

# Search for a Grand Strategy to Turkish FP in the 21st Century - Kaan Kutlu Ataç



---

While there is no accepted a common definition of Grand Strategy (GS) in the literature, it is possible to distill a common thread from existing definitions: at what points do a state's vital interests emerge? Hence GS involves identifying where these vital interests are at stakes and determining the course of action to mitigate the jeopardized national interests. GS by and large is the art of developing and implementing a long-term plan to protect a country's national security, interests, and values on the global stage. It serves as the foundation for a country's foreign policy and military strategy. GS of a state includes a careful balance of power, diplomacy, and resources.

GS, ideally at its foundation, necessitates a comprehensive assessment of a country's strengths and weaknesses, as well as a sharp awareness of the changing worldwide situation. It needs a thorough understanding of the state's values, goals, and vision for the future. Defining important interests, prioritizing them, and determining how to defend them are key components of grand strategy. GS entails a careful balance of means (available resources and instruments), aims (objectives or designed results), and ways (methods or techniques to attain those purposes). It is critical for GS success to ensure that all these components are well-aligned.

Ultimately, GS is a key search for a state to address a vital question of resource extraction in attaining national security and interests. This endeavor serves as the core framework for its foreign policy, coordinating the state's efforts within the global political system to achieve defined goals. Thus, political decision-makers must clearly lay out the primary underlying pillars of grand strategic architecture, particularly, 1) the role of tools such as economic, military, political and ideology , 2) balance between ends and means, 3) an understanding of the international environment, and 4) the distinction between risk and uncertainty.

For the first pillar the role of tools, the strategic selection and synchronization of diverse power tools is essential for GS. These instruments include military, diplomatic, economic, and financial tools. The proper selection and combination of these instruments is critical for achieving national security goals. For the second pillar, aims and means balance, the essential balance between desired aims and accessible means is a major notion in GS. Disproportionate objectives in relation to the available methods and resources can lead to strategic failure that may lead to a state into nightmare for survivability in international system. Consequently, a pragmatic appraisal of resources and objectives becomes critical. Third pillar, understanding the international environment, mastering GS necessitates a thorough understanding of the strategic environment. This understanding includes an evaluation of threats, vulnerabilities, hazards, and uncertainties. Such discoveries serve as the foundation for sound and safe policymaking. And the last pillar, threats vs. vulnerabilities, it is critical to distinguish between threats, which entail acts by other players jeopardizing national interests, and vulnerabilities, which include risks that are created by

non-human factor, like pandemics and natural disasters. Threats often require the use of physical force, but vulnerabilities may necessitate humanitarian, developmental, or governance alternatives. Identifying between risk and uncertainty is critical for successful decision-making and strategic planning. Risk reflects the probability of an unwanted outcome based on current knowledge, whereas uncertainty refers to unknown unknowns.

Within the scope of this overarching architectural framework, it becomes more accessible to comprehend what is at stakes in Türkiye's grand strategy. Consequently, in the 21st century, it is possible to delineate the prominent elements within Türkiye's GS into two primary categories. The first pertains to Türkiye's domestic challenges, while the other encompasses the resistances emerging amid the uncertainties of the global geopolitical tsunami. One of the most significant challenges Türkiye faces in domestic issues relates to the dramatic structural financial problems in the national economy. According to the [World Bank](#) the economy has been losing momentum amidst a deteriorating external environment and heterodox monetary policies. The devastating earthquakes on February 6, 2023, direct losses are estimated at \$34.2 billion while the reconstruction needs could be double. The earthquakes added pressures to an increasingly fragile macro-financial situation. The societal consequences of economic and financial structural difficulties tend to be extremely disruptive as well. [World Inequality Report 2022](#) indicates dramatic disruptive inequalities in social strata: bottom 50% of Türkiye's population makes up lower class who possess 4% of the total national wealth. On the other hand, the middle class, that makes up 40% of the population, owns 29% of the total national wealth, whereas the upper class that makes up 10% of the population, owns 67% of the national wealth. Despite the new cabinet formed after the May 2023 general elections, which has shown a strong inclination towards returning to traditional and rational economic and financial policies, it is observed that in the medium-term economic programme, the country still needs to grapple with high inflation. While the Turkish economic administration conducts roadshows to attract foreign investors on the international stage in fiscal and economic policies, there is still a [skeptical and cautious approach](#) to the policies in international circles.

Apart from economic problems, one of the most serious obstacles confronting

Türkiye in the implementation of GS concerns is societal polarization, which is a fundamental feature of accomplishing national objectives. Türkiye witnessed such political polarization during the [May 2023 general election](#). According to Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, an [expert](#) on Turkish politics, Türkiye's polarization is widespread, entrenched, and not self-resolving. It creates echo chambers in which citizens communicate largely with those who share their beliefs, restricting free dialogue and strengthening differences. This polarization includes a wide range of problems and emotions, hurting pluralistic democracy, making people more vulnerable to misinformation. Other factor indicating in political politicization in Türkiye is migration which has become a hot issue in political level in the recent years. [By hosting around 4 million refugees Türkiye has become the largest refugee hosting country in the world since 2011](#). The influx of migrants, mainly Syrian refugees, is blamed for rising social turmoil in Türkiye. This problem has fueled rising discontent among the Turkish people, [and it reached second place, right after the economic crisis](#). The debate for a new constitution seems to be another source of potential political polarization in Türkiye. It is worth noting that President Erdoğan is determined to submit a draft for [new constitution](#) for public vote in the immediate future. The internal challenges Türkiye faces hurdle its effort to design a comprehensive and long term endeavor for GS that it needs to resource extraction process in order to balance resources-means-ends.

As for the international political system, a search for a new global order has triggered geopolitical uncertainty. An increase in armed conflicts in Türkiye's immediate neighborhood poses a threat to Turkish national security. From the standpoint of Turkish national security decision-makers, this situation remains the top agenda topic at [National Security Council meetings](#). This threat assessment is largely related to its Transatlantic relations. The most notable challenges in Türkiye's foreign policy are encountered in its security and defense policies within the alliance structure of NATO and its relations with the US. Especially after the 2010s, during the period when Türkiye was seeking an autonomous and ambitious foreign policy within the context of redesigning the global order, these challenges have come to the forefront more frequently. As of today Türkiye and the US portray each other a threat to their national security. The US at least in Syria considers Türkiye [to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to its national security and foreign policy](#).

Furthermore, the US has included Türkiye in the [CAATSA](#) sanctions and categorizes Türkiye in the category of adversaries to be dealt with. Similarly, [Türkiye also views the United States as a national security threat in Syria](#). An important indication of the tension between Türkiye and the US is the fact that since the Biden administration took office in January 2021, there have been no visits to Türkiye at the ministerial level (with the exception of Secretary of State Blinken's visit in connection with the February earthquakes). Despite frequent visits by the US Secretaries of State and Defense to regions near Türkiye in the past three years, their absence in Ankara indicates the level of tension between the two capitals. If creating allies in the implementation of national policies is essential for achieving goals in grand strategy, it is observed that Türkiye finds it challenging to reach a common understanding with the US, with whom it is in a defense pact. This situation may be a political preference for both capitals. However, in terms of balancing means with ends, it stands as an issue that Turkish foreign policy needs to overcome.

Another test in Türkiye's foreign policy can be observed in its relations with the EU. [Erdoğan's statement](#) on 16 September 2023, "The European Union (EU) is making an effort to distance itself from Türkiye. During this period, we will make our assessments in light of these developments, and if necessary, we can part ways with the European Union," reveals the mindset that Türkiye has reached during its sixty-year EU process.

Furthermore, Türkiye's efforts to replace the ruptures in its long-standing foreign policy goal of Transatlantic relations are noteworthy. The extent to its relations with Russia, particularly in the fields of defense and energy security, can serve as a viable alternative for its grand strategy in the short and medium term remains a subject of debate. If Ankara chooses this political path, especially to address the structural economic problems mentioned above with a Russian alternative, it will lead Türkiye into a challenging and risky GS quest. In this case, Türkiye's foreign policy objectives will necessitate a paradigm shift, even in the long term, ultimately causing a complete reset of the balance between strategy tools-resources and objectives. Similar claims apply to Türkiye's relations with China. The riskiest aspect of developing a relationship with China is that as a global actor, China's new superpower status has not yet been thoroughly tested. China

still maintains its closed-box feature, preserving its uncertainty in global foreign policy.

In conclusion, Türkiye's GS in the second quarter of the 21st century will be marked by challenges that it has been trying to overcome for a long time: structural problems in the economy and finance, and the quest for stability in domestic politics. As taught by Türkiye's traditional foreign policy reflexes, a pragmatic and realpolitik perspective, in constant pursuit of balance in geopolitical tsunami, can offer us a glimpse into its GS architecture.

---



**Dr. Kaan Kutlu Ataç, Mersin University**

Dr. Kaan Kutlu Ataç graduated from Hacettepe University, Department of Public Administration. He completed his master's degree in Public Administration and International Relations at the same university. Ataç received his doctorate from Hacettepe University, Department of History in 2016. Ataç, who is a lecturer at Mersin University, Department of International Relations, gives lectures at the National Defense University as a Visiting Lecturer.

---

**To cite this work:** Kaan Kutlu Ataç, ““Search for a Grand Strategy to Turkish FP in the 21st Century”, Panorama, Online, 19 December 2023, <https://www.uikpanorama.com/blog/2023/12/19/search-grand>

---

Copyright@UIKPanorama. All on-line and print rights reserved. Opinions expressed in works published by the Panorama belongs to the authors alone unless otherwise stated, and do not imply endorsement by the IRCT, Global Academy, or the Editors/Editorial Board of Panorama.