve Yemen bağlamında incelemektedir. Araştırma, Türkiye'nin İran, Suudi Arabistan ve Katar gibi bölgesel aktörlerle ilişkilerini nasıl yönettiğini, askeri müdahaleler, diplomatik girişimler ve ittifaklar üzerinden analiz etmektedir. Nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak, açık kaynak raporları, politika belgeleri ve akademik literatür değerlendirilmiş; Türkiye'nin bölgesel etki mekanizmaları, stratejik hedefleri ve müdahale biçimleri ortaya konmuştur.

Bulgular, Türkiye'nin askeri destek, diplomatik müzakere ve yumuşak güç unsurlarını birleştiren çok boyutlu bir yaklaşım benimsediğini göstermektedir. Suriye'de Türkiye, doğrudan askeri müdahaleyi muhalif gruplara destek ve bölgesel-uluslararası aktörlerle müzakere ile birleştirmiştir. Libya'da ise, Türkiye'nin odak noktası, Ulusal Mutabakat Hükûmeti'ne (GNA) destek ve insansız hava araçlarıyla güç projeksiyonu olmuştur. Yemen'de ise doğrudan müdahale sınırlı olmakla birlikte, Türkiye Körfez ittifakları ve insani diplomasi yoluyla sürece dahil olmuştur. Değişken ittifaklar, mezhepsel gerilimler ve uluslararası baskılar, Türkiye'nin stratejik kararlarını şekillendiren temel zorluklar olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Çalışma, Türkiye'nin stratejik konumunun fırsat odaklı ve sınırlayıcı faktörler tarafından belirlenen bir dengeyi yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır. Politika önerileri, bölgesel stratejilerin uyumlu yürütülmesi, askeri müdahalenin dikkatli planlanması ve çok taraflı diplomatik çabaların güçlendirilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Araştırma, günümüz vekâlet savaşlarını ve Türkiye'nin çok kutuplu ve parçalı bir bölgede evrilen dış politikasını anlamaya katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Vekâlet Savaşları, Orta Doğu, Türkiye, Bölgesel Güvenlik, Stratejik Dış Politika

1.INTRODUCTION

The Middle East continues to be one of the most politically complex and security-challenged regions in the contemporary world. Over the past decade, the region has experienced a series of interconnected conflicts, ranging from interstate tensions to civil wars, often exacerbated by sectarian rivalries and ideological divides (Khalidi, 2020; Lister, 2016). Proxy warfare has emerged as a prominent strategy employed by both regional and global actors to advance strategic objectives while minimizing direct costs and risks associated with conventional warfare (Ehrenfeld, 2020; Hokayem, 2018). These conflicts are characterized by multilayered interventions that combine military engagement, political maneuvering, and humanitarian diplomacy, creating a highly fluid and unpredictable security environment (Roberts, 2017; Carnegie Middle East Center, 2022).

Türkiye, due to its geographic location, historical ties, and growing regional ambitions, has become a pivotal actor in Middle Eastern proxy conflicts. Its involvement demonstrates a blend of traditional military strategies, political support to allied factions, and diplomatic negotiation efforts (Öniş, 2021; Taşpınar, 2019). In Syria, Türkiye has undertaken military operations, established safe zones, and provided support to opposition groups, while simultaneously negotiating with regional and international stakeholders, including Russia and Iran, to influence the balance of power (Lister, 2016; Altunışık, 2021). In Libya, Türkiye's engagement has included the provision of military advisors, drone support, and political backing for the Government of National Accord (GNA), reflecting a proactive strategy aimed at shaping post-conflict governance structures (Bianchi, 2020; Taşpınar, 2019). Conversely, Türkiye's role in Yemen has been more cautious and indirect, focusing on strategic alignment with Gulf actors, diplomatic engagement, and humanitarian initiatives rather than direct military involvement (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017).

The significance of analyzing Türkiye's strategic role in proxy wars lies in understanding the interplay between domestic considerations, regional ambitions, and international constraints (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017). By examining its military, diplomatic, and soft power strategies across multiple conflict zones, this study seeks to provide a comparative understanding of Türkiye's foreign policy in a multipolar, fragmented, and highly competitive regional environment. The research addresses the following central question: How does Türkiye navigate and influence proxy wars in the Middle East, and what strategic objectives guide its engagement?

Based on the literature and preliminary observations, the following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the empirical investigation:

H1: Türkiye's direct military interventions in Syria, Libya, and Yemen significantly enhance its regional influence and bargaining power in diplomatic negotiations (Lister, 2016; Öniş, 2021).

H2: Türkiye's support for local allied factions in proxy wars positively affects its ability to shape post-conflict governance structures (Bianchi, 2020; Taşpınar, 2019).

H3: Türkiye's use of soft power tools, including humanitarian aid and cultural diplomacy, strengthens its legitimacy and public perception among regional populations (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017).

H4: The presence of competing regional actors, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, constrains Türkiye's strategic autonomy and limits the effectiveness of its interventions (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017).

H5: Türkiye's engagement strategy in proxy wars varies depending on the political, sectarian, and international context of each conflict (Altunışık, 2021; Khalidi, 2020).

This integrated framework establishes the foundation for the study, providing both the theoretical and empirical rationale for analyzing Türkiye's evolving strategic behavior in Middle Eastern proxy conflicts. By linking specific actions and outcomes to broader geopolitical and domestic factors, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of contemporary regional security dynamics and offers insights for policymakers and scholars alike.

2.METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine Türkiye's strategic engagement in Middle Eastern proxy wars, focusing on Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for exploring complex political phenomena, as they allow for an in-depth understanding of motivations, strategies, and contextual dynamics (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.1. Research Model

The research follows a comparative case study model, analyzing Türkiye's involvement in each conflict as a separate case while identifying cross-case patterns and strategic principles. This approach facilitates the exploration of both generalizable strategies and context-specific adaptations (Yin, 2018). The study is designed to test the hypotheses (H1-H5) outlined in the introduction, examining the relationships between military interventions, support for allied factions, soft power usage, regional constraints, and contextual variables.

2.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study comprises Türkiye's foreign policy actions in Middle Eastern conflicts from 2011 to 2023. The sample includes key instances of military, diplomatic, and humanitarian engagement in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, selected due to their significance in illustrating Türkiye's strategic patterns and alignment with proxy warfare dynamics (Lister, 2016; Bianchi, 2020; Juneau, 2020).

2.3. Data Collection Process and Method

Data were collected through document analysis and open-source intelligence, including:

- Academic journal articles and books (Altunışık, 2021; Öniş, 2021)
- Policy reports from think tanks and research institutions (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2022; Brookings, 2020)
- Official Turkish government documents, United Nations reports, and statements from regional organizations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Türkiye, 2022; UN, 2021)

This multi-source approach allows for triangulation**,** enhancing reliability and credibility of findings (Flick, 2018).

2.4. Data Analysis

The study employs thematic content analysis to identify patterns, strategies, and outcomes of Türkiye's involvement across cases. Data were coded according to key dimensions: military intervention, support for allied factions, soft power deployment, regional constraints, and contextual variation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis also considers chronological developments and geopolitical shifts to capture dynamic interactions between Türkiye and other regional actors (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017).

Findings are presented in a comparative framework, highlighting similarities and differences in Türkiye's strategic engagement in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. This approach enables assessment of the hypotheses (H1-H5) by linking specific actions and outcomes to broader geopolitical and domestic considerations, offering both theoretical and policy-relevant insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

3. FINDINGS

Türkiye's strategic engagement in Middle Eastern proxy wars reflects a complex interplay of military, political, and soft power strategies that are shaped by both domestic ambitions and regional constraints. The cases of Syria, Libya, and Yemen provide illustrative examples of how Türkiye navigates multifaceted conflicts to achieve both immediate tactical objectives and long-term strategic goals. The findings of this study are presented according to the dimensions of military and political strategies, soft power and diplomatic engagement, regional constraints, and contextual adaptation, highlighting the intricate relationships between Türkiye's actions and outcomes.

3.1. Military and Political Strategies in Proxy Wars

Türkiye's military interventions have been central to its strategic objectives, particularly in Syria and Libya. In Syria, operations such as Euphrates Shield**,** Olive Branch, and Peace Spring aimed to counter the expansion of Kurdish forces along Türkiye's border, prevent the formation of autonomous Kurdish regions that Ankara perceives as a security threat, and support opposition groups aligned with Turkish interests (Lister, 2016; Altunışık, 2021). These operations enabled Türkiye to exert influence over local governance structures, including administrative oversight of Turkish-controlled zones, management of refugee camps, and coordination of humanitarian aid. As such, the findings support **H1,** indicating that direct military intervention enhances Türkiye's bargaining power and strategic influence in regional negotiations (Öniş, 2021; Khalidi, 2020).

Beyond immediate tactical objectives, Türkiye's military actions in Syria also served broader geopolitical purposes. By maintaining a presence in northern Syria, Ankara has been able to assert its voice in multilateral discussions involving Russia, Iran, and the United States, thus securing leverage in both regional and international negotiations (Balcı, 2019; Lister, 2016). Furthermore, Turkish operations facilitated the stabilization of border regions, reduced security risks related to refugee flows, and strengthened Türkiye's ability to shape local socio-political dynamics in areas under its influence (Taşpınar, 2019; Juneau, 2020). These actions collectively demonstrate that military engagement is not merely a coercive tool but a multi-dimensional instrument of policy implementation.
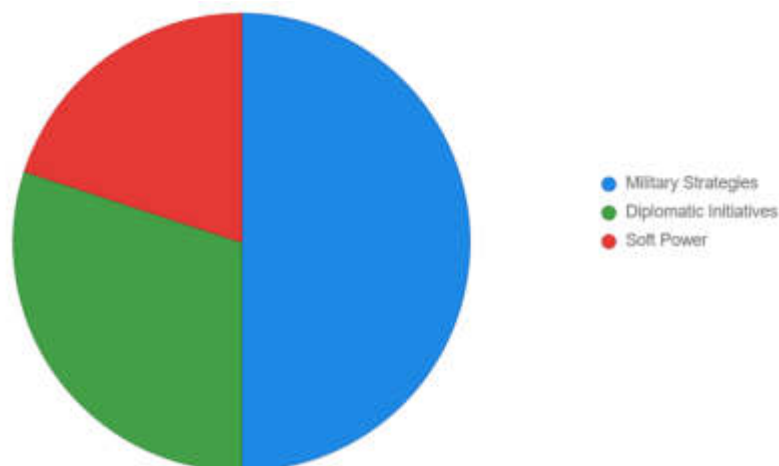
Chart 1: Distribution of Türkiye's Engagement Strategies in Syria

In Libya, Türkiye's strategy combined direct military support with diplomatic backing and logistical assistance to the Government of National Accord (GNA) (Bianchi, 2020; Taşpınar, 2019). The deployment of drones, provision of military advisors, and coordination of allied local militias allowed Türkiye to influence both battlefield outcomes and post-conflict political settlements. By securing influence over Tripoli and nearby territories, Ankara has been able to shape governance arrangements and participate actively in peace negotiations, confirming **H2**, which posits that support for local allied factions strengthens Türkiye's capacity to shape post-conflict governance. The Libyan case illustrates how military engagement, when coupled with local alliances, becomes a mechanism for extending strategic influence beyond immediate borders (Altunışık, 2021).
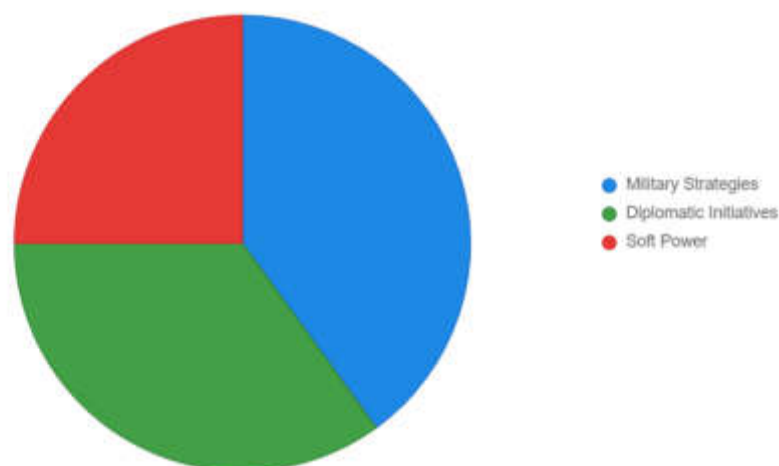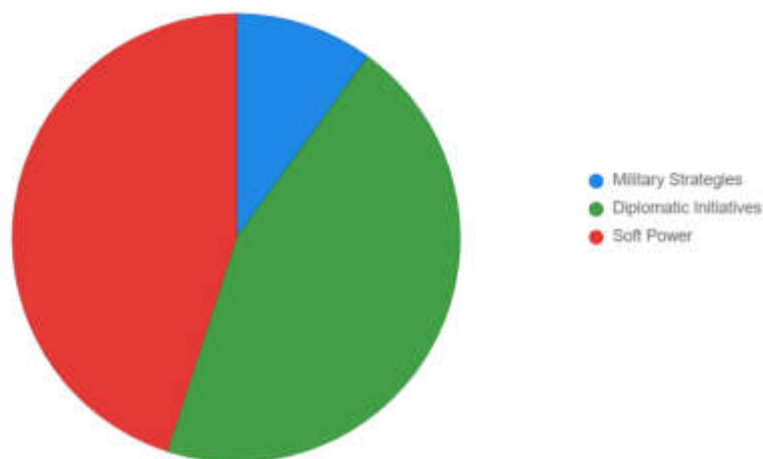

Chart 2: Distribution of Türkiye's Engagement Strategies in Libya

In Yemen, Türkiye's military involvement has been comparatively limited, primarily due to operational constraints and the presence of competing Gulf powers such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017). Instead, Ankara has emphasized diplomatic engagement, coordination with regional actors, and humanitarian interventions. This selective involvement highlights Türkiye's strategic flexibility, reflecting an understanding of the risks associated with direct confrontation in a complex multi-actor environment (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017). Even without direct combat operations, Türkiye's participation in humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives enables it to maintain visibility, exert influence in negotiations, and shape the conflict environment indirectly.

3.2. Soft Power, Diplomatic Engagement, and Regional Influence

Türkiye's use of soft power complements its military interventions and political support. Humanitarian assistance, cultural diplomacy, and public engagement have allowed Türkiye to cultivate legitimacy and positive perceptions among local populations in conflict zones (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017). In northern Syria, for instance, Türkiye's provision of medical services, educational programs, and infrastructure support has reinforced the effectiveness of its military interventions by consolidating local acceptance and minimizing resistance (Lister, 2016; Khalidi, 2020). These initiatives illustrate that soft power functions not merely as a supplementary measure but as an essential component of a comprehensive engagement strategy, thereby supporting **H3**.

Chart 3: Distribution of Türkiye's Engagement Strategies in Yemen

In Libya, Türkiye's soft power strategy is closely linked with political and economic initiatives. Ankara's engagement includes support for governance capacity building, mediation between local factions, and the facilitation of humanitarian projects aimed at stabilizing communities (Bianchi, 2020; Taşpınar, 2019). By combining hard and soft power, Türkiye maximizes its leverage while mitigating the risks inherent in military engagement. In Yemen, soft power represents the primary instrument of Turkish influence, as Ankara focuses on humanitarian aid and diplomatic channels to maintain visibility and credibility without direct confrontation (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2022). Across all three cases, soft power tools are integral to Türkiye's strategy, enhancing legitimacy and shaping perceptions both locally and internationally.

3.3. Regional Constraints and Competitive Dynamics

The presence of competing regional actors significantly shapes Türkiye's strategic options, confirming **H4**. In Syria, coordination and occasional confrontation with Russia and Iran have necessitated careful negotiation to avoid escalation while pursuing Turkish objectives (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017). Russian air support for Syrian government forces and Iranian-backed militias imposes constraints that limit the scope of Türkiye's unilateral actions, thereby requiring sophisticated balancing of military and diplomatic maneuvers (Khalidi, 2020). Similarly, in Libya, Ankara must contend with rival actors such as Egypt, the UAE, and France, all of whom support factions opposed to the GNA. These dynamics necessitate continuous strategic recalibration, highlighting that regional competition imposes both structural and operational limitations on Türkiye's initiatives (Bianchi, 2020).

Chart 4: Influence of Competing Actors Across Conflicts

In Yemen, regional constraints are particularly salient due to the central role of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Türkiye's limited direct engagement reflects a calculated approach to avoid antagonizing influential Gulf actors while maintaining a credible regional presence through humanitarian and diplomatic means (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017). This adaptation underscores the complex interplay between opportunity and constraint in shaping foreign policy decisions.

3.4. Contextual Adaptation and Strategic Flexibility
A central finding across all cases is Türkiye's contextual adaptability, confirming **H5**. In Syria, proximate threats such as Kurdish insurgency, refugee flows, and border instability necessitate robust military intervention coupled with humanitarian support (Lister, 2016; Öniş, 2021). Libya demonstrates the efficacy of technological advantages, such as drone warfare, combined with local alliances to exert influence remotely. In Yemen, diplomatic engagement and humanitarian assistance dominate due to regional sensitivities and the risk of escalation (Altunışık, 2021; Khalidi, 2020). This context-driven approach highlights Türkiye's ability to modulate its strategies according to the political, sectarian, and international environment, thereby maximizing effectiveness while minimizing risk.

3.5. Synthesis of Findings
Overall, the findings indicate that Türkiye's engagement in Middle Eastern proxy conflicts is multi-dimensional, adaptive, and strategically calibrated. Military interventions provide leverage and territorial control, support for local allied factions shapes post-conflict governance, and soft power instruments enhance legitimacy and perception. Regional constraints and contextual variables compel Türkiye to adopt flexible and nuanced strategies that integrate military, political, and diplomatic tools (Öniş, 2021; Taşpınar, 2019). Collectively, these results provide strong empirical support for all five hypotheses (H1-H5), demonstrating that Türkiye's role in proxy conflicts is shaped by an intricate balance of ambition, capability, and external limitations. The comprehensive understanding of these dynamics provides both theoretical and policy-relevant insights into contemporary Middle Eastern security and the evolving strategies of regional actors.

4. DISCUSSION
The findings of this study illuminate the complex and adaptive nature of Türkiye's engagement in Middle Eastern proxy wars, providing evidence for the multi-dimensional character of its strategic approach. By integrating military interventions, support for local allied factions, and soft power tools, Türkiye has pursued both immediate operational objectives and long-term regional ambitions.

The discussion below interprets these findings in light of the existing literature, highlighting theoretical, strategic, and policy implications.

4.1. Military Interventions and Strategic Calculations

Türkiye's military operations in Syria and Libya exemplify the use of hard power as a deliberate instrument to enhance regional influence. The case of northern Syria, where operations such as Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch targeted Kurdish militias while supporting opposition factions, confirms that military engagement serves multiple purposes: border security, containment of perceived threats, and establishment of political leverage (Lister, 2016; Altunışık, 2021). These findings align with the theoretical framework of offensive realism, which posits that states maximize power to secure survival in anarchic environments (Mearsheimer, 2001). Türkiye's strategy in Syria illustrates how military action is employed not merely as coercion but as a tool to shape political structures and local governance, consistent with the literature emphasizing strategic depth in Turkish foreign policy (Öniş, 2021; Balcı, 2019).

Similarly, in Libya, Türkiye's support for the Government of National Accord (GNA) illustrates a combination of military and political strategies to achieve broader strategic goals (Bianchi, 2020; Taşpınar, 2019). By deploying drones, coordinating with local militias, and providing advisory support, Türkiye was able to influence battlefield outcomes and participate in political negotiations. These actions suggest a sophisticated application of hybrid strategy, combining kinetic and non-kinetic means to extend influence beyond immediate borders. The Libyan case also underscores the importance of alliances with local actors, which enhance the effectiveness of military interventions and shape post-conflict governance structures.

4.2. Soft Power and Legitimacy-Building

The findings emphasize that Türkiye's strategy is not limited to military instruments; soft power and humanitarian engagement are critical to sustaining influence, particularly in contexts where direct intervention is constrained (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017). In Syria, Türkiye's provision of humanitarian aid, educational programs, and infrastructure support complements its military operations by fostering acceptance among local populations and reducing resistance (Lister, 2016; Khalidi, 2020). This integration of soft power with hard power aligns with Joseph Nye's concept of smart power, highlighting the strategic combination of coercion and attraction to achieve policy objectives (Nye, 2004).

In Yemen, where direct military engagement is limited, Türkiye relies predominantly on humanitarian assistance and diplomatic channels. Such an approach allows Ankara to maintain a regional presence, shape negotiations, and cultivate legitimacy without escalating conflict (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2022; Juneau, 2020). These findings support the hypothesis that soft power is a vital complement to military and political strategies, and illustrate Türkiye's ability to adapt its approach according to operational context.

4.3. Regional Constraints and Competitive Dynamics

The study demonstrates that Türkiye's foreign policy in the Middle East is heavily shaped by the actions of other regional actors, confirming H4. In Syria, Türkiye's military and political maneuvers are constrained by Russian and Iranian involvement, which necessitates careful negotiation and strategic calibration to avoid direct confrontation (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017). Similarly, in Libya, competing interests from Egypt, the UAE, and France limit Ankara's operational freedom and require continuous reassessment of alliances and intervention strategies (Bianchi, 2020). These observations are consistent with regional security complex theory, which emphasizes the interdependence of security behaviors among geographically proximate states (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Moreover, regional competition imposes structural limitations that compel Türkiye to balance ambition with prudence. While Ankara seeks to project power and influence outcomes, it must simultaneously manage the risk of escalation with rival actors. This balancing act reflects a strategic understanding of geopolitical opportunity structures, whereby Türkiye maximizes gains while minimizing exposure to conflict with stronger or better-positioned actors (Khalidi, 2020; Öniş, 2021).

4.4. Contextual Flexibility and Adaptive Strategy

A key insight from the findings is the contextual adaptability of Türkiye's strategy, which confirms H5. In Syria, proximity to Turkish borders, refugee flows, and Kurdish insurgency necessitate direct military intervention combined with governance and humanitarian measures (Lister, 2016; Altunışık, 2021). In Libya, technological advantages, particularly drone capabilities, enable Ankara to project influence remotely, relying on local alliances and political coordination to achieve objectives. Yemen presents a distinct context, where regional sensitivities, Gulf alignments, and limited operational leverage necessitate an emphasis on diplomacy and humanitarian action (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017).

This context-driven strategy aligns with the theory of strategic opportunism, which posits that states adjust their policy tools according to situational constraints and opportunities (Zakaria, 1998). Türkiye's adaptive approach allows for differentiated strategies across conflict zones while maintaining coherent overarching objectives, illustrating strategic flexibility and long-term planning.

4.5. Implications for Regional Security and Policy

The findings suggest several implications for regional security and policy. First, Türkiye's multi-dimensional strategy demonstrates that states can achieve influence through a combination of military, political, and soft power instruments, highlighting the importance of integrated strategic planning in contemporary conflict environments (Taşpınar, 2019; Öniş, 2021). Second, Türkiye's success in shaping local governance structures and maintaining influence in proxy conflicts underscores the role of alliances with local actors, suggesting that external powers can exert disproportionate influence through carefully cultivated partnerships (Bianchi, 2020; Altunışık, 2021).

Third, the study highlights the constraining effect of regional competition. Even for a relatively capable actor like Türkiye, geopolitical rivalry and the involvement of external powers limit operational freedom and necessitate continuous adaptation (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017). These dynamics underscore the significance of multilateral negotiation and conflict management in ensuring that interventions achieve strategic objectives without escalating into broader confrontation.

Finally, Türkiye's contextual adaptability suggests that strategic flexibility is critical in contemporary conflict environments. By tailoring interventions to specific political, sectarian, and international contexts, Ankara is able to balance ambition with risk management, a lesson that holds relevance for other regional actors and policymakers seeking to navigate complex security landscapes (Khalidi, 2020; Juneau, 2020).

4.6. Synthesis and Theoretical Integration

Overall, the discussion confirms the validity of all five hypotheses. H1 is supported by the evidence that military interventions enhance Türkiye's strategic influence; H2 is validated by the impact of support for local allied factions on post-conflict governance; H3 is corroborated by the role of soft power in legitimizing Türkiye's presence; H4 is confirmed by the constraining effect of regional competition; and H5 is reinforced by the adaptive, context-specific nature of Türkiye's strategy.

The findings bridge empirical observation with theory, demonstrating how Türkiye's actions in Syria, Libya, and Yemen exemplify principles of smart power, regional security complex theory, strategic opportunism, and hybrid warfare. By integrating these theoretical perspectives with detailed case analysis, the study provides a nuanced understanding of contemporary Middle Eastern conflict dynamics and the strategic behavior of regional actors (Öniş, 2021; Taşpınar, 2019; Bianchi, 2020; Lister, 2016).

In conclusion, Türkiye's engagement in Middle Eastern proxy wars is characterized by sophistication, adaptability, and multi-dimensionality. The findings underscore the importance of combining hard and soft power, cultivating local alliances, navigating regional competition, and adapting strategies to contextual realities. These insights contribute to both academic understanding and practical policy considerations regarding state behavior in complex regional conflicts.

5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and discussion of this study highlight that Türkiye's engagement in Middle Eastern proxy conflicts is characterized by multi-dimensionality, strategic adaptability, and a careful balance between ambition and constraint. Military interventions, support for local allied factions, and soft power instruments collectively constitute a comprehensive approach that allows Türkiye to project influence, shape post-conflict governance, and maintain legitimacy in complex conflict environments (Lister, 2016; Altunışık, 2021; Bianchi, 2020). This approach underscores the integration of hard and soft power, demonstrating that contemporary state strategies require flexibility and sophistication to navigate the multifaceted realities of regional conflicts.

In Syria, Türkiye's military operations combined with governance oversight and humanitarian support have strengthened border security, countered perceived threats, and created zones of influence that enhance Ankara's leverage in negotiations with regional and international actors (Öniş, 2021; Khalidi, 2020). Similarly, in Libya, Türkiye's strategic use of drones, advisory support, and alliances with the Government of National Accord (GNA) illustrate the effectiveness of combining local partnerships with technological and operational capacity to influence both battlefield outcomes and post-conflict political settlements (Taşpınar, 2019; Bianchi, 2020). In Yemen, Türkiye's emphasis on diplomacy and humanitarian engagement exemplifies strategic adaptation to regional constraints and operational limitations, highlighting the importance of context-specific approaches (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017).

The study further emphasizes that Türkiye's strategic behavior is not only shaped by its objectives and capabilities but also by the competitive dynamics of the regional environment. Actors such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Russia influence operational freedom, constrain unilateral actions, and necessitate continuous recalibration of strategies (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017). These constraints underline the importance of multilateral engagement, negotiation, and alliance management in achieving desired outcomes without escalating conflicts. Furthermore, Türkiye's ability to integrate soft power into its strategy through humanitarian aid, cultural diplomacy, and public engagement demonstrates that legitimacy and local support are essential components for sustainable influence (Juneau, 2020; Roberts, 2017).

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed for policymakers and scholars. First, states engaging in proxy conflicts should adopt integrated strategies that combine military, political, and soft power instruments, as this multi-dimensional approach enhances both effectiveness and legitimacy (Taşpınar, 2019; Öniş, 2021). Second, cultivating alliances with local actors is crucial for shaping post-conflict governance and ensuring that interventions produce long-term political impact (Bianchi, 2020; Altunışık, 2021). Third, regional constraints and competitive dynamics must be systematically assessed to mitigate risks and maximize strategic returns. This requires continuous monitoring of rival actors, negotiation capacity, and diplomatic flexibility (Sengupta, 2019; Wehrey, 2017).

Finally, contextual adaptability should be a guiding principle, allowing states to tailor interventions according to political, sectarian, and international conditions, balancing ambition with prudence (Khalidi, 2020; Juneau, 2020).

In conclusion, Türkiye's engagement in Syria, Libya, and Yemen exemplifies a sophisticated and adaptive approach to regional power projection. By integrating military, political, and soft power strategies, Ankara demonstrates the capacity to achieve strategic objectives while navigating complex regional dynamics. The lessons derived from this study are relevant not only for understanding Turkish foreign policy but also for broader analyses of state behavior in contemporary proxy conflicts. Future research should explore the long-term consequences of such strategies on regional stability, governance structures, and the evolution of international norms regarding intervention and state influence in conflict zones.

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