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**Going Rogue: Understanding the struggle for status within  
multilateral alliances through a comparison of Gaullist France and  
Erdoganist Turkey's foreign policies**

Volkers, Sam

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# Going Rogue

*Understanding the struggle for status within multilateral alliances through a comparison of Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey's foreign policies*

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Name: Sam Volkers

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First Reader: Dr. Alp Yenen

Second Reader: Dr. Tsolin Nalbantian



Universiteit Leiden

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## Introduction

During the 2023 negotiations on Finnish and Swedish NATO-membership, Turkey blocked Sweden's accession on numerous occasions, complicating the process and raising tensions within NATO and the wider Atlantic bloc (Dettmer 2023).<sup>1</sup> This exemplifies the shift in Turkish foreign policy in recent years. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey has moved away from its cooperative pro-Atlanticist course and shifted towards a more assertive, independent foreign policy aimed at establishing Turkey's "great power" status, which at times has brought Turkey into conflict with its fellow Atlantic bloc members. Although this development is remarkable, given that the Atlantic bloc is usually a stable alliance, it is not the first time this has happened. Before Turkey, there was another member state that went its own way to re-establish itself as a great power state: Gaullist France.

Under President Charles de Gaulle, France embarked on an independent foreign policy with the goal of re-establishing France's status as a great power, capable of playing a major role in global politics (Kramer 2010: 2). Although comparisons between the two have been made before, these often remain limited and do not provide an in-depth comparison between the foreign policies of the two countries. I aim to add to this research gap with my research question: *"How can Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey's independent foreign policies help us understand the struggle for status within multilateral alliances?"* Following this research question, I will analyze and compare the international strategies of these countries aimed at asserting great power status and the dynamics that appeared because of the clashes resulting within the Atlantic bloc of which both countries are active members. Through this research, I will demonstrate how alliance members, driven by aspirations for greater status and pursuing independent foreign policies, may conflict with the interests of the hegemonic alliance member and deviate from the established norms of the alliance. Based on these findings, I propose a "rogue member theory", which provides a framework to understand these dynamics.

The analysis of these dynamics using these two cases is interesting, as the cases fit with the academic debates about the struggle for status in international relations while also being outliers in these debates. In contrast to other aspiring great powers, France and Turkey are long-time members of the Atlantic bloc and thus challenge the status-quo international status hierarchy from inside the multilateral establishment, instead of from the outside. Research on

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term "Atlantic bloc" denotes the multilateral alliance of Euro-Atlantic countries originating from the US-led bloc of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the Atlantic bloc consisted of organizations such as NATO and the EEC. This is the description relevant for the case of Gaullist France. After the Cold War, the Atlantic bloc would come to dominate global politics and establish the US-led "liberal international order", dominated by organizations such as NATO and the EU. This is the description relevant for the case of Erdoğanist Turkey.

this topic can thus add to these debates by highlighting the role these “rogue members”<sup>2</sup> play in multilateral alliances and help us better understand status struggles within multilateral alliances. Furthermore, it also fits within the broader academic debate about the increasingly multipolar nature of global politics, which has spurred the rise of both new multilateral alliances as well as the emergence of multiple aspiring great powers. In the future, these developments could lead to similar dynamics within these new multilateral alliances as those present within the Atlantic bloc in the cases of France and Turkey, which can then be analyzed based on the general framework I aim to provide in this thesis, establishing a basis for future research.

The link between Erdoğanist Turkey and Gaullist France has been made before by the political scientist Ömer Taşpınar, who has attempted to explain Erdoğan’s bellicose relations with the Atlantic bloc through references to similar actions by Charles de Gaulle.<sup>3</sup> Although these works succeed in establishing some basic similarities between the two cases, they often remain limited and do not provide a systematic comparison between the two cases, nor do they situate their comparisons within wider relevant theoretical frameworks. Aside from Taşpınar’s works, the comparison between the two cases is still an underrepresented perspective.

Instead, the majority of academic work discusses the cases individually and analyzes the foreign policies based on one of three dimensions: *realpolitik*, ideology, or leadership.<sup>4</sup> The “*realpolitik* camp” consists of authors such as Kali Robinson, Asli Aydıntaşbaş, and Svante E. Cornell for Turkey and Edward A. Kolodziej, Garret Martin, and Douglas Johnson for France. The main argument of this camp is that the foreign policies of Turkey and France can be explained as a response to changing geopolitical realities and domestic politics. The “*ideological* camp” consists of authors such as Ümit Nazmi Hazır and M. Hakan Yavuz for Turkey, and Roger Bernos and Philip G. Cerny for France. This camp’s main argument is that Turkish and French foreign policies should be analyzed through the lens of ideology, identity, self-perception, and the perception of others. The “*leadership* camp” consists of authors such as Murat Ülgül and Soner Cagaptay for Turkey and Henry Kissinger and Henk Wesseling for France. This camp argues that Turkish and French foreign policies can be explained by looking at the political leadership and individual worldviews of de Gaulle and Erdoğan.

Although these camps all give good explanations of the individual dimensions they focus on, their neglect to take into account the arguments presented by the other camps prevents

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<sup>2</sup> I define “rogue members” as those members of an alliance that engage in foreign policy behaviors that deviate from (or even contradict) the alliance’s general outlook and bring them into conflict with other alliance members.

<sup>3</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> For the relevant sources, see bibliography.

them from presenting a multifaceted perspective of the two cases. One thing that is agreed upon by all three camps, however, is the importance of status for both Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey. This is what I will focus on. By focusing on status, I can combine the claims from the three camps and analyze how different factors motivated France and Turkey to pursue great power status and how this pursuit of status affected their position within the Atlantic bloc. There already exists a body of research that links Turkish and French foreign policies to status theory, such as the works by Özgür Özdamar, Zeynep Arkan and Müge Kınacıoğlu, and Bülent Aras and Aylin Görener for Turkey, and the works by Ulrich Krotz, James Sperling, and Pernille Rieker for France.<sup>5</sup> These works seek to provide an analysis of French and Turkish foreign policies through examining their status-claims. Despite this existing academic interest, there has not yet been any works that compare the foreign policies of Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey through the lens of status theory in order to provide insights into the dynamics of alliance cohesion and the challenges posed by the divergent behaviors of rogue members.

To answer my research question, I do a comparative case analysis in which I compare the foreign policies of Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey. I explain their great power status-claims, their role conflicts with the Atlantic bloc's hegemon (the US), and their status-seeking strategies, making analytical comparisons based on my theoretical framework. With this, I aim to elaborate on the nature of their status-claims, how these claims led to role conflict within the Atlantic bloc, and how this incentivized both states to adopt more confrontational status-seeking strategies. In my general analysis, I will expand on this by explaining how the turn towards more confrontational status-seeking behaviors turned France and Turkey into "rogue members" within the Atlantic bloc and how this can help us understand the struggle for status within multilateral alliances. For my research, I rely on a combination of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources I use consist of articles by government officials and news articles. My secondary sources consist of academic articles and books, policy analysis, and political commentaries. I use these sources to define France and Turkey's status-claims and role conceptions, the relationship and role conflict France and Turkey had with the US, and their subsequent status-seeking behaviors, so that I can compare and analyze these.

### **Status and Role in Multilateralism: A Theoretical Framework**

According to theories about status in international relations, promoted by academics such as Jonathan Renshon, Christina Stolte, T.V. Paul, Deborah Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, the

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<sup>5</sup> See bibliography.

international order is a status hierarchy in which all states have a certain status, which can be seen as their “ranking” in this hierarchy (Renshon 2020).<sup>6</sup> Status is determined by both domestic and international beliefs about the importance and corresponding ranking of a state, based on factors such as military power, economic capabilities, historical standing, demographics, and culture (Larson et al. 2014: 7). This status comes with certain rights and duties, corresponding to certain perceived roles. These roles are also referred to as *national role conceptions* (NRCs). NRCs define a state’s perceived roles in the international order and the corresponding foreign policy behaviors, attitudes, and commitments (Holsti 1970: 239, 245). Status and roles are thus interlinked, with status being a state’s social standing within the international order, and roles being the corresponding expected behaviors (Karim 2018: 7). In this social hierarchy, “great powers” are often seen as those states that are at the top of the hierarchy. They are considered to have special rights and powers, such as managing peace and security in a wider geopolitical region or even globally, dominating the international institutions, and shaping the global order. Furthermore, great powers can usually count on other states to show deference to their interests and respect their spheres of influence (Larson et al. 2014: 10, 18-19).

Status in IR is subjective, which means that a state’s status is not just based on its objective capabilities and its self-representation but also on the recognition of these by other states (Larson et al. 2014: 8). As mentioned, status-claims bring certain expected behaviors with them in the form of NRCs. For a state to have its claims recognized, it is thus important to be seen as capable of fulfilling these roles (Karim 2018: 7). This is especially the case for aspiring great powers. For a state to be recognized as a great power, it needs to be recognized as capable of fulfilling its corresponding roles by other great powers and as well as by lower-status states (e.g. regional powers, middle powers, and small powers). To be recognized by other great powers, an aspirant state must behave in line with their expectations and the interests of the leading great power. However, to be recognized by lower-status states, the aspirant state must be able to show enough independence in foreign policy behavior that smaller states will respect it as a leader in its own right. The aspirant state thus cannot too closely follow the lead of the established great powers and must also act independently (Stolte 2015: 20-22). Due to the scarce nature of great power status – if all states can claim it, its value will decline – the community of great powers tends to be hesitant to recognize new members (Larson et al. 2014: 9). The strongest state within this community, which I call a hegemon, tends to play a particular role as gatekeeper managing competition by blocking aspirant great powers (Stolte 2015: 21).

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<sup>6</sup> See bibliography.

When a state's status-claims and the perceived status of that state by another state do not align, this will lead to disagreements between the two states over their corresponding rights and duties towards each other, leading to "role conflict" (Backman 1970: 313). In the case of role conflict between an aspiring great power and the hegemonic great power, the hegemon will attempt to block the aspirant power from entering the great power community by undermining its ability to carry out the roles related to its status-claims and attempt to force it to instead accept a more subservient position (role altercasting) (Backman 1970: 313). In this situation, the fact that the recognition of the aspirant's capability to fulfill its roles is undermined weakens its status-claims, leading to status-concerns. As a result of this, the aspirant will attempt to assert its claims by adopting more assertive status-seeking behaviors (Renshon 2017: 52-53).

Through status-seeking strategies, states seek to gain a higher status by emulating and/or competing with the states from the status-club they want to belong to and by asserting themselves towards lower-status states. There are three main types of status-seeking strategies: social mobility, social competition, and social creativity (Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 38, 43-45). Through social mobility, states try to move up the hierarchy by adopting the values and behaviors of the states in the status-group that they want to join. If a state fails to move up the ranks through social mobility (e.g. because the other states refuse to recognize it as an equal), a state may adopt social competition and/or social creativity strategies. Through social competition, a state competes with other states in fulfilling their relevant roles to show higher-ranking states it is equally capable, while also asserting the legitimacy of its leadership claims to lower-status states. Some examples of social competition are geopolitical competition, expanding military capabilities, obstructive behaviors, and major independent diplomatic initiatives (Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 38-39; Stolte 2015: 34). States can also attempt to strengthen their status by emphasizing their unique characteristics as part of an attempt to seek alternative domains in which they can set themselves apart from states in the higher-status group. This is social creativity (Stolte 2015: 34). Some examples of social creativity are: regional cooperation, promoting new developmental models, and promoting alternative international norms (Larson et al. 2014: 26-27; Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 41).

Status also influences multilateral alliances. In this paper, multilateral alliances are conceptualized as international alliances between multiple countries based on shared values and common goals (De Wijk et al. 2020: 17). These alliances can be either a single organization or a constellation of multiple international organizations that adhere to the same goals and values (as fits with the Atlantic bloc). With regards to status, I conceptualize multilateral alliances as organized networks with their own internal status hierarchies. Multilateral alliances are led by



the strongest member state, which is at the top of the internal hierarchy. Often, these are great powers which derive part of their status from this leadership position (De Wijk et al 2020: 17). The rest of an alliance consists of states with different levels of power, each of which has its own interest. Their status is also affected by their place on the alliance's internal hierarchy, as a higher place on the alliance's internal hierarchy means more independence, greater influence on the alliance's policies, and more respect for their interests (Larson et al. 2014: 7-10, 18-19).

## **Great Power Status-Claims and National Role Conceptions**

### **France: Empire in Decline or a Great Power Comeback?**

Throughout its history, France has always striven to be a great power. Surrounded by rival powers and with access to a large coastline, France always felt the need to expand its influence both on the continent and into the wider world. This drive, combined with its dominance of the intellectual, cultural, and scientific spheres after the French Revolution, made France a great power for centuries (Cerny 1980: 75). This culminated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when France established itself as a leading state in Europe. France also was a global power, establishing a large overseas colonial empire and wielding a strong influence in regions where it could not establish or maintain colonies, e.g. the Levant, New Orleans, and Quebec (Kennedy 1989: 290-291). France maintained its status moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and defended it in WWI, but its quick defeat in the beginning of WWII and subsequent occupation by Nazi Germany would spell the end of France as an unquestionable great power. Furthermore, it increasingly lost control over its colonial empire. All of this damaged France's international status. Despite his best efforts, President Charles de Gaulle, taking power in France after WWII, failed to stop this process. While he managed to get France accepted as one of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, he did not manage to restore France's status in the Cold War competition between the superpowers: the US and the USSR (Bozo 2016: 7-10). After stepping down in 1946, de Gaulle was succeeded by a string of governments which, while also failing to restore France's status, did manage to improve France's economy, rebuilt its military capacities and established the foundations for an independent nuclear program (Kramer 2010: 2).

After returning to power in 1958, de Gaulle would use this as a basic foundation for restoring France's status. He improved upon this by resolving the issue of decolonization. De Gaulle understood that France had to shake of its colonial image in order to maintain influence in this changing world. It had to complete the process of decolonization, while still maintaining ties with its former colonies (Kolodziej 1974: 448-451). Ending France's brutal conflict in Algeria

was of particular importance, as the war damaged France's image, put a strain on its resources, and caused severe domestic turmoil (which was also the reason for de Gaulle's return to power). By resolving this issue, de Gaulle provided France with the diplomatic space it needed to re-orient its foreign policy to the new realities of the Cold War (Bozo 2016: 44-45, 55).

Aside from this material and diplomatic recovery, the main argument for France's claim to great power status was historical. It was argued that France's claims had historical legitimacy as, until recently, France had been a great power. It was thus seen as natural for France to be a great power (Kolodziej 1974: 27). This claim was reinforced by France's international presence. Despite its decline, France still had an influential presence on all continents, maintained close relations with its (former) colonies, and could rely on its cultural and historical links with Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet-Union for diplomatic relations outside of the West (Cerny 1971: 276). The weight of its global role was also increased by its membership of prestigious international institutions (Rieker 2017: 18, 23).

France's claims were also influenced by domestic politics. The notion that France should restore its great power status was widespread in French society, accepted by both political elites and the general public. Knowing this, de Gaulle used his status-claims as a tool to again inspire domestic unity, political trust, and national pride in the country (Cerny 1980: 88). Furthermore, he also used these claims as part of populist appeals to boost support for government reforms. One of the main arguments for strengthening the president's role was that it would strengthen foreign policy, enabling more decisive status-seeking.<sup>7</sup> These successful reforms granted de Gaulle the powers necessary to carry out his ambitious foreign policy (Bozo 2016: 44).

De Gaulle's main foreign policy goal was to restore France's great power status. French great power self-conceptions followed the notion that France had an independent role to play in global politics, on par with the other great powers. France also expected to fulfill certain roles. In Europe, France believed it should establish itself as a "regional power". France was to lead Europe as an independent bloc, guaranteeing its security and stimulating cooperation and integration between its member states (Cerny 1980: 136). France also believed it had to play an active role as a "global power". France had to assert its global influence and contribute to managing the international order, maintaining peace, and assisting international development (Kolodziej 1974: 28). To do so, France had to become an "active independent" retaining its independent power projection capabilities and engaging in independent diplomatic relations

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<sup>7</sup> In domestic politics, de Gaulle would dissolve France's Fourth Republic, which was dominated by a strong parliament, and establish the French Fifth Republic, dominated by a strong elected president.

with different states, without being tied to a single power bloc. Similarly, France perceived that, due to its pivotal position, it could act as a “Cold War balancer” capable of mediating between different states, regions, and power blocs (Holsti 1977: 131-134). By fulfilling these roles, de Gaulle argued, France could again become a pivotal great power at the center of global politics.

### **Turkey: Neo-Ottoman Aspirations**

Turkey is the heir to the Ottoman Empire which historically was one of the leading great powers of its time, with a large military, vast territories, and strong cultural and religious influence. Its territory spanned across the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and North Africa through which it had influence over these diverse regions and their politics. After WWI, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, which led to the Turkish War of Independence and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. However, Turkey never completely lost its important position due to its strategic geographic location which ensured that it has remained a strategically relevant country until today (Barkey 2010: 239-240; Yavuz 2020: 186). After WWI, Turkey came under the rule of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who modernized the country and distanced it from its Islamic and ‘Oriental’ Ottoman past. In foreign affairs, Turkey sought a balanced position, maintaining ties with both the European great powers as well as the USSR, while also engaging with its Middle Eastern neighbors (Bein 2017: 16-17). During the Cold War, increasing Soviet threats (e.g. the Soviet claims on the Turkish straits) made Turkey abandon this policy and align itself with the US and the Atlantic bloc more firmly, joining NATO and seeking closer cooperation with Europe, while still attempting to maintain a level of strategic autonomy (Isci 2023: 621-626).

After the Cold War ended, Turkey’s position started to change. Without the Soviet threat Turkey was able to re-orient its policies towards its neighboring regions (Barkey 2010: 247). Under President Turgut Özal, Turkey pursued a foreign policy which combined increased engagement with its former Ottoman regions (e.g. the Middle East and the Turkic states) with attempts to become a close partner to the US. Özal believed that aligning closely with the US would increase Turkey’s standing and allow it to influence American policies towards Turkey’s adjacent regions (Aras and Görener 2010: 79-80). Turkey also increased its efforts to get closer to Europe. The governments after Özal sought to continue these shifts. However, it was under Erdoğan that Turkey’s foreign policies started to undergo a significant transformation.

After taking office, Erdoğan implemented an extensive program of domestic reforms, aiming to make Turkey compatible as an EU member. However, despite these reforms, Turkey had trouble joining the Union, due to the hesitance of important member states caused by the continuing Turkish presence in Northern Cyprus after the failure of the 2004 re-unification

attempts<sup>8</sup> and doubts about the idea of a predominantly Muslim country with a population comparable to Germany becoming a member. This led Turkey to feel shunned by the EU. At the same time, Turkey's neighbourhood became increasingly unstable as a result of 9/11, the War on Terror, the Arab Spring and the conflicts that followed (Arkan and Kınacıoğlu 2016: 7). Furthermore, as the US's role in the Middle East started to recede due to its failed interventions, a power vacuum emerged. Amidst these developments, Turkey started to reconsider its position in the world, looking to assert itself as a more independent great power state.

The basis of Turkey's status-claims is rooted in its Ottoman history. Historically, Turkey was a great power state, as it formed the core territory of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey has inherited these historical and cultural ties to its former Ottoman territories, as well as its central geographical location. This strategic central location puts Turkey at the crossroads of different regions, giving Turkey multiple regional spaces to expand its influence to and serve as a bridge between. In addition to its Ottoman links, Turkey is also tied into the West through its membership of important Atlantic bloc organizations (Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 52-53). In recent decades, Turkey has emerged as a considerable developing economic power, strengthening its international confidence (Cornell 2012: 17). Much of this economic growth resulted from Turkey's economic expansion to its adjacent regions. Combined with Turkey's emergence as a central geoeconomic hub (e.g. for energy transit), this has led to an increased economic entanglement in Turkey's neighboring regions (Walker 2010: 11; Yavuz 2020: 184). In parallel, Turkey has sought to expand its power projection capabilities, necessary for protecting its transregional economic and political interests (Akbaba and Özdamar 2019: 101).

Turkey's great power status-claims were also influenced by domestic political changes in Turkey, which allowed this shift to happen. Under Erdoğan, the government has ideologically and culturally shifted Turkey from the secular Kemalist consensus to a more conservative and Islamic one. This has transformed Turkish society and reintroduced Ottoman heritage as part of its national identity (Cagaptay 2024; Yavuz 2020: 181). Furthermore, Erdoğan has used his status-claims as part of a wider populist appeal to strengthen his own political power. Erdoğan has created a new political base of both voters and elites that support his policies in various ways, which has weakened the leverage of traditional actors in Turkey's foreign policy, allowing new actors to set the agenda (Cagaptay 2024). The reforms turning Turkey into a

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<sup>8</sup> This refers to the 2004 Annan Plan, a plan proposed by the United Nations to help re-unify Cyprus and resolve the dispute. The plan failed after it was voted down (mainly by Greek Cypriots) in an island-wide referendum.

presidential republic have reinforced this, centralizing decision-making power in the hands of Erdoğan, enabling him to more decisively carry out his new foreign policy (Ülgül 2019: 173).

Erdoğan's central claim for Turkey being a great power is that the country has an important independent role to play in both its adjacent regions as well as the wider world. This also implies specific roles. In its adjacent regions, Turkey believes it should become a "transregional power". Turkey is to organize these regions, provide mediation and security, promote regional cooperation, and represent them in the world. Turkey also believes it should become a "global power" and involve itself in managing global politics, support international development, and spread its influence in the world. In doing so, Turkey should aim to become an "active independent", engaging in independent diplomatic relations and working towards achieving strategic autonomy (Başer 2015: 8). Furthermore, due to its geographical and cultural centrality, Turkey believes it has the opportunity to become a "central state" capable of connecting and mediating between diverse states, regions, and cultures (Aras and Görener 2010: 85). Through fulfilling these roles, Erdoğan attempts to turn Turkey into an important central great power.

### **Comparison: Great Power Status-Claims and National Role Conceptions**

When comparing the cases, some common trends can be identified. The great power status-claims of the two countries share similar origins, as both countries are successors to historical great powers. Both countries make similar status-claims based on their history, geography, geopolitics, material factors, and power projection capabilities. In both cases there is also a comparable dynamic between great power status-claims and domestic politics. Both de Gaulle's government and Erdoğan's government used these status-claims as part of populist appeals aimed at strengthening their popularity and support for other domestic reforms.

The great power self-conceptions themselves also share many similarities. France and Turkey both adopted claims that perceived their state as a great power with a strategic central position (France as "pivot state" and Turkey as "central state") between different power blocs which allows it to maintain an independent position, create an influence sphere in its adjacent regions, and enables it to play an important role in international politics. This fits with the conceptualization of "great powers" in my theoretical framework as both claims envision their state as belonging at the top of the international hierarchy and deserving special rights (Larson et al. 2014: 10, 18-19). These commonalities can also be seen in the corresponding roles claimed by both states, as France and Turkey share similar NRCs which mark them out as great powers. As explained in the theoretical framework, status-claims are often paired with specific NRCs. To gain recognition for its status, a state must be seen as capable of fulfilling the related roles

(Karim 2018: 7). If France and Turkey want their status-claims to be recognized, it is thus important that they are seen as capable of fulfilling the roles related to these claims.

### **Conflict with Hegemon: Role Conflict & Status Concerns**

#### **France: No World for Old Powers?**

In the aftermath of WWII, as the bipolar Cold War order started to emerge, France realized that its place as a dominant great power was not assured. International politics would be dominated by the Cold War's bloc system. Under this system, much of the world was divided between the Atlantic and Eastern blocs under the hegemony of their respective superpowers. France would not be treated as a natural equal. In this context, the relationship between France and the US declined, as the two countries increasingly disagreed on geopolitics. After WWII, the US would proclaim itself the guarantor of freedom and democracy in the world, which included opposition to the continuation of the old European colonial empires. France distrusted this anti-imperialist stance, believing it to be a guise for the US' geopolitical ambitions, and it was particularly frustrated by the American opposition to their war in Algeria. This worsened following the 1956 Suez-crisis, during which the US turned against its allies, France and the UK, forcing the British to pull out. This left France to retreat alone, damaging its Middle Eastern interests and causing humiliation (Johnson 1994: 92). France was also skeptical about the US security presence in Europe, fearing that the US might use it to dominate the continent (Martin 2010: 296). As the Atlantic bloc developed, it became clear that France's position as an important partner to the US was not guaranteed as – unlike the UK – it did not have a “special relationship” with the US, leading France to become increasingly dissatisfied with its unequal role in the bloc.

When de Gaulle came to power again, he attempted to change France's position within the bloc to one more befitting of a great power. De Gaulle hoped to establish France as an equal partner to the US, cooperating to coordinate the Atlantic bloc's policies, while also being able to follow its own interests independently. At the start of his presidency, de Gaulle attempted to raise France's standing within the bloc's hierarchy by proposing a reformed NATO command structure based on a triumvirate between the US, UK, and France. The three states were to come up with common policies for the Atlantic bloc, based on mutual recognition as equal great powers. This reformed hierarchy would have benefitted France, as it enlarged its influence over US foreign policy (e.g. gaining the ability to veto US decisions), allowed it more space for independent foreign policy, and gave France a superior position vis-a-vis the non-triumvirate countries within the bloc (e.g. Italy, West Germany, or Benelux states) (Kolodziej 1974: 71-72,

84). In line with this, de Gaulle also continued the development of France's nuclear arsenal, hoping to decrease reliance on American nuclear protection and in the future expand the triumvirate's common decision-making to also include nuclear strategy (Bozo 2016: 47-48).

The US, however, perceived itself as a "benevolent hegemon" whose goal it was to shape the Cold War order and whose authority deserved the obedience of its European and Asian allies. Together with the USSR, the US had become one of the two most prominent great powers that dominated international politics (including "smaller" great powers), often referred to as a "superpower". Based on this perceived position in the world, it was important for the US' status to maintain its hegemonic dominance over the Atlantic bloc. The US thus had to maintain its monopoly on providing the Atlantic bloc's nuclear protection and assume a dominant leadership position within the bloc's organizations (e.g. NATO), refraining from sharing decision-making with allies. To the US, France was not an equal great power but a subordinate partner that should follow American leadership (Krotz and Sperling 2011: 213-214, 217-219).

To defend its hegemonic status, it was thus important for the US to counteract challenges by allies such as France and force them to accept a position subservient to American interests. In line with this, the US dismissed France's proposed triumvirate, as it directly undermined the US' leadership position (Davidson 2010: 112-114). France's independent nuclear arsenal and its aspirations for a stake in the decision-making about the Atlantic bloc's nuclear strategy formed a threat to the American monopoly on nuclear protection. The US thus opposed French plans for an independent arsenal, denying their requests for the materials, technology, and information necessary for its development. Furthermore, the US also tried to convince the French to accept an alternative strategy – the so-called "flexible response" – which would entail the creation of a collective Western response to Soviet threats, with the US taking on the full responsibility for Europe's nuclear defense, essentially institutionalizing French (and European) dependency on the US for nuclear protection (Kolodziej 1974: 76-77, 106-108).

France believed that being accepted within the Atlantic bloc as an equal partner to the US with room for an independent foreign policy would serve as a recognition of its status-claims and its ability to fulfill the corresponding roles. Through its actions, however, the US undermined this. The US's rejection of France's proposal to reform NATO undermined its "regional power" and "global power" roles, as the reforms would have given France more space to take a leading role in both Europe and the world. By opposing France's independent nuclear program, the US undermined France's "active independent" role, as nuclear weapons were essential for French

strategic independence. This raised questions about the legitimacy of France's status-claims, leading to status-concerns for France. It thus became important for France to challenge this rejection, as giving in to American opposition would mean it forfeited its claims. As a result, France intensified its efforts to assert itself as a great power, leading it to emphasize the more confrontational elements of its status-seeking foreign policy, in an attempt to assert its capabilities as a great power to fulfill its corresponding roles (Kolodziej 1974: 52, 70).

### **Turkey: Loyal Follower or Independent Power?**

In 1951, Turkey joined NATO to gain security guarantees against the USSR. This solidified its ties with the US and established Turkey as a member of the Atlantic bloc (Isci 2023: 626). After the Cold War ended, the US-Turkish partnership continued. However, in recent years, Turkey has started to doubt the US' reliability as a partner due to their regular misalignment on affairs in Turkey's adjacent regions. A good example of this is the persistent disagreement between the US and Turkey over the issue of Kurdish separatism in the region. The US has supported the Kurds on numerous occasions, such as in the aftermath of the Gulf War or more recently in the war against ISIS. Turkey views this as contradicting its national interests, as it has been dealing with Kurdish separatism in its own country, which it views as a threat to national unity. For Turkey, the issue of Kurdish separatism is an existential threat (Ward 2019). As the 2010s progressed, more disagreements would emerge. After the failed 2016 coup d'état against President Erdoğan, Turkey pressured the US to extradite the Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, arguing that he was behind the coup, which the US refused to do. Furthermore, Turkey would also have problems with the Atlantic bloc in general, as deteriorating relations with the bloc made it increasingly difficult for Turkey to access Western weapon systems (Egeli et al. 2024: 21). These issues have led Turkey to question how serious the US takes Turkey's national interests and have increased dissatisfaction with its position within the Atlantic bloc.

As a result, in recent years Turkey has sought to redefine its relationship with the US and the Atlantic bloc, hoping to establish a more equal relationship suitable to Erdoğan's ideas of Turkey as an independent great power. Turkey expects the US to act not as a hegemon, but as a more equal partner, with which it can cooperate as a fellow Atlantic state (e.g. through coordinating their strategies) but which also leaves Turkey enough space to follow independent foreign policies in its adjacent regions (Gulmez and Soyaltin 2017: 142). Turkey believed the war in Syria would be a good opportunity to attempt to improve its relations with the Americans, attempting to coordinate its strategy with the US to find a common approach based on mutual interests. Turkey proposed to prioritize supporting the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to remove



Assad and replace him with a Muslim Brotherhood government, with which Turkey has close relations. However, the US was hesitant to support these plans and prioritized the fight against ISIS alongside the Kurdish YPG, while remaining undecided on the endgame in Syria (Özdamar 2023: 1, 9; Ward 2019). As a result of this indecisiveness, Turkey would take the initiative in October 2019, launching “Operation Peace Spring”, invading Northern Syria in order to drive-out the US-allied YPG and create a buffer zone controlled by Turkey and the FSA. At the same time that this was happening, in response to the increasing difficulty it faced accessing Western weapon systems, Turkey would seek to buy them from other partners in an effort to diversify its security ties and show its independence in global politics, making a deal with US-rival Russia to buy new Russian S-400 anti-air weapon systems (Egeli et al. 2024: 23).

The US, however, viewed these matters differently. Since the end of the Cold War, the US and Atlantic bloc have come to dominate the international order, establishing a status-quo referred to as the “liberal international order”. In this new context, the US’s self-perceived position in the global order has been of itself as the leader of the Atlantic bloc and the guarantor of the liberal international order, tasked with promoting liberal-democracy and stability. However, after failed interventions in regions such as the Middle East, the US has attempted to “lead from a distance”. Although the US still maintains direct involvement (e.g. through military presence and diplomacy) it also relies on regional partners to share in the burden of upholding the liberal international order (Golmohammadi 2019: 112-114; Krotz and Sperling 2011: 217).

Part of the US’ status thus comes from being seen as the hegemon upholding the liberal international order and being able to steer its regional partners into doing so as well. Although the US has given more space to its regional partners, it expects them to use this space to play a regional role in accordance with US interests. This is especially the case for Turkey, as it is not just a partner in the Middle East, but also a member of the Atlantic bloc. American leadership of this bloc is another core part of the US’ status. Failing to enforce this behavior from such a partner would thus seriously damage the US’ status. In line with this, the US denounced Turkey’s actions, making clear that it did not agree with Turkey’s divergent policies regarding Syria and Russia. Regarding Syria, the US implemented temporary sanctions while pushing for ceasefire talks, eventually succeeding in forcing Turkey to accept a ceasefire (BBC 2019). As for the S-400 deal, the US argued that it undermined the Atlantic bloc and strengthened the position of Russia, a traditional competitor to the US, thus kicking Turkey out of the F-35 fighter program, refusing to deliver Turkey these new jets (BBC 2020; Egeli et al. 2024: 23).

In line with its self-perceived status, Turkey hoped to build a more equal partnership between Turkey and the US within the Atlantic bloc, while also creating the necessary space for independent policies in its adjacent regions. For Turkey, acceptance of this by the US would have served as a recognition of its status-claims. However, by ignoring Turkey's plans for Syria and refusing to accept its divergent policies, the US frustrated this. By denouncing Turkey's independent military intervention, the US undermined its "transregional power" role, as it rejected Turkey's perceived right to operate independently in its adjacent regions. The US' sanctions in response to the S-400 deal undermined Turkey's "active independent" role, as the sanctions were a clear rejection of Turkey's attempts to engage in independent diplomatic relations and undermined its strategic autonomy. This brought the legitimacy of Turkey's status-claims into question, causing status-concerns. In turn, this has reinforced Turkey's geopolitical divergence from the US, leading it to intensify the more confrontational aspects of its status-seeking strategies to assert its capability to fulfill the roles related to its status-claims.

### **Comparison: Conflict with Hegemon: Role Conflict & Status Concerns**

When comparing the two cases, some important similarities can be identified. For both France and Turkey, their conflicts with the US started with the misalignment between their geopolitical interests and those of the US, leading to increasing distrust of the US as a reliable ally. This stimulated both countries to seek to revitalize their relationship with the US in order to attain a more equal position within the Atlantic bloc's hierarchy in line with their self-perceived great power status in the world. As explained in the theory, higher status within a multilateral alliance's hierarchy can bring major benefits to a state's status. In the cases of France and Turkey, a higher position would mean acceptance of their status-claims by the established great power hegemon (the US), while being given more independence would help assert status-claims to lower-status states. However, this clashed with American interests, as part of the US' status comes from its position as the Atlantic bloc's hegemon and its ability to dominate allies. Agreeing to French and Turkish demands for a better position within the bloc would weaken this position and thus also weaken the US' status. This clash resulted in role conflict.

As explained in the theoretical framework, status in IR is subjective and its legitimacy is based on its recognition by other states (Larson et al. 2014: 8). If a state wants to have its status-claims recognized, above all it is important that it is recognized as being able to fulfill the NRCs corresponding to its claimed status (Stolte 2015: 20). Status is also scarce, and therefore established powers will seek to protect their status (Larson et al. 2014: 9). This is also what happened in the cases of France and Turkey. Because the US saw French/Turkish

emergence as a threat to its own status, it tried to prevent this by undermining them in their attempts to fulfill the roles related to their status-claims and attempted to force them into a subservient role. In turn, this role altercasting led to a dilemma for France and Turkey. As explained in the theory, for a state to be recognized as a great power it is important to both be accepted by other great powers as well as lower-status states. Although it is vital to be recognized by other great powers, if an aspiring great power too closely follows the lead of the established great powers, lower-status states will not accept its great power claims, as they will believe it to be a mere follower (Stolte 2015: 20-22). To prevent this, France and Turkey would shift towards adopting more confrontational status-seeking strategies, aiming to legitimize their status through asserting their ability to fulfill the corresponding roles to both the established great powers (e.g. the US) and lower-status states (e.g. European and Middle Eastern states).

### **Independent Status-Seeking Foreign Policies**

#### **France: Asserting France's Grandeur**

As a result of its stifled status mobility, the top priority for de Gaulle became restoring France's *grandeur* (greatness) on the world stage and assert its capability to fulfill the related roles (Krotz 2002: 14, 17). The idea was that, through increasing France's role in the world, France could re-gain its status (Kolodziej 1974: 28). In practice, this would mean a combination of competitive strategies aimed at expanding France's influence and power, and creative strategies aimed at going beyond the bloc system and promoting alternatives to the Cold War status-quo.

France's international policies were grounded in the belief that France had an important role in the management of international affairs and should assert its influence in all four spheres of Cold War geopolitics: the Atlantic bloc, Western Europe, the Eastern bloc, and the Third World (Kolodziej 1974: 64; Krotz and Sperling 2011: 216). By spreading its influence in all four spheres, France could establish itself as an important actor in each of them and, in doing so, put itself at the center of the Cold War's geopolitical landscape (Kolodziej 1974: 64). Most of France's early international policies were focused on its position in the Atlantic bloc. As mentioned, France pushed for reforming the Atlantic bloc and establishing a common nuclear strategy in an effort to be accepted as an equal partner to the US and the UK. These efforts failed, and in turn France shifted its attention to Western Europe and the Eastern bloc.

One of de Gaulle's main concerns was the division of Europe between the two power blocs. He viewed it as an unnatural state, believing that Europe represented a unique civilization with its own role in global politics. However, given the limitations imposed by the Cold War,

France's efforts would be focused on Western Europe and providing it with an alternative to Atlanticism: establishing a Western Europe which was independent on the world stage, putting it on equal footing with the US and USSR (Nelson 2019: 57; Teasdale 2016: 20). In practice, this would mean a Western Europe that would manage its own affairs and cooperate on foreign policy, defense, economics, culture, and science (Teasdale 2016: 20). France would replace the US as Western Europe's nuclear protector and, given its historical dominance, de Gaulle believed France would also be its natural leader (Johnson 1994: 93; Kolodziej 1974: 295). With regards to the USSR and Eastern bloc, France followed its own strategy. Unlike the rest of the Atlantic bloc, France attempted to go beyond the bloc system, and engaged freely with the USSR and Eastern bloc states. In these diplomatic efforts, de Gaulle went beyond ideology and attempted to establish relations based on mutual interests and personal diplomacy towards Eastern bloc leaders. France sought to facilitate East-West dialogue and pursue *détente* between the two Cold War blocs, hoping to promote better ties between France and the USSR/Eastern bloc, rapprochement between West and East, and political reform in the Eastern bloc countries (Bozo 2016: 64). Furthermore, de Gaulle hoped that these policies would open the way for an alternative, more multipolar international order. Although this diplomacy clashed with Atlantic bloc interests, France saw it as an assertion of its diplomatic independence and an opportunity to establish France as a balancer between the two Cold War blocs (Martin 2010: 300).

However, as the East-West balance of the Cold War settled, it became clear that the real space of competition would be the unaligned Third World. The success of France's international policies thus depended on its ability to exert influence in the Third World, as it would ensure France access to the resources, markets, strategic leverage, and political partners it needed to compete (Kolodziej 1974: 449-451; Martin 2010: 302). Aware of the growing superpower influence in the Third World, France attempted to encourage Third World states to resist the superpowers and instead align with France (Kolodziej 1974: 59-63, 432, 452). France presented itself as an advocate for the independence and development of Third World states, citing its decolonization efforts, its recent confrontations with the superpowers, and its historical role in developing the ideals of human rights, democracy, and national sovereignty (Bozo 2016: 66; Martin 2010: 301-302). As France's decolonization efforts continued in the 1960s, this approach started to have success, changing France's image in the Third World and allowing it to play an active role in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Kolodziej 1974: 451-452).

In the Middle East and Asia, France attempted to strengthen its influence by establishing itself as the primary mediator in important conflicts. Using its (historical) ties to these regions, France tried balance between both local actors (e.g. Arab states and Israel) and the superpowers

(e.g. US, USSR, and China in Vietnam) (Behr 2011: 89; Kolodziej 1974: 50). France also tried to find new allies, establishing diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in the hope that it could serve as a partner in the fight against superpower hegemony (Davidson 2010: 125). In Latin America, France presented itself as an alternative partner to the US, emphasizing a shared Latin identity, with the aim of strengthening its political, economic and cultural ties with the continent (Fernandois 2010: 271). However, France's influence was strongest in Africa, where it established privileged relations with its former colonies. In exchange for accepting French influence and supporting its international positions, African states would receive diverse forms of assistance, leading to cooperation on politics, security issues, cultural affairs, and economic development. French influence was especially strong in the economic and military spheres. Economically, the African states remained dependent on France, as their currency, "the African franc", was pegged to the French franc (Vallin 2015: 79-80). Militarily, France received privileged access to these states, maintaining a military presence there and training local security forces. France used this presence to help allied regimes suppress opposition and to militarily involve itself in local conflicts (Vallin 2015: 79-83). France would also attempt to strengthen its cultural soft power throughout the Third World in general by perpetuating the presence of its language, ideas, and culture, establishing cultural centers and maintaining special cultural relations with French-speaking countries (Bossuat 2003: 447).

These efforts were complemented by France's growing strategic independence. Strategic doctrine under de Gaulle stressed that, for France to maintain its importance, it needed a military capable of defending France and acting independently across the globe (Johnson 1994: 91). However, after its failed NATO reforms, France was cast into a subordinate role to the US within the alliance, contradicting its strategic doctrine. To address this, France withdrew from NATO's integrated command structures and demanded that all US forces left French territory (Kuisel 1992: 25). In doing so, France regained its autonomy and normalized its relationship with the US, overcoming its subservient position within the Atlantic bloc. However, France never fully left the alliance, allowing it to maintain its relations with its traditional Atlantic partners while hedging itself against possible Soviet threats (Kolodziej 1974: 51).

This newfound autonomy also required France to acquire the means the militarily defend itself and project its power independently. To do so, France would expand its defense industry and enhance its military capabilities, developing the power it needed to assert its strategic interests on the world stage (Johnson 1994: 92). Most important of these efforts was the continuation of the development of France's nuclear arsenal. De Gaulle believed that the

ownership of an independent nuclear arsenal was key to France's re-emergence as a great power. It would enable France to replace the US as the nuclear protector of Europe, give France a say in the management of global affairs, and – being an important marker of status during the Cold War – raise France to the level of the other nuclear great powers (Cerny 1980: 194).

Throughout his presidency, de Gaulle would also continue his attempts to assert France's importance within the Atlantic bloc, despite the failures of earlier efforts. De Gaulle's main strategy for this was to obstruct negotiations within the Atlantic bloc when these contradicted French interests. He would veto important decisions or refuse to show up to negotiations ("tactic of the empty chair") until French interests had been addressed (Kolodziej 1974: 53). This tactic was used most prominently during EEC negotiations about further integration.

As one of the EEC's most important members, further integration would not be possible without French consent. De Gaulle knew this, and used it to obstruct negotiations that were unfavorable to French interests (Teasdale 2016: 53). This strategy was best exemplified by France's continued obstruction of the UK's accession to the EEC. During the 1960s, the UK made multiple attempts to join the EEC. However, as it was the US's closest partner, France feared that British membership would allow US influence to penetrate the EEC. Furthermore, as France and the UK were of comparable status, France worried that Britain could threaten French dominance over the EEC. To prevent this, de Gaulle would twice veto Britain's entry into the EEC (Kolodziej 1974: 313-314). Through these obstructive behaviors, France was able to dominate the EEC and steer the course of its development. As the EEC was an important institution of the Atlantic bloc, France's ability to dominate it allowed France to demand respect for French interests from its Atlantic partners and re-asserted its importance within the bloc.

When taken as a whole, Gaullist France's independent foreign policy can be explained as a response to its status-concerns. France embraced a combination of social competition (e.g. geopolitical competition, independent diplomatic efforts, the development of independent power projection capabilities and obstructive behavior) and social creativity (e.g. the European project, *détente* efforts, and international development). With these strategies, France aimed to assert its capabilities to fulfill the roles related to its great power status-claims to the other great powers (e.g. the US and the USSR), states with a comparable status (e.g. the UK), and lower-status states (e.g. Western Europe, Eastern bloc countries, and the Third World).

## **Turkey: Turkey Goes its Own Way**

As Turkey's attempts to become a great power were stifled, Erdoğan steered Turkish foreign policy towards an increasingly divergent course. The underlying vision of this strategy views Turkey as a "central country" in a geographic, cultural and political sense, allowing it to expand its influence over its adjacent regions and play an important role in global politics (Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 55). In practice, this would mean a combination of competitive strategies aimed at expanding Turkish influence and strength in its adjacent regions and wider world, and creative strategies aimed at embracing Turkey's multiple identities (e.g. Atlantic, European, Ottoman, Turkic, Islamic) at once, presenting an alternative vision of Turkey that stands at the center of global politics, and proactively promoting a more inclusive, multipolar world order.

Under Erdoğan, Turkey's regional efforts have followed the idea that, due to its central position, Turkey should actively engage in its adjacent regions and establish itself as a transregional power capable of protecting its regional interests, providing security and mediation, leading regional cooperation and development efforts, and representing its adjacent regions globally. In turn, this should strengthen Turkey's global importance (Kınacıoğlu 2021: 220). When this strategy was adopted at the start of Erdoğan's rule, it was mostly aimed at strengthening Turkey's influence by establishing it as a regional peacebuilder. Between 2003 and 2023, Turkey has been involved in 29 mediation processes, mediating between states and/or non-state actors in its adjacent regions. This meant involvement in negotiating ceasefires, peace deals, de-escalation, and the release of hostages and prisoners. In some cases, Turkey also served as an interlocutor between a state in its region and external states, such as in its facilitation of nuclear talks between Iran and Western states (Sofos 2023: 5-11, 15-16).

However, as Turkey's security environment became more unstable and competition increased from other great powers (e.g. Russia) and regional powers (e.g. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE), Turkey adopted a new approach based on asserting its power through active unilateral military interventions in its adjacent regions (Adar 2024: 17; Akgül and Koçak 2022: 292). In the Middle East, Turkey has intervened in Syria, creating a buffer zone on its border, supporting proxy groups, and combating the US-backed YPG, while in Iraq it has expanded its military bases and is fighting the PKK (Hacaoglu 2024). In the Mediterranean, Turkey has clashed with Cyprus and fellow NATO-member Greece over maritime borders and energy exploration, leading to naval stand-offs, competitive drilling, and diplomatic disputes (Adar et al. 2021). Furthermore, it is also involved in Libya, agreeing to recognize the UN-backed GNA government and support it militarily against the Russian, Saudi, and UAE backed opposition

forces, in exchange for a deal supporting Turkey's claims in the Mediterranean (Adar et al. 2021; Hacaoglu 2024). In the Caucasus, Turkey backs Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia through military advisers, arms deliveries, and diplomatic support (Hacaoglu 2024). Turkey has also been involved in less intense military activities in its adjacent regions, such as multilateral peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Bosnia and the construction of a military base in Qatar. Furthermore, Turkey has also been expanding its military presence outside of its adjacent regions, sending military advisers to Gambia, Mali, and Somalia (Hacaoglu 2024).

Besides mediation and military intervention, Turkey has attempted to stimulate regional cooperation and development, emphasizing its (historical) Ottoman, Islamic, and Turkic identities to strengthen its appeal. Regarding its former Ottoman territories (e.g. the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and the Caucasus) Turkey has made consistent efforts to facilitate regional integration (Akbaba and Özdamar 2019: 99). Turkey has developed bilateral, multilateral, and institutional relations with and between states in its adjacent regions and promoted political reforms, using its own success at combining democracy, secularism, and market economics with its Islamic cultural and religious identity as a model to follow (Sofos 2023: 6; Tüysüzoglu 2014: 90). Economically, Turkey has expanded its presence through trade deals, investments, development aid, and business councils, while also taking the lead in developing regional infrastructure, aiming to improve the connection between its regions (Adar 2024: 8-10; Renda 2011: 101). Besides building ties between states, Turkey has also made efforts to connect the peoples and societies of its former Ottoman regions, using its soft power to promote its own cultural and religious values as a unifying force. Through these efforts, Turkey attempts to re-organize the regional system in its own image, allowing it to establish itself as the leading state. Building forth on these ambitions, Turkey has made efforts to connect its former Ottoman regions with the rest of the world, representing them in international initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations (Renda 2011: 101).

Looking beyond its former Ottoman lands, Turkey has also made attempts to establish itself as the leader of the Turkic countries and the wider Islamic world. With regards to the Islamic world, Turkey has increasingly styled itself as the protector and representative of Islam worldwide, protesting the persecution of Muslims and supporting Islamic political causes such as Palestinian liberation and the Muslim Brotherhood (Yavuz 2020: 197). Regarding the Turkic countries (Azerbaijan and Central Asia) Turkey has taken a leading role in promoting their integration and political, economic, and cultural development through active engagement in regional organizations like the Organization of Turkic States (Fidan 2023: 21).



In parallel with its regional efforts, Turkey has also attempted to strengthen its influence on the global level. Turkey has taken a proactive role in international institutions, engaging in global governance while also challenging the hegemonic features of the international order and arguing for an alternative multipolar order, more inclusive to non-Western states (Aral 2016: 79-80). In line with this, Turkey has also sought better ties with the Global South, improving its relations with Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Turkey has engaged extensively in development cooperation with Asian and African countries, in which it has tried to set itself apart from Western countries and China through providing its own development model, the so-called “Ankara Consensus”, which emphasizes the lack of Turkey’s colonial past, its preference for mutual gains over relations of dependence, and a combination of economic development with political mediation and religious soft-power ties (Donelli 2018: 9; Sofos 2023: 7).

More important, however, are Turkey’s growing ties to the main competitors of the Atlantic bloc: Russia and China. Based on Erdoğan’s personal diplomacy towards Putin and strong economic ties, Turkey and Russia have strengthened their diplomatic relationship and agreed on power-sharing agreements in conflicts they are both involved in (Cagaptay 2024). China has become one of Turkey’s most important economic partners and invests massively in Turkish infrastructure, which Turkey hopes to use to become a global trade hub. Turkey has also joined China’s Belt and Road Initiative, and has expressed interest in joining organizations like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Chivvis et al. 2023). According to Turkey, these relations do not mean that it seeks to break with its Atlantic partners. Rather, it views these ties as a sign of its growing diplomatic independence and global engagement (Cagaptay 2024). Turkey has used these ties to put itself at the center of global politics, best exemplified by its involvement in the Ukraine War. Regarding Ukraine, Turkey has condemned Russia’s invasion and supported Ukraine with military aid, while simultaneously refusing to impose sanctions on Russia, maintaining good ties with both countries (Dipama and Parlar Dal 2024: 87). As a result, Turkey has been able to adopt a “balancer” position, organizing multiple peace talks and mediating between Russia, Ukraine, and the West (Chivvis et al. 2023).

Turkey’s geopolitical efforts have been bolstered by its parallel efforts to achieve strategic autonomy. Under Erdoğan, Turkey has developed a strong, independent defense industry capable of meeting Turkey’s strategic needs (e.g. tanks, drones, and helicopters). This has decreased Turkey’s reliance on foreign suppliers which in turn has boosted its capabilities to engage in independent security policies and improved its international position. This is best exemplified by Turkey’s drone industry. After multiple failed attempts to purchase drones from

the US and Israel, Turkey established its own drone industry, which led it to become one of the biggest developers and producers of drones in the world (Egeli et al. 2024: 16-18).

The creation of an independent domestic drone industry has given Turkey a strategic advantage in its regional military efforts and made it less dependent on the whims of other states for the supply of important military equipment (Martins et al. 2023: 1-2). Turkey has also become a major drone exporter, selling its drones to countries in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. This has helped Turkey to expand its international influence, as the export deals allow it to engage in new partnerships and strengthen its established partnerships. Furthermore, the fact that it is one of the few countries that can produce these complicated weapons, which many consider to be the future of war, has also displayed Turkey's advances as a leader in the field of military technology, strengthening its prestige (Martins et al. 2023: 2).

In line with its growing ambitions, Erdoğan has tried to assert Turkey's important position in the Atlantic bloc and demand respect for its interests from its Atlantic partners. Recently, his main way of doing so has been to leverage Turkey's veto power within NATO to obstruct important decision-making processes with the goal of extracting concessions from its partners, reminding them that they need Turkey's consent for the Atlantic bloc to function.

This is best exemplified by his recent veto of Sweden's NATO accession (Levin 2023). Ostensibly, Erdoğan vetoed Sweden's accession due its relaxed stance towards the PKK (e.g. allowing pro-PKK demonstrations) and multiple instances of Quran burning in the country. Although the direct target of the veto was Sweden, Turkey's underlying motivation was strengthening its position within the Atlantic bloc (Levin 2023). In recent years, its foreign policies have been frustrated by its Atlantic partners. As mentioned, the US supported the YPG in Syria and sanctioned Turkey after it acquired Russian S-400s, while Turkey's EU accession process is still frozen. Turkey's demands for removing the veto included the lifting of American sanctions and restarting its EU accession process. Eventually, Erdoğan would lift his veto, allowing Sweden to join. Although it did not get concessions from the EU, Turkey did achieve the removal of American sanctions and a deal to purchase F35 fighter jets (Dettmer 2023).

When taken as a whole, Erdoğanist Turkey's independent foreign policy can be explained as a response to its status-concerns, embracing a combination of social competition strategies (e.g. mediation and military interventions in its regions, proactive engagement in global affairs, independent diplomacy, increasing strategic autonomy and obstructive behavior) and social creativity strategies (e.g. regional cooperation, promoting its own governance model, engagement with the Islamic and Turkic worlds, and promoting a multipolar order). With these

strategies, Turkey aims to prove itself as capable of fulfilling the roles related to its status-claims to both the other great powers (e.g. the US and Russia), other aspiring powers (e.g. Saudi Arabia) and lower-status states (e.g. UAE, Egypt, and smaller states in its adjacent regions).

### **Comparison: Independent Status-Seeking Foreign Policies**

When compared, the foreign policies of France and Turkey share similarities, as both countries embraced a foreign policy based on confrontational status-seeking strategies in response to their status-concerns caused by the role conflict with the Atlantic bloc hegemon (the US). These similarities can be explained by looking at the theoretical framework. As the theoretical framework explains, if a state wants its status-claims to be recognized, it must convince other states that it is capable of fulfilling the roles related to this claimed status (Karim 2018: 7). In case this capability is disputed, states can still assert their capabilities through competing with other states (e.g. established great powers) in relevant dimensions of comparison, through which they can prove themselves equally capable of fulfilling these disputed role conceptions (Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 39). Furthermore, states can also attempt to raise their status by embracing characteristics that set them apart from the competition. This allows them to target domains where it believes that these characteristics will allow it to provide more appealing alternatives than their competition. (Stolte 2015: 34). These dynamics are also visible in the cases of France and Turkey, as both embraced social competition and social creativity strategies to assert themselves to the great powers, comparable states, and lower-status states.

France's social competition strategy revolved around expanding its influence and power, establishing itself as a global actor equal to the great powers, while its social creativity strategy was based on establishing France as an unaligned power capable of providing alternatives to the status-quo, setting it apart from the superpowers. With these strategies, France attempted to prove it could fulfill the roles related to its status-claims. Through its European project and in its relations with fellow Western European states in general, France wanted to establish a dominant leading position for itself, befitting its self-conception as a regional power. To assert its global power, France followed an active international policy, opening up French ties to the Communist countries, competing over dominance in the Third World, and supporting economic and cultural development worldwide. In line with these efforts, France became less dependent on the Atlantic bloc and the US, leaving NATO's integrated command structures and actively working to develop its own independent power projection capabilities (e.g. its nuclear arsenal) and diversify its diplomatic relations (e.g. de Gaulle's diplomacy towards the USSR, Eastern bloc and China). As a result of this growing independence, France embraced an unaligned

position, attempting to establish itself as a balancer between the Cold War's superpowers and alliances, pushing for *détente* between East and West and a multipolar order.

Turkey's social competition strategy followed the notion that Turkey should play an active role in its adjacent regions and global politics in order to establish itself as equal to the great powers, while its social creativity strategy attempted to set Turkey apart from the established powers as a unique, alternative actor by emphasizing its multiple identities. Based on these strategies, Turkey has attempted to assert its capability to fulfill the roles related to its status-claims. By following an active policy combining mediation, military interventions, and regional cooperation, Turkey seeks to establish itself as a transregional power at the center of multiple important regions. To strengthen its global power credentials, Turkey has expanded its military influence outside of its adjacent regions, fostered ties with the Global South, engaged proactively in international organizations, and established itself as a staunch supporter of international development. Turkey has also sought to gain more independence from the US and the Atlantic bloc, developing its independent power projection capabilities (e.g. Turkey's drone industry) and balancing its Western relations with improved ties to Russia and China, allowing it to mediate in important global conflicts, such as the Russo-Ukrainian War. In a similar vein, Turkey has used its cultural and geographical centrality to position itself as a bridge between different peoples, states, regions, and cultures, representing its former Ottoman regions, the Turkic countries, and the wider Islamic world on the world stage.

In summary, I argue that both France and Turkey used a combination of social competition and social creativity strategies to make up for their frustrated attempts at status mobility, combining similar competitive approaches (e.g. geopolitical competition, trying to achieve strategic autonomy, engaging in independent diplomatic efforts, and obstructive actions within the Atlantic bloc) and similar creative approaches (e.g. promoting regional integration, providing alternatives to the global status-quo, and engaging with developing states) to prove to the established great powers, as well as lower-status states and states with a comparable status to their own, that they are capable of fulfilling the roles related to their status-claims.

### **General Analysis: Establishing a Rogue Member Theory**

In this thesis, I aim to answer my research question "*How can Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey's independent foreign policies help us understand the struggle for status within multilateral alliances?*" through analyzing the great power status-seeking foreign policies of Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey, comparing their international strategies and the dynamics that appear because of the resulting clashes within the Atlantic bloc between

France/Turkey and the US. In doing so, I have compared France and Turkey's great power status-claims and related role conceptions, their role conflicts with the US over their hierarchical positions within the Atlantic bloc, and their independent status-seeking foreign policies that came as a result of these role conflicts. I analyzed these comparisons based on my theoretical framework, using theories about status and roles in international relations, through which I have found a similar pattern in both cases that explains why both Turkey and France have become "rogue members" within the Atlantic bloc as a result of their status-claims. Based on these findings, I can demonstrate how alliance members that are pursuing independent foreign policies out of an aspiration for greater status can come into conflict with the interests of the hegemonic alliance member and deviate from the established norms of the multilateral alliance, which leads them to become the alliance's "rogue members" in the process.

Inspired by their historical legacies, geographical and cultural characteristics, changes in the international order, material advancements, and domestic political shifts, both Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey identified themselves as great powers. This led them to embrace new role conceptions, arguing that fulfilling these would legitimize their status-claims in the eyes of fellow great powers and lower-status states. To do so, both countries adopted more independent foreign policy positions that would allow them to assert their capabilities to fulfill these roles. However, this brought them into a difficult position vis-à-vis the US, the Atlantic bloc's hegemon. Both France and Turkey already had a history of problems with the US, often caused by misalignment on geopolitical issues vital to both sides. When combined with their status-claims, which essentially required that the US granted them a higher position in the alliance's international hierarchy, this became a pressing issue that needed to be resolved.

At first, both France and Turkey attempted to improve their relationship with the US and tried to establish a closer – but also more equal – partnership, which would allow them to have more independence and a greater say in the Atlantic bloc's (and thus the US') affairs. This higher position would essentially mean acceptance of their status-claims by the established great power hegemon (the US), while being given more independence would help assert status-claims to lower-status states. For the US, however, this was unacceptable. The US owes a considerable part of its status as a superpower to the fact that it is the hegemon of the Atlantic bloc, capable of fulfilling a dominant leadership position within the alliance. Giving France and Turkey both more independence and a greater say in Atlantic bloc policies would undermine this dominant position and in effect also weaken the legitimacy of the US' status. This clash of interests led to a role conflict between the US and France/Turkey, with the US attempting to

undermine French/Turkish capabilities to fulfill their roles and force them to accept a subservient role in line with the US' expectations. Due to these instances of American role altercasting, the legitimacy of both France and Turkey's status-claims came into question, as their ability to fulfill the related roles was challenged. While accepting a more subservient role might have improved their ties with the US, it would have also made them look like followers in the eyes of lower-status states, discrediting their status-claims. This led to status-concerns.

In response, both countries more readily embraced the "confrontational elements" of their status-seeking strategies, combining social competition strategies aimed at proving themselves as equals to the established powers and social creativity strategies aimed at setting themselves apart from the established powers as alternative leaders, in order to assert themselves to both the established great powers as well as lower-status states as being capable of fulfilling the roles related to their status-claims. However, as a result of their social competition strategies, France and Turkey would often be at odds with the US and other Atlantic bloc members (e.g. the UK for France and Greece for Turkey), while their social creativity strategies led them to promote alternatives which directly challenged the accepted norms of the Atlantic bloc (e.g. France challenging the Cold War status-quo or Turkey criticizing the liberal international order). In doing so, both countries became "rogue members" within the alliance.

The comparison of these two cases is interesting, as both cases fit with the academic literature about status-seeking in international relations, but defy the common "hegemonic great power vs aspirant great power" analyses (e.g. established US vs emerging China), because both states are active members of the Atlantic bloc, attempting to assert their status from within the multilateral establishment. This has given me insights into the dynamics of alliance cohesion and the challenges posed by the divergent behavior of rogue members, allowing me to analyze the struggle for status within multilateral alliances and thus answer my research question.

Based on my findings, I propose a "rogue member theory". I argue that, when generalized, the comparison between the two cases shows that great power status-claims by a member state of a multilateral alliance can set into motion a process that leads it to become a "rogue member" within the alliance. As explained in my theoretical framework, multilateral alliances can be viewed as organized networks with their own internal hierarchies. The position of a state on this internal hierarchy influences its status in general. A state that aspires to be a great power will also aspire to have a higher position in this internal hierarchy, as this will allow it to have the influence, recognition, and independence it needs to fulfill the role conceptions related to its status-claims. However, this will inevitably bring it into conflict with the

hegemonic state of the alliance, whose status is partly based on its privileged leadership position at the top of the alliance's internal hierarchy. The hegemon will attempt to undermine the aspiring great power's capabilities to fulfill its roles and force it to instead accept a more subservient position in line with the hegemon's interests. If the aspiring great power accepts this subservient position, it will essentially give up on its great power status-claims, as other states will view it as a mere follower of the hegemon. The aspiring power can also choose to instead embrace social competition and/or social creativity strategies to assert itself as a great power, engaging independently in global politics to show it is capable of fulfilling the roles related to its status claims, however with the result of becoming a "rogue member" within this alliance, as these strategies will inevitably contradict the norms of the multilateral alliance and put the aspirant great power in a position where it competes with its fellow member states.

These findings can help us understand the struggle for status within multilateral alliances, as they explain the dynamics of an important form of status struggle within multilateral alliances: that between members aspiring to become great powers and the alliance's hegemonic great power. This is relevant, as it fits with broader academic themes such as the shift towards multipolarity. As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar, new multilateral alliances are starting to emerge (e.g. BRICS) and emerging great powers are becoming increasingly ambitious. In the future, these processes can lead to dynamics within these new multilateral alliances similar to the dynamics present in the cases of Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey, which can then be analyzed based on the "rogue member theory" I have provided in this thesis.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, in this thesis I answered the following research question: "*How can Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey's independent foreign policies help us understand the struggle for status within multilateral alliances?*" I arrived at my answer through a comparative case analysis between Gaullist France and Erdoğanist Turkey, comparing their great power status-claims and related role conceptions, the nature of their conflict with the Atlantic bloc's hegemon (the US), and their status-seeking foreign policies. In doing so, I was able to identify a pattern in both cases which, if generalized, helped me explain how great power status-claims by a member state of a multilateral alliance can set into motion a process that leads this aspiring great power state to become a "rogue member" within the alliance, which helps us understand an important form of the struggle for status within multilateral alliances: that between aspiring great powers and the alliance's hegemonic great power.

With this research, I hope to add to the academic debate about status in international

relations in general and to provide a basis for future research on the struggle for status within multilateral alliances. This research could also pick up on some of the limitations of my paper. For example, while this thesis focused on the struggle for great power status within a multilateral alliance, future research could inquire if similar patterns can be seen when states aspiring to be middle powers try to assert themselves or if that would lead to different forms of status struggle. Furthermore, while I argue that my findings are generalizable as the case studies I chose mostly serve to explain a broader theoretical logic, future research could test these claims by looking for similar status dynamics within other multilateral alliances.

Another limitation of this thesis that is important to note has to do with the aspect of individual leadership. Both de Gaulle and Erdoğan are commonly perceived as strong and charismatic leaders that have a direct personal impact on their state's foreign policies. However, due to the limited boundaries of my thesis project, the influence of the individual leadership of both de Gaulle and Erdoğan was not analyzed in its own right, but rather as part of the whole. Although this did not impact my arguments, given that I included the relevant information related to this aspect in my work, it would be interesting to see future research that attempts to analyze the influence of individual leadership on status-seeking in international relations.

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