

MIR 504

Turkey and Its Neighborhood

Boğaziçi University

Instructor: Onur Isci

Spring 2026

Course Description

This graduate seminar examines Turkey's relations with its surrounding regions through the lenses of history, geopolitics, and security, focusing on how long-term historical legacies and shifting regional power balances have shaped foreign and security policy outcomes from the late Cold War to the present. The course treats Turkey as a state operating simultaneously across multiple strategic environments—including the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Europe—each characterized by distinct political, military, and economic dynamics.

Emphasis is placed on the historical evolution of regional orders and the ways in which wars, crises, regime changes, and great-power competition have redefined Turkey's security priorities over time. The course explores how concerns such as territorial integrity, alliance commitments, military capabilities, maritime access, energy routes, and regional rivalries have structured Turkey's external behavior. Particular attention is given to critical junctures including the end of the Cold War, NATO enlargement, conflicts in the Caucasus and the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean disputes, and the return of hard security competition in the Black Sea region.

Readings draw on historical scholarship, geopolitical analysis, and security-focused research that foreground strategic geography, material power, and contingency. By situating contemporary developments within longer historical trajectories, the course equips students to assess Turkey's regional policies as part of evolving geopolitical landscapes rather than as isolated or short-term phenomena. Students completing the course will develop the ability to critically analyze Turkey's role in its neighborhood(s) and to contextualize current security challenges within broader regional and historical frameworks.

Assessment & Evaluation

1) Active Seminar Participation – 20%

Participation grades reflect preparation, engagement, and consistency. Students who come prepared and contribute thoughtful, reading-based interventions in most sessions can expect an A-range participation grade; students who attend regularly but contribute occasionally or superficially should expect a B-range grade. Limited attendance, lack of preparation, or repeated non-participation will result in a C-range or lower participation grade.

2) Weekly Response Memos – 20%

Weekly response memos are evaluated based on timely submission, engagement with the assigned readings, and analytical clarity rather than summary. Memos that demonstrate careful reading, advance a clear argument or question, and situate the material in its historical or geopolitical context can expect an A-range grade; memos that accurately

summarize readings but offer limited analysis or originality should expect a B-range grade. Late, incomplete, or consistently superficial submissions will receive a C-range or lower grade.

3) In-Class Presentation – 10%

The presentation is evaluated based on clarity of argument, command of the research question, and the ability to situate the project within its historical and geopolitical context, rather than on presentation style or visuals. Presentations that clearly articulate a coherent argument, demonstrate strong mastery of the material, and respond thoughtfully to questions can expect an A-range grade; presentations that communicate the basic project but lack analytical clarity or depth should expect a B-range grade. Unfocused, underprepared, or incomplete presentations will receive a C-range or lower grade.

4) Final Research Paper – 50%

Final papers are evaluated based on the originality of the research question, analytical depth, and effective use of historical and empirical evidence. Papers that advance a clearly articulated argument grounded in independent interpretation of sources and debates can expect an A-range grade; papers that rely primarily on descriptive summary or generic arguments—whether AI-assisted or not—should expect a B-range or lower grade. Technical fluency without original analysis will not be sufficient for a high grade.

***A.I. Tools may be used as research aids; however, students should be prepared during the presentation to explain how the research question emerged, how sources were selected, and how analytical decisions were made, as the presentation assesses independent understanding rather than technical polish.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction

Week 2 – Interwar Period and the Making of Turkey’s Geopolitical Outlook

1. Samuel J. Hirst, *Against the Liberal Order: The Soviet Union, Turkey, and Statist Internationalism, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024);
2. Onur Isci, “The Yardstick of Friendship: Soviet-Turkish Relations and the Montreux Convention of 1936,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 21, 4 (Fall 2020): 733-762.

Week 3 – The Second World War and Strategic Neutrality

1. Onur Isci, “The Massigli Affair and its Context: Turkish Foreign Policy after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 55:2 (2020): 271-296;
2. Onur Isci, “Turkey at a Crossroads: The Soviet Threat and Postwar Realignment,” *Diplomatic History*, 47, 4 (September 2023): 621–646;
3. Onur Isci and Samuel J. Hirst, “Turkey’s Rushed Liberalization: Wartime Neutrality and the Devaluation of 1946,” *Turkish Studies*, 25, 4: 625-651.

Week 4 – The Cold War: Alliances, Security, and Containment

1. Onur Isci, Samuel J. Hirst and Orhun Bayraktar, “Let the Black Sea Unite Us: The 1967 Soviet-Turkish Industrial Agreement and Ankara’s Cold War Rapprochement with Moscow,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (published online first, November 20th 2024) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2024.2429862>;
2. Onur Isci and Samuel J. Hirst, “Smokestacks and Pipelines: Russian-Turkish Relations and the Persistence of Economic Development,” *Diplomatic History*, 44, 5 (November 2020): 834-859.

Week 5 – Turkey and Russia: Cooperation, Competition, and Managed Rivalry

1. Onur Isci, Mustafa Aydın and Mitat Çelikpala, “Public Perceptions and Hybrid Influences in Russian-Turkish Relations,” *Global Strategic Insight*, 3 (October 2024);
2. Onur Isci, Mustafa Aydın and Mitat Çelikpala, “A Precarious Interdependence Between Russia and Turkey: Economic Cooperation, Energy Ties, and Sanctions,” *Global Strategic Insight*, 2 (July 2024)
3. Onur Isci, Mustafa Aydın and Mitat Çelikpalai, “Triangulating Russia, Turkey and the West: Towards a New Regional Order?” *Global Strategic Insight*, 1 (May 2024) with Mustafa Aydın and Mitat Çelikpala.

Week 6 – The Caucasus: War, Corridors, and Regional Order

1. “Seeing Beyond Victory: Azerbaijan’s Pathways After the Second Karabakh War.”

- Baku Dialogues*, 2021.
<https://bakudialogues.idd.az/articles/seeing-beyond-victory-10-04-2021>
2. “The Rising Significance of the Middle Corridor.”
Baku Dialogues, 2022.
<https://bakudialogues.idd.az/articles/the-rising-significance-of-the-middle-corridor-18-10-2022>
 3. “Strategic Rail Connectivity: Time to Reconnect Iran.”
Baku Dialogues, 2022.
<https://bakudialogues.idd.az/articles/strategic-rail-connectivity-18-10-2022>
 4. “Azerbaijan’s Multilateral Green Energy Diplomacy: Powering Regional Integration Through the Caspian–Black Sea Green Energy Corridor.”
Baku Dialogues, 2023.
<https://bakudialogues.idd.az/articles/azerbaijans-multilateral-green-energy-diplomacy>

Week 7 – The Black Sea: Security, Maritime Politics, and Great-Power Rivalry

1. Isachenko, Daria, and Göran Swistek.
The Black Sea as Mare Clausum: Turkey’s Special Role in the Regional Security Architecture.
SWP Comment no. 33/2023. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), June 2023.
<https://doi.org/10.18449/2023C33>.
2. Gorenburg, Dmitry.
Russia’s Interests in the Black Sea and Mediterranean.
CNA Corporation and Harvard University, March 2025.
3. Soldatiuk-Westerveld, Julia, Ben Bekkering, Emma Caals, and Giulio Damiani.
Black Sea Security as the White Knight for Peace? Navigating Risks and Prospects for Talks.
Clingendael Report. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael,” October 2025.

Week 8 – Eurasia: Connectivity, Energy, and Strategic Depth

1. Akçay, Nurettin, and Changgang Guo. “Türkiye’s Middle Corridor and China’s BRI: Identification and Assessment.” *Insight Turkey* 25, no. 1 (2023): 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2023251.4>.

2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *Realising the Potential of the Middle Corridor*. Paris: OECD, 2023.
3. Austvik, Øystein, and Gulmira Rzayeva. "Turkey in the Geopolitics of Natural Gas." *Energy Policy* 107 (2017): 539–547.

Week 9 – Turkey, the United States, and NATO

1. Martin, Lenore G. "Challenging Friends: Türkiye–U.S. Relations." *All Azimuth* 14, no. 1 (2025): 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.20991/allazimuth.1532722>.
2. Abrami, Samuele Carlo Ayrton. *What's Up with U.S.–Turkey Relations? Between International Turmoil and Trump 2.0*. IPC–Mercator Analysis (January 2025).
3. Kaya, Ayşe Ömür. "The Future of Türkiye–NATO Relations in Light of the Strained Transatlantic Dialogue." *Insight Turkey* (April 10, 2025).

Week 10 – Turkey and the European Union

1. Sotiriou, Stylianos A. "When Tension Borders Aggression: Turkey, the European Union, and the Politics of Interdependence." *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (April 2025). doi:10.1080/14683857.2025.2494371.
2. Meltem Müftüler-Bac. "Turkey's Influence as a Third Country on the European Union: From Association to a Key Partner." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 61, no. 6 (2023): 1471–1487. doi:10.1111/jcms.13430.
3. Ovacık, G. "Taking Stock of the EU-Turkey Statement in 2024." *European Journal of Migration and Law* 26, no. 2 (2024).

Week 11 – Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean

1. O. Eilat, *Water Is Thicker Than Gas: Turkey, UNCLOS, and the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Dispute*, *Maritime Policy & Law* (2025).
2. *Energy Diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean*, *International Journal of Energy and Geopolitics* 5, no. 4 (2025).
3. Esra Dilek, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean: Peacemaking in Cyprus at a Crossroads* (IPC–Mercator Analysis, March 2023).

Week 12 – Turkey and the Middle East

1. Sinem Adar, Turkey in MENA, MENA in Turkey, SWP Research Paper 3 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2024).
2. Katerina Dalacoura, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Power Projection and Post-Ideological Politics,” *International Affairs* 97, no. 4 (2021).
3. Salim Çevik, Turkey’s Reconciliation Efforts in the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints in a Changing Regional Order, SWP Research Paper 15 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, October 2024), https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2024RP15_Turkey_ReconciliationMiddleEast.pdf.
4. Senem Aydın-Düzgit, “Authoritarian Middle Powers and the Liberal Order: Turkey’s Contestation of the Global and Regional Status Quo,” *International Affairs* 99, no. 6 (November 2023): 2319–2337, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad225>.
5. E. Stein, “Egyptian Responses to Turkey’s MENA Policy from the Arab Spring to 2024,” *International Studies Review* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-025-00699-5>.

Week 13 – Student Presentations

Week 14 – Student Presentations