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Strategic Gatekeeping: Geopolitical Objectives and Turkey's Syrian Refugee Policy

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Abstract

Since the war in Syria began, Turkey has become home to the largest refugee population in the world, hosting over 3.7 million displaced Syrians. While Turkey initially welcomed them through an open-door refugee program, its policy has since become more restrictive and securitized, including threats of forced repatriation. This puzzling shift has been the subject of some limited scholarship, but there has been no comprehensive analysis of Turkey's policies, particularly from a foreign relations perspective. This study attempts to address this paucity by examining the nexus between foreign and refugee policy, using two case studies. First, because Turkey had failed to project itself as a regional power in years prior, from 2015-2016 it shifted its emphasis to relations with the E.U., negotiating a deal with the latter in 2016. Turkey agreed to adopt an arrangement of restricting refugee movement towards Europe, gaining leverage in its relations with the E.U. In the second case, from 2016-2021, Turkey has found itself weakened and defensive in the Syria conflict, which refocused its security goals inward, though it continued to seek concessions from the E.U. As a result, the country adopted a more securitized policy with goals of resettlement and repatriation of refugees back to Syria. Both case studies thus demonstrate the influence of Turkey's foreign policy on its refugee program, and the latter period also illustrates how refugee policy might influence foreign affairs.

I.   Introduction

Since the civil war in Syria began a decade ago, the Republic of Turkey (Turkey) has become home to the largest refugee population in the world, hosting approximately 3.7 million displaced Syrians[1]. While, in 2011, Turkey had initially warmly welcomed Syrians through an open-door refugee program that allowed freedom of movement, its policy has since become more restrictive and securitized[2]; in recent years, this trend of securitization has escalated to threats of forced repatriation and planned resettlements back to still-wartorn Syria[3]. These puzzling and sudden shifts have been the subject of some limited scholarship, but there has been no comprehensive analysis of Turkey's policies, particularly from a foreign relations perspective. This study attempts to address this paucity by examining the nexus between foreign and refugee policy. Thus, an essential question arises: what foreign relations factors might explain Turkey's policy shift from an open-door refugee program to a restrictive and nationalist one? This paper will seek to answer this question using two periods as case studies, namely the periods from 2015 to 2016 and from 2016 to 2021.

In terms of methodology, the case studies examine (a) Turkey's foreign policy goals during each period and (b) what refugee policies it adopted. As such, the research will assess the connection between these factors, drawing from academic research, news, diplomatic sources, and reports. Findings from this research is significant since Syrian refugees represent one of the largest refugee and humanitarian crises of our contemporary history. Additionally, Turkey represents a major geopolitical force that impacts both Europe and the Middle East, and which, as a country of the Global South, is often under-studied. Lastly, uncovering the nexus of refugee and foreign policy

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[1](2021). Turkey - The World Factbook. *CIA*. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/turkey/.
[2] Donelli, F. (2018). Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Security Perspective. *New England Journal of Public Policy*, 30(2): 1–9.
https://trinity.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,uid&db=bth&AN=133416680&site=eds-live
[3] Gall, C. (2019). Turkey's Radical Plan: Send a Million Refugees Back to Syria. *The New York Times*.
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/10/world/middleeast/turkey-syria-refugees-erdogan.html

deepens our understanding of what factors might motivate the decisions of refugee host states, helping us to better manage these crises.

II.   Context

    A. Turkey's Geopolitical Standing and the War in Syria

At the turn of the century, Turkey stood at a pivotal point geopolitically. In 1999, Turkey stood at a pivotal point, as the European Union (E.U.) accepted its candidacy to join the union, putting the nation on the path to accession for the next decade[4]. However, when the momentum of the accession process stalled in the mid-2000s, Turkey began to expand its foreign policy towards improving relations with the Middle East. It had developed aspirations of becoming a regional power beyond Western Europe, engaging in broad diplomatic activism in the Middle East and Eastern Europe[5]. These foreign relations changes in Turkey are known as neo-ottomanism (as it was inspired by the former reach and power of the Ottoman Empire), theorized under the foreign policy doctrine of "zero problems with neighbors" and "strategic depth". These concepts were formulated by Turkish foreign policy advisor and, later, minister Ahmet Davutoglu (2002-2009; 2009-2012), part of the Justice and Development Party or AKP (Turkish acronym) that has held power since their election in 2002[6]. In terms of relations with Syria, the early 2000s represented a golden age of Turkey-Syria relations, but quickly came to an end with the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, which Turkish president Erdogan reprimanded before intervening in the conflict as an oppositional power to Assad's government, in support of the rebels[7]. Turkey aimed to establish itself as a role-model and assertive regional and global power.

    B. Defining Refugees in Turkey

When studying migration and asylum in Turkey, it is essential to note that its definition of a

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[4] Terzi, Ö. (2010). *The Influence of the European Union on Turkish Foreign Policy*. Ashgate.
[5] Linden, R. H. (2012). *Turkey and Its Neighbors : Foreign Relations in Transition*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
[6] Park, B. (2012). *Modern Turkey : People, State, and Foreign Policy in a Globalized World*. Routledge.
[7] Islam, T. (2016). Turkey's Akp Foreign Policy Toward Syria: Shifting Policy During the Arab Spring.
International Journal on World Peace, 33(1): 7–41. https://www-jstor-org.trinity.idm.oclc.org/stable/45014320

refugee is based in the 1951 Refugee Convention, which originally referred to refugees of World War II from Europe (limited in time and space). Later, the addition of 1967 Optional Protocol solidified the global definition of a refugee as "any person who is outside their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return there or to avail themselves of its protection, owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,"[8]. However, Turkey has not adopted and ratified the Optional Protocol. Thus, as a result of the 1951 Convention's geographic limitation, Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey cannot receive refugee status, rather being considered temporary migrants. For simplicity and clarity, this paper will refer to the Syrian population in Turkey as refugees..

II. Case Study #1 - 2015-2016: Turkey's Gatekeeping and the European Migrant Crisis

C.   Foreign Policy Objectives

To understand Turkey's foreign policy goals in the period of 2015-2016 requires closer study of the aforementioned context. By 2010, Turkey had been making progress towards alignment with E.U. policies and demands, but its diplomatic activism in the Middle East made certain European countries uneasy and led to increased tensions[9]. Progressively becoming disillusioned with the stalling E.U. accession process in the early 2010s, Turkey had put its focus on solidifying its status as a regionally assertive power, intervening in the Syrian conflict in 2011, as well as engaging in other Arab-Spring conflicts in support of the Muslim Brotherhood (in Tunisia and Libya for example)[10]. Turkey's interventionism and miscalculations cost the nation its close relations with its European and Middle-Eastern allies, and even with the United States, leaving it alienated on the global stage[11]. By 2015, Turkey was regionally isolated and faced with a conflict-ridden post-Arab Spring environment,

[8] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E., Loescher, G., Long K. & Sigona N. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*. Oxford University Press. https://play.google.com/books?id=Lp_NAwAAQBAJ

[9] Terzi, 2010.

[10] Yesilyurt, N. (2017). Explaining Miscalculation and Maladaptation in Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East during the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 6(2): 65–83. DOI: 10.20991/allazimuth.310151

[11] Cagaptay, S. (2019). The Syrian Disaster. In *Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East* (p. 111-). Bloomsbury Publishing. https://play.google.com/books?id=zOCrDwAAQBAJ.

which influenced it to turn back towards Europe and Eurasia more generally[12].

Thus, one of Turkey's primary foreign policy objectives in the 2015-2016 period was to reinvigorate relations with the E.U. Through diplomacy, Turkey tried to achieve this objective and express a renewed commitment to E.U.-Turkey relations. Analysis of Turkish high-level diplomatic visits from 2009 to 2016 demonstrates that, while Turkey had made increasing diplomatic overtures towards other regions like Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans, its diplomatic activism towards Western Europe still dominated, in addition to commitments to the U.N. and NATO[13]. Publications by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs have also emphasized the importance of a relationship with the West and of Turkey's commitment to accession[14], despite hostility that has limited avenues for cooperation. The 2015-2016 refugee crisis, however, presented opportunities for renewed cooperation, albeit with alternative modes of partnership and integration[15]. Though accession to the Union remains a primary goal for Turkey, scholars have argued that the handling of the refugee crisis during this period indicates that its relationship with the E.U. is primarily functional, with integration and cooperation based mainly on economics, monetary policy, security, and research and development[16]. This pragmatic approach to foreign relations can also be seen in Turkey's approach to cooperation on the refugee crisis.

D. Adapted Refugee Policy

The 2016 refugee deal between Turkey and the E.U. illustrates how Turkey instrumentalized its refugee policy to achieve its foreign relations goal of rapprochement with the E.U. In late 2015, E.U. countries, particularly Italy and Greece, became flooded by an influx of over a million refugees,

[12] Kösebalaban, H. (2020). Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward Syria: The Return of Securitization. *Middle East Critique* 29(3): 335–44. DOI: 10.1080/19436149.2020.1770450
[13] Kuşku-Sönmez, E. (2019). Dynamics of Change in Turkish Foreign Policy: Evidence from High-Level Meetings of the AKP Government. *Turkish Studies* 20(3): 377–402. DOI: 10.1080/14683849.2018.1495078
[14] (2021). "From Rep. of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs." Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa
[15] Müftüler-Baç, Meltem. 2017. "Turkey's Future with the European Union: An Alternative Model of Differentiated Integration." *Turkish Studies* 18(3): 416–38. DOI: 10.1080/14683849.2017.1300534
[16] Saatçioğlu, B. (2020). The European Union's Refugee Crisis and Rising Functionalism in EU-Turkey Relations. *Turkish Studies* 21(2): 169–87. DOI: 10.1080/14683849.2019.1586542

using deadly and dangerous routes crossing either through the Mediterranean or overland through Turkey. In response to this management and humanitarian crisis, the two parties came up with the Joint Action Plan (JAP) in which Turkey agreed to improve its protections of Syrians and to reinforce coordinated border control, stemming the influx of irregular Syrian migrants into the E.U[17]. In exchange for these benefits, the E.U. provided humanitarian and financial assistance for the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, including a sum of 6 billion euros. In addition, it agreed to open accession negotiations on Chapter 17 on Economic and Monetary Policy. In 2016, the parties also signed the Readmission Agreement of which the key principle is: for every Syrian readmitted into Turkey after illegal entry in the E.U., another will be legally resettled in the E.U. During these high-level political dialogues, in addition to issues pertaining to the migration crisis, the two parties also discussed partnerships in energy as well as joint commitment to the fight against terrorism[18]. For example, accelerating visa liberalization procedures for Turkish citizens seeking entry into the E.U. and upgrading the customs union were also a part of the legislation, serving to re-energize Turkey's convergence towards the benefits of E.U membership[19].

On one hand, these cooperative agreements demonstrated Turkey's key role in E.U. security and stability, cementing its regional importance[20]. On the other hand, the JAP and Readmission Agreement illustrate how Turkey was able to use its geostrategic position as a gatekeeper to Europe—playing a pivotal role in the passage (or not) of a massive influx of Syrian asylum-seekers—in order to gain concessions regarding the accession process. Turkey used this refugee crisis as a political opportunity to bargain with the E.U., who desperately wanted to limit the

[17] (2016, January 25). Joint Statement Following the High Level Political Dialogue between Turkey And the EU, 25 January 2016, Ankara. *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-statement-following-the-high-level-political-dialogue-between-turkey-and-the-eu_-25-january-2016_-ankara.en.mfa

[18] (2016, January 25). *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*.

[19] Oltean, P. & Iov C. A. (2017). EU-Turkey Negotiations in the Context of Securitizing Migration after the 2015 Refugee Crisis: Joint Action Plan and the Readmission Agreement. *Research and Science Today, 13*: 101–15. http://heinonline.org.trinity.idm.oclc.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/rescito13&div=35

[20] Oltean & Iov, 2017.

number of refugees entering the bloc. Tsourapas describes how states of the Global South, who often host the majority of refugee populations despite having lesser resources, can use a rent-seeking strategy in order to gain forms of external income or benefits from keeping refugee populations within their borders, as Turkey did in the 2016 deal[21]. Turkey used a blackmailing strategy where it threatened to allow refugees' illegal passage through Turkey into the E.U.[22] Thus, as a result of its objective of reinvigorating E.U.-Turkey relations—more specifically, regaining the functional benefits of their partnership—Turkey adapted its refugee policy to be more restrictive.

Additionally, Turkey's foreign policy goal also relates to its adherence to and convergence towards E.U. norms and policies. From a legal and humanitarian perspective, E.U. norms demand high standards for treatment and conditions of refugee populations, ensuring fundamental legal rights and protections. However, in the 2015 migrant crisis, where the JAP and Readmission Agreement as a response, it became clear that, in the E.U., security concerns prevailed over the normative rhetoric of solidarity and protection[23]. In essence, these deals represent a form of externalized migration and border control, placing a majority of the burden on Turkey[24]. The European Union, like much of the Global North, has been part of an increasing trend of securitization in the past decades, which contradicts with traditional E.U. norms[25]. As such, though Turkey had adhered to many of the E.U. norms on migration and refugees in the past, such as adopting the 2013-2014 Law on Foreigners and International Protection, in 2015, it chose to adapt accordingly to the E.U. increasing demands for

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[21]Tsourapas, G. (2019). The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4(4): 464–81. 10.1093/jogss/ogz016
[22] Tsourapas, 2019.
[23] Gürkan, S. & Coman, R. (2021). The EU–Turkey Deal in the 2015 "Refugee Crisis": When Intergovernmentalism Cast a Shadow on the EU's Normative Power. *Acta Politica: International Journal of Political Science*, 56(2): 276. DOI: 10.1057/s41269-020-00184-2
[24] Dogachan D. (2018). Eu's Refugee Crisis: From Supra-Nationalism to Nationalism? *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs (JLIA), 3(3)*, 9-19.
http://libproxy.trinity.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,uid&db=edsdoj&AN=edsdoj.8375a72716124c10be58f161d405c9c5&site=eds-live
[25] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al, 2014.

securitization[26]. Furthermore, it is arguably the high politicization of migration in the E.U. that made Turkey's political opportunism possible, as the 2016 deal was based in E.U. fears allowing Turkey to obtain benefits[27]. Finally, it is clear that this deal reflects a push for securitization on behalf of the E.U. as the 2016 deal with Turkey was in fact used as a template for other deals such as between Italy and Libya and Spain and Morocco[28].

Though Turkey seems to have formulated its refugee protocol in 2015-2016 based on its goal of a rapprochement with the E.U., the outcome of its efforts is nuanced. Turkey did engage in close cooperation and dialogue with the E.U. in order to manage this crisis, signing onto two joint agreements. In many ways, Turkey envisioned the deal as a new page for cooperation and improved relations; however, the behavior of these actors ultimately left a bad taste in the mouths of both parties[29]. Firstly, Turkey leveraged its gatekeeping power through strategic bargaining, which alienated the E.U. as it perceived Turkey as an untrustworthy power. Secondly, the E.U. nations appeared hypocritical to Turkey as they were reluctant to commit to burden-sharing (physically and financially) or the norms that they have promoted for decades[30]. As such, rapprochement seems to have not been very successful and cooperation has remained limited to functionalism.

III.   Case Study #2 - 2016-2021: Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Nationalist Foreign Policy

      A.   Foreign Policy Objectives

In the next case study period from 2016-2021, Turkey maintained an objective of

[26] Müftüler-Baç, M. (2021). Externalization of Migration Governance, Turkey's Migration Regime, and the Protection of the European Union's External Borders. *Turkish Studies* 0(0): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2021.1943661

[27] Goalwin, G. J. (2018). Population Exchange and the Politics of Ethno-Religious Fear: The EU-Turkey Agreement on Syrian Refugees in Historical Perspective. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52(2/3): 121–34. DOI: 10.1080/0031322X.2018.1433011

[28] Terry, K. (2021). The EU-Turkey Deal, Five Years On: A Frayed and Controversial but Enduring Blueprint. *Migration Policy Institute*. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/eu-turkey-deal-five-years-on.

[29] Çetin, R. & Hamşioğlu, O. (2017). The Impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Turkey-EU Relations. *Uluslararası Politik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 3 (3), 13-19. DOI: 10.25272/j.2149-8539.2017.3.3.02

[30] Temiz, S. (2018). Erdogan's Political Leadership and Foreign Policy Nexus: the Case of the Syrian Refugee Crisis and Turkey's Role. *Al-Shajara Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization of the International Islamic University Malaysia*, Special Issue: Migration and Refugee Studies: 123-136. https://journals.iium.edu.my/shajarah/index.php/shaj/article/view/739

E.U.-Turkey relations, but its foreign affairs have also been motivated by security concerns in regards to the conflict in Syria. Relations with the E.U. were subject to the terms of the previously discussed 2016 deal, but have seen ever-increasing tensions. As previously noted, Turkey became frustrated at the E.U., who failed to fulfill parts of the agreement including lifting visa restrictions, continuing accession talks, and establishing equitable burden-sharing and disbursing funds[31]. Implementation of the 1:1 principle of the Readmission Agreement of refugees entering Greece from Turkey has also been limited[32]. Additionally, the E.U.'s mistrust of Turkey has grown due to the nation's continued use of a blackmailing strategy. Nevertheless, Turkey's official rhetoric has maintained its commitment to positive relations with the E.U. and even has hopes to renew and update the deal to include increased financial aid and support[33]. As such, continued cooperation on border security and the migrant crisis is a major objective for Turkish foreign policy. Through partnership on these issues, Turkey can ensure funding for its extensive refugee population, which can placate some of its domestic concerns regarding integration. During this period, Turkey has seen the development of a nationalist backlash against the West and international law and governance, which can also have a negative effect on refugees: for example, one study found that, in 2020, 80% of Turkish citizens surveyed opposed accepting additional refugees[34]. After the coup against president Erdogan in 2016, Turkey has seen increased political insecurity and concerns about whether or not the AKP will remain in power. Faced with these uncertainties, Erdogan has been likely to use an aggressive foreign policy approach as a rally-the-flag strategy to preserve his electoral support[35]. While this paper seeks

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[31] Uras, U. (2020, March 3). Turkey, EU and the Imperilled Refugee Deal. *Aljazeera*.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/3/turkey-eu-and-the-imperilled-refugee-deal. ; Dogachan, 2018.
[32] Hammargren, B. (2020). Syrians in Turkey - Guests without a future? *SKL International*.
https://sklinternational.se/syriansinturkey.1001.html.
[33] Terry, 2021.
[34] Cope, K. L. & Crabtree, C. (2020). A Nationalist Backlash to International Refugee Law: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Turkey. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 17(4): 750-788.
https://trinity.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,uid
&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.emplest17.35&site=eds-live
[35] (2020). Turkey's increasingly assertive foreign policy, *Strategic Comments, 26(6)*, iv-vi,
DOI:10.1080/13567888.2020.1830557

to understand the nexus of foreign and refugee policy, it should be noted that domestic concerns can also influence and explain foreign affairs objectives.

As a result, another key goal of Turkish foreign policy from 2016 to 2021 has been to stabilize the situation in Syria to avoid additional influxes of refugees. 2016 represented a tremendous turning point in the Syrian War, with Russia entering the conflict and changing the balance of power to favor Assad's dictatorship, weakening Turkey. These changes in power dynamics have led to Turkey adopting a more securitized and defensive approach, strategically repositioning itself in Syria: its primary goals have been countering what it considers to be the Kurdish threat, while letting Assad keep his majority control[36]. For example, in 2018, Turkey signed a de-escalation agreement with Russia and Iran regarding the situation in Syria, fearing security threats and spillover[37]. This foreign policy objective is also illustrated by Turkey's addition of defensive troops to the Syrian city of Idlib in 2020, hoping to prevent Assad's forces from overrunning the enclave of rebel control and triggering another refugee crisis[38]. Increased terror attacks from ISIS at home have also led Turkey to perceive open migration as a threat to internal security, which adds to the pre-existing Turkish concerns of terrorism on behalf of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), whose separatism is perceived as threatening to Turkish identity. Turkey considers the various Kurdish fighter groups and militias in Syria as security threats—despite them also being allied with the rebels—and has historically conducted transnational military actions that target Kurdish forces or populations[39]. Thus, the second part of their objective in Syria is to ensure that these forces do not establish a Kurdish state.

B. Adapted Refugee Policy

Two refugee policies that Turkey has adopted in the period from 2016-2021, securitization

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[36] Kösebalaban, 2020.
[37] Uras, 2020, March 3.
[38] (2020). Turkey's increasingly assertive foreign policy, *Strategic Comments*
[39] (2021). Turkey - The World Factbook, *CIA*

and resettlement & repatriation, demonstrate a clear link to the nation's foreign relations objectives. First, securitization refers to the increased border control, limitation of refugee status and protections, and limits to freedom of movement that Syrians experience in Turkey. In terms of securitization, the E.U.-Turkey deal in the previous period played a key role in this trend. Furthermore, Turkey has continued to pursue its foreign policy goals by using refugees as pawns to exert diplomatic pressure in this securitized landscape. During the conception of the deal and following its implementation, Turkey continued to threaten the E.U. with the idea of opening the gates. For example in 2020, Turkey, frustrated with the E.U. 's lack of concessions, threatened a reopening of migration routes that would have led to thousands refugees fleeing towards Europe[40]. This has led to multiple maritime disputes around migration between Turkey and Greece, further slowing accession prospects[41]. While Turkey continues to try to gain concessions and become closer to the E.U., it is clear that its relationships with its E.U. neighbors pose a barrier to future accession possibilities. Like with the souring relations in the Middle East, the deterioration of Turkey-E.U. relations provides mounting evidence to the idea that the Turkish foreign policy doctrines of "zero problems" and "strategic depth" have failed, causing Turkey to turn inward. Turning inward has narrowed its foreign policy down towards a more securitized and defensive approach, illustrated by its refugee policies.

Turkey's focus on security has led to a more nationalist-oriented refugee policy, adding return discourse and repatriation to an already securitized environment. From the Turkish state's perspective, the Syrian conflict has allowed for multiple threats to develop against Turkey, including the rising possibility of a Kurdish state at its border with Syria (which would be a potential ally of Turkey's domestic terrorist group, the PKK) and the threats of violent extremism by ISIS. As such, since 2016, Turkey has established more restrictive border controls and limits to the freedoms of refugees. Furthermore, because Turkey has no plans to secure Syrians' legal status as refugees under

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[40] Terry, 2021.
[41] Mathews, S. (2021, June 2). Turkey, Greece Look for Calm Eastern Mediterranean Summer. *AlJazeera*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/2/turkey-greece-look-for-calm-eastern-mediterranean-summer

the 1961 Optional Protocol, these asylum seekers remain temporary migrants, which limits their rights and protections under Turkish law. A report from 2020 details the following conditions: limited access to health, education, and mobility (due to movement restrictions, walls), as well as a precarious place in the labor market (working in the informal sector and lacking work permits)[42]. Surveillance has also greatly increased, which serves as a refugee security measure, but also one regarding the security threat of terrorism[43]. In 2019, Turkish police was reported conducting roundups and ID checks, intimidating and threatening Syrians with deportations[44].

In a drastic shift from its previously welcoming policy, in recent years Turkey has been accused of deporting thousands of Syrian refugees as part of its repatriation and resettlement plan[45]. The border crossing department of Bab Al-Hawa reports that in the month of November 2021 alone, 964 Syrian refugees were deported by Turkish authorities[46]. Under the Refugee Convention, repatriation is defined as voluntary return to one's country of origin, with the right be return being protected[47]. In the case of Turkey's actions, it is unclear and unconvincing whether most of these returns have been voluntary, challenging its legality. However, due to the technicality in which it does not consider Syrians as refugees, Turkey seems to have escaped accountability for these deportations. Furthermore, in 2019, Turkey announced its intentions to repatriate and resettle one million refugees in Syrian border territories; to make return possible, Turkey has planned to create extensive infrastructure and redevelopment projects, creating so-called safe-zones at its borders, which it controls with the US and Kurdish forces[48]. These projects have led to military incursions into

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[42] Hammargren, 2020.
[43] Içduygu, A. & Nimer, M. (2020). The Politics of Return: Exploring the Future of Syrian Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(3): 415–433. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1675503
[44] Hammargren, 2020.
[45] Içduygu & Nimer, 2020.
[46]Baladi News. (2021, December 3). Bab al-Hawa Crossing Discloses Number of Syrians Deported by Turkey in November. *The Syrian Observer*. https://syrianobserver.com/news/71739/bab-al-hawa-crossing-discloses-number-of-syrians-deported-by-turkey-in-november.html
[47] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al, 2014.
[48] Gall, 2019.

Northern Syria, already making space for the resettlement of about 61,000 Syrians as of 2020[49]. In 2021, the Syrian Observer reported progress on these developments, with 50,000 of a planned 100,000 housing units already constructed in these zones[50].

While these safe zones do have a clear purpose in Turkey's approach to refugee management, they are also instrumental in its foreign policy, serving as buffer zones to the Kurdish forces and preventing additional territorial gain for the Kurds that could lead to an independent state[51]. For example, the Euphrates Shield Operation that secured these safe-zones was supplemented through Operation Olive Branch, which effectively rid the areas of YPG (Kurdish) control[52]. Prioritizing its foreign affairs and refugee policy gains, Turkey continues to push a repatriation agenda, though return currently remains a non-viable option that is neither safe nor sustainable[53]. Local and global non-governmental organizations and agencies have accused Turkey of advancing demographic change in Northern Syria through its settlement project, while Erdogan maintains this is a humane and humanitarian approach in favor of the refugees[54]. Finally, despite being faced with pushback from these agencies and some Western nations, Turkey's gatekeeping leverage has allowed it to move forward with resettlement and repatriation plans and to continue to exert diplomatic pressure on the E.U.

IV. Conclusion

The exploration of these case studies demonstrates how, over the period of 2015-2016, Turkey's refugee policy has been observably shaped by its foreign relations objectives, while over the

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[49] ibid.
[50] North Press. (2021). Turkey Finishes Building 50,000 Houses in Northern Syria: Erdogan. *The Syrian Observer*. https://syrianobserver.com/news/68210/turkey-finishes-building-50000-houses-in-northern-syria-erdogan.html
[51] Donelli, 2018. https://trinity.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,uid&db=bth&AN=133416680&site=eds-live
[52] Akcapar, S. K., and Simsek, D. (2018). The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Question of Inclusion and Exclusion through Citizenship. *Social Inclusion*, 6(1): 176–87. https://www.cogitatiopress.com/socialinclusion/article/view/1323
[53] Içduygu & Nimer, 2020
[54] North Press, 2021.

period of 2016-2021, both Turkey's refugee protocols and its foreign policy seem to have influenced each other. More research is needed to establish direct causational links, but this paper demonstrates the correlation of and provides a strong argument for a multidimensional link between foreign policy and refugee protocols. Further research would also allow for a greater understanding of the contemporary and future policies in Turkey, which presumably will see long-term impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges the country faces. What can already be noted is that Turkey seems to have reached its maximum capacity as a refugee host state, its immense refugee population leading to escalating societal tensions and high integration costs[55]. Without an updated deal, Turkey has indicated that it is unwilling to support its refugee population, or any more arrivals[56]. Furthermore, the policies in the last decade have been shaped by Erdogan and the AKP party, both of which seem to be on their way out due to political threats and an economic downturn bolstered by the pandemic; as such, Turkey may turn to opposition parties, which favor an even stronger nationalist refugee protocol based in deportations and have argued for normalizing relations with Assad[57]. This trend of seeking normalization with Assad's regime, at the detriment of Syrian refugees, can also be seen in various E.U. countries (though the official foreign relations position remains denouncing the dictatorial regime)[58]. As such, if Turkey chooses to maintain alignment with E.U. positions, it may pursue further securitization in an updated deal.

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