# A TALE OF TWO ALLIES: CHANGING MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE U.S.-TURKISH RELATIONSHIP

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**A TALE OF TWO ALLIES: CHANGING MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE U.S.-TURKISH RELATIONSHIP**

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## ABSTRACT

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The United States and Turkey entered the twenty-first century as close allies, and the American media's characterization of Turkey and the U.S.-Turkish relationship reflected as much. By the early 2020s, U.S. expectations of Turkey had declined as a result of both discrete disputes and structural forces that eroded the foundations of the alliance. The American media, accordingly, came to expect a disparity between the two countries' foreign policy priorities. This study examines two newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and two magazines, *The New Yorker* and *The National Interest*. Focusing on news coverage of U.S.-Turkish discord and reconciliation around the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the study employs critical discourse analysis to trace changes in media narratives about Turkish policies and the status of U.S.-Turkish relations. The key finding is that unfavorable narratives are persistent: whether the relationship starts out strong or rocky, when a disagreement between Ankara and Washington emerges, the tenor of the news conversation turns negative and this change in the coverage does not quickly fade. The pattern is asymmetric, too: bilateral reconciliation does not elicit positive coverage to the same degree. The effects on U.S. media narratives vary based on the overall status of the bilateral relationship at the time, but bad news lingers on regardless of the context.

# ÖZET

BIR İTTIFAKIN HIKAYESI: ABD-TÜRKIYE İLIŞKILERININ DEĞIŞEN MEDYA TEMSILLERI

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Irak Savaşı, Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri, Türk dış politikası, Uluslararası medya

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Türkiye yirmi birinci yüzyıla yakın müttefikler olarak girdiler Amerikan medyasında ABD-Türkiye ilişkilerinin temsili de bu durumu yansıtan bir tablo çizmekteydi. 2020'li yılların başında ise, ABD'nin Türkiye'den beklentileri, hem münferit anlaşmazlıklar hem de ittifakın temellerini aşındıran yapısal nedenler dolayısıyla azaldı. Bununla ilişkili olarak Amerikan medyasında da iki ülkenin dış politika öncelikleri arasındaki uyumsuzluk temsili ön plana çıkmaya başladı. Bu çalışma ABD menşeli iki gazete, *The New York Times* ve *The Wall Street Journal* ile iki dergi, *The New Yorker* ve *The National Interest* de yer verilen Türkiye-ABD ilişkilerinin temsillerini incelemektedir. 2003'te Irak'ın işgali ve 2022'de Rusya'nın Ukrayna'yı işgali sırasında ABD-Türkiye arasında başgösteren anlaşmazlıklar ve uzlaşmaya dair haber kapsamlarına odaklanan çalışma, Türkiye'nin politikaları ve ABD-Türkiye ilişkilerinin durumu hakkındaki media anlatılarındaki değişikliklerin izini sürmek için eleştirel söylem analizi metodunu kullanmaktadır. Çalışmanın temel bulgusu, olumsuz anlatıların kalıcı olduğudur: İlişkiler ister güçlü ister inişli çıkışlı başlasın, Ankara ile Washington arasında bir anlaşmazlığın ortaya çıkması durumunda, haberlerdeki anlatılar olumsuzlaşmakta ve olumsuz anlatılar zamanla kalıcı nitelik taşımaktadır. Bu örüntü aynı zamanda asimetrik bir tablo çizmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, ülkeler arası uzlaşma aynı derecede olumlu habere yol açmamaktadır. İkili ilişkilerin ABD medya anlatılarına olan etkisi o dönemdeki ikili ilişkilerin genel durumuna göre değişse de, olumsuz temsiller ilişkilerden bağımsız olarak varlığını sürdürmektedir.

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*To my family*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**AKP** Justice and Development Party ..... 4, 6, 20, 28

**EU** European Union ..... 3, 4, 5, 27

**ISIS** Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ..... 6, 72

**NATO** North Atlantic Treaty Organization .. 2, 3, 4, 7, 13, 16, 20, 27, 30, 34, 36, 42, 44, 45, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 75, 77, 81

**PKK** Kurdistan Workers' Party ..... 6

**PYD** Democratic Union Party ..... 6

**UN** United Nations ..... 51, 56, 67

**YPG** People's Defense Units ..... 6

# 1. INTRODUCTION

On March 24, 2003, a few days after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and a few weeks after the Turkish parliamentary vote that declined to assist the American war effort, the *New York Times* columnist William Safire accused Turkey's government of "[transforming] that formerly staunch U.S. ally into Saddam's best friend." One week later, on March 31, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wrote an opinion essay in the *Times*' rival newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, with a headline that took aim at American critics of Turkey's policies: "My Country Is Your Faithful Ally and Friend." A decade and a half and several op-eds later, Erdoğan wrote for *The New York Times* under very different political circumstances. This time, Ankara was not pleading Washington to remember its friendship—it was issuing a warning. The United States' "failure to reverse" a "trend of unilateralism and disrespect," Erdoğan cautioned in an essay published on August 10, 2018, would force Turkey "to start looking for new friends and allies."

More than just chronicles of news events, U.S. publications serve as sites of contestation for bilateral relations. Reporters and editors shape narratives that set the tone not just for the U.S.-Turkish relationship but for any number of foreign policy issues. Professional journalists take cues from policymakers, resulting in coverage that reflects real shifts in the direction of foreign policy, and they add their own interpretation or framing to real-world events. As the examples of Erdoğan's essays illustrate, too, publications give space to political leaders and other policymakers looking to intervene in the debates playing out in their pages. The news media does more than just reflect the actual state of U.S. foreign relations; through its power to build and to police the bounds of narratives, it becomes a foreign policy actor itself.

Beyond a few fiery opinion essays, how has the U.S. media treated the relationship between the United States and Turkey? Ties with Turkey do not often make the headlines in the United States—the two countries have never gone to war, after all, and even though Ankara is an important partner it does not enjoy a position at the top of Washington's priority list. Yet it is no secret that the relationship

is under strain. Turkey and the United States have been formal allies for more than seven decades, since Turkey joined NATO in 1952. Although the Cold War era—which many look back on as the heyday of the relationship—was not without periods of tension, the gap between U.S. and Turkish foreign policy outlooks and interests has grown wider in the three decades since the Soviet Union fell. Today, it is not uncommon to see Turkey referred to in the American press as a "disruptive ally" (Crowley & Erlanger 2022) and the U.S.-Turkish relationship described as "troubled" (Coşkun 2022) or likened to "an unhappy marriage" (Eissenstat 2023).

To be sure, the two countries still maintain a defense alliance, trade ties, and reasonably robust diplomatic and people-to-people contact. Neither is looking to cut its losses and draw up divorce papers. Recent high-level bilateral visits and renewed consideration of previously stalled U.S. weapons transfers to Turkey have shown that some rapprochement is possible, but lingering distrust and persistent, substantive policy disagreements keep Ankara and Washington from a more comprehensive reconciliation. The U.S. media has covered these ups and downs, detailing goodwill overtures and fallings-out alike. Yet positive and negative developments do not necessarily change the trajectory of news reporting in the same way—bad news can spread quickly, but clawing back a positive spin is often more difficult.

This thesis aims to illuminate the different ways in which the U.S. media portrays Turkey at pivotal moments—when a good relationship turns sour, when a rocky relationship crumbles further, and when a bad situation appears to turn around. How does coverage of Ankara's decisions change as the broader relationship evolves from a tight partnership to a looser, more transactional one? And, in turn, what can a better understanding of how media narratives develop reveal about the way policymakers might think about the U.S.-Turkish relationship? For the most part, previous research at the intersection of media and foreign policy has focused on extraordinary incidences of war or humanitarian crisis, rather than considering the more incremental ways a story is built about a standard-issue diplomatic relationship. But that does not mean the behavior of the media in such a case is irrelevant to real-world policy decisions or unworthy of scholarly attention.

## 1.1 Turkey and the United States

The U.S.-Turkish relationship presents an interesting case with which to conduct such a study, given the well-documented changes it has undergone over the past two decades. During the Cold War, Turkey and the United States shared an over-

riding strategic interest: resisting Soviet expansionism (Güney 2005). As long as that threat remained, both countries had strong incentives to prioritize cooperation. When the threat disappeared in the 1990s, however, other interests came to the fore. Ankara turned its attention to its immediate neighborhood, renewing its efforts to join the EU (Cagaptay 2004) and seeking opportunities to expand its influence in the wider region, including in the post-Soviet space (Yanık 2007). From Washington's perspective, Cold War geopolitics had made Turkey an essential partner; with that fight over, Turkey's precise role in the United States' alliance system was less clear (Güney 2005). For the next decade, U.S.-Turkish relations carried on more or less as before. Then, in March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq. The subsequent war is widely regarded as a turning point in U.S.-Turkish relations (Parris 2003; Cagaptay 2004; Güney 2005; Müftüler-Baç 2005; Aydın 2009; Larrabee 2010; Altunışık 2013). The United States and Turkey have been stuck in a cycle of recrimination ever since.

Disagreement is not a new feature of the U.S.-Turkish relationship, however. From the beginning, bilateral relations have ebbed and flowed as the two countries' security concerns diverged and converged. The Turkish Republic maintained a strategy of balancing, neutrality, and self-sufficiency for the first two decades of its existence, only entering a security agreement with the United States after World War II and joining NATO a few years later when its territorial sovereignty came under threat from the Soviet Union (Güney 2005; Larrabee 2010; Buhari Gulmez 2020). The United States shared Turkey's interest in preventing Soviet expansion, and Washington saw the security partnership as mutually beneficial, as Turkey's geographic position made it an advantageous site for U.S. military installations (Güney 2005). As long as the two countries' interests converged, they had strong incentive to cooperate. But that did not mean they always saw eye to eye. When the United States removed the Jupiter missiles it had stationed in Turkey in order to resolve peacefully its standoff with the Soviet Union in the 1963 Cuban Missile Crisis, it did so without consulting Turkey. Shortly after, Washington threatened to weaken its defense commitments to Ankara if the Soviet Union were to respond to a Turkish military operation in Cyprus (Larrabee 2010). On the Turkish side, meanwhile, Ankara pursued closer ties both with Moscow and across the Middle East in an effort to avoid exclusive reliance on Washington (Buhari Gulmez 2020). After Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, the United States imposed an arms embargo on Turkey, causing "a sharp deterioration" in bilateral relations (Larrabee 2010).

During the troubled years of the 1960s and 1970s, the United States was adamant that Turkey avoid acting in contravention to U.S. security interests. Washington, a superpower, saw fit to make demands on Ankara, which was only "a medium-sized regional power" (Güney 2005). But Turkey had security interests of its own, and

even when they did not necessarily align with U.S. security interests, Ankara expected Washington's backing. When the United States did not see things the same way, Turkey grew concerned it could not trust the United States, and acted independently to advance its own interests. This downward spiral stopped with the 1980 military coup in Turkey, as the generals who took control of the country were largely pro-American in outlook (Buhari Gulmez 2020). Turkey cooperated closely with the United States during the Gulf War in the early 1990s, but the mismatched priorities and expectations that became apparent during that conflict—specifically, Ankara's concerns that Washington had insufficiently appreciated the economic burden the war placed on Turkey, and that U.S. support for semi-autonomy for the Kurds in northern Iraq would contribute to Kurdish separatism within Turkey—set the groundwork for future discord (Larrabee 2010). A decade later, when Turkey and the United States fell out over the 2003 Iraq invasion, it was hardly the first time that their security interests clashed and a period of heightened tension ensued.

What makes the friction of the 2000s distinct from the cycles of discord and reconciliation of twentieth-century relations, however, is in part the change in Turkey's strategic orientation over the past two decades. Even though the same political party, the AKP, has led Turkey's government since 2002, the country's foreign policy has not been static. In the early 2000s, even as relations with Europe and the United States remained the basis of Turkish strategy, Ankara was ramping up its regional trade relations (Kirişçi 2009) and diplomatic engagement with its Middle Eastern neighbors (Oğuzlu 2007). Turkey promoted itself as particularly well-suited, given its history and geography, to serve as a mediator between East and West (Yanık 2011). In the second half of the decade, Turkey's regional aspirations grew more pronounced. The "strategic depth" doctrine, championed by Ahmet Davutoğlu in his capacity as foreign policy adviser to Prime Minister Erdoğan and then as foreign minister (a position he held from 2009 to 2014), emphasized active Turkish engagement across the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East as a means of enhancing Turkey's regional influence, improving its security environment, and strengthening its position vis-à-vis its Western interlocutors (Murinson 2006; Öniş & Yılmaz 2009; Sözen 2010).

During the 2010s, with the EU accession process stalled and the Arab uprisings revealing both the flaws in Ankara's Middle Eastern diplomacy and the magnitude of the region's security challenges, "strategic depth" began to give way to "strategic autonomy." Strategic autonomy, as Kutlay and Öniş describe it, "constitutes a framework within which Turkish ruling elites can *align* themselves with non-western Great Powers and *balance* the US-led hierarchical order" (Kutlay & Öniş 2021). Turkey maintained its military ties within NATO and a high volume of trade with

the EU, but its foreign policy also became more assertive and independent. Ankara appeared more willing to take unilateral military action, including in northern Iraq and Syria, and its approach to bilateral relations grew increasingly transactional (Haugom 2019). Striving to diversify its great-power partnerships, Turkey expanded its ties to Russia and, to a lesser extent, China (Balta 2019; Kutlay & Öniş 2021). The idea was to allow Ankara greater flexibility in its foreign policy and to become major player in international affairs, rather than a junior partner of the more powerful West. But in practice, as several scholars have pointed out, this balancing strategy has not resolved Turkey's economic and energy dependence on great powers. It has just transferred some of that dependence, and the foreign policy constraints that come with it, to new patrons—most notably Russia (Aydın-Düzgit, Balta, & O'Donohue 2020; Kutlay & Öniş 2021).

Turkey's foreign policy evolution has not taken place in a vacuum—the international order has undergone a transformation, too. When the Soviet Union effectively conceded defeat in the Cold War, the United States was left as the world's sole superpower; contemporary commentators dubbed its subsequent period of dominance the "unipolar moment" (Krauthammer 1990). Washington maintained its edge over potential rivals through the 1990s and into the early 2000s. The 9/11 attacks on the U.S. homeland thus came as a shock—and prompted, first in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, a military response premised in a deeply held belief that American power could eliminate the threat posed by terrorist groups and rogue states (Boot 2023; Wertheim 2023). While the United States was mired in two long wars (and, in 2008, succumbed to a financial crisis), however, countries in other parts of the world were gaining economic and political influence, chipping away at Washington's dominant position (Zakaria 2008).

Although some scholars maintain that the liberal international order (Ikenberry 2018) and American primacy (Brooks & Wohlforth 2023)—the shorthand for describing international relations in the post–Cold War era—still persist, albeit in an altered form, it is becoming increasingly common to describe the world in terms of multipolarity (Ashford & Cooper 2023), great-power competition (Allison 2020), and the decline of American hegemony (Cooley & Nexon 2020). The precise nature, magnitude, and foreign policy implications of the United States' loss of relative influence remain subjects of heated debate in both academic and policy circles. One clear effect of changing international dynamics, though, is the arrival of new opportunities for middle powers such as Turkey to claim larger roles in world affairs and, occasionally, disrupt the prevailing order (Posen 2009; Aydin 2021; Aydın-Düzgit 2023).

The trajectory of U.S.-Turkish relations over the past two decades not only has been determined by discrete events and policy decisions, therefore, but also has taken place against the backdrop of a broader structural shift. These two factors are interconnected. Ankara's increasing independence from Washington—even as Washington remains the more powerful of the pair—has created more opportunities for the two countries' interests to clash and made it more difficult to resolve their differences (Altunışık 2013; Kara 2023). In a telling illustration of Turkish leaders' attitudes toward the alliance, İbrahim Kalın, a former presidential spokesperson and the current director of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization, wrote in 2010 (before his service in either position) that the health of the bilateral relationship would "depend on the extent to which the American policymakers will be willing to accommodate Turkey as a new rising power centre" (Kalın 2010). Yet even as Turkey asserts itself and, at times, explicitly frames its policy choices in opposition to U.S. hegemony, it has calibrated its moves and avoided a full break with the United States (Kibaroglu & Sazak 2015; Buhari Gulmez 2020).

Plenty of policy divergences have provided grounds for U.S.-Turkish conflict in the past decade in particular. On the Turkish side, two issues are frequently cited as sources of persistent grievance with the United States: first, Washington's refusal to extradite the Pennsylvania-based Fetullah Gülen in the wake of the July 15, 2016, coup attempt in Turkey, and second, Washington's partnership with Kurdish fighting forces in northern Syria (Buhari Gulmez 2020; Kara 2023; Özdamar 2023). The Turkish government blames Gülen—the leader of an Islamist organization whose members remained in high-placed positions in the Turkish military and government after falling out with the AKP, its former ally, in 2013–2014—for orchestrating the coup attempt. U.S. leaders were slow to denounce the putsch and then declined to help Turkey bring its alleged mastermind to justice, angering Ankara, which expected more sympathy and cooperation from its ally (Özdamar 2023). As evocative as this issue has been, however, scholars generally identify Syria as the most consequential point of contention between Turkey and the United States in recent years (e.g., Kara 2023; Özdamar 2023). The crux of the disagreement is the United States' close cooperation with the Syrian Kurdish PYD and its militant wing, the YPG, in the fight against ISIS in northern Syria. Ankara considers the Syrian Kurdish groups an existential security threat due to their affiliation with the PKK in Turkey, which both Turkey and the United States have designated a terrorist organization. The result is a fundamental misalignment of U.S. and Turkish security interests (Özdamar 2023), as well as an ever-present risk of direct clashes between U.S. and Turkish forces during military operations in northern Syria.

The United States' most prominent recent grievance with Turkey, meanwhile, has

been Ankara's acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile defense system (Danforth 2021). The contract for the purchase was first negotiated in 2017, over the objections of the United States, and Washington placed sanctions on Turkey in 2020 after the weapons were delivered. The S-400 issue represents yet another misalignment of U.S. and Turkish security outlooks: in the "strategic triangle" between the United States, Turkey, and Russia, Ankara might "[see] no contradiction in purchasing a stand-alone Russian system and in fulfilling its responsibilities as a NATO member," but Washington and other NATO powers do not take the same view (Goren 2018). In this instance, Turkey's efforts to diversify its international partnerships were seen as both an operational problem (a Russian-made, Russian-maintained system could not be integrated with NATO weapons systems) and a strategic and diplomatic slight (by coordinating with a U.S. adversary, in Washington's view, Turkey was not acting as an ally ought).

As long as both sides stand by their current policy positions, these persistent disagreements make a return to the alliance's Cold War heyday unlikely. But Ankara and Washington's recent steps toward rapprochement demonstrates that they are not on the verge of cutting ties, either. The more probable scenario is that the two countries will continue to hold together an uneasy status quo (Danforth 2021). More than just their sometimes-conflicting interests, differences in perspectives between the two countries entrench bilateral tensions (Özdamar 2023). U.S. policymakers still tend to view Turkey through a Cold War lens, expecting "the same degree of allegiance" that Ankara displayed during that singular period (Ertem & Karadeniz 2019). Turkey, on the other hand, "yearns ... to be a standalone power" in its neighborhood (Aydıntaşbaş 2021). The country's leaders expect their American counterparts to recognize Turkey's rightful status and to support or, at least, respect Turkish interests in the region. If American and Turkish priorities were to complement each other, the disconnect in the two sides' worldviews would not necessarily pose a problem. But because they often do not, friction is inevitable. Moments of friction test the relationship, serving as obstacles for the two sides to either overcome or allow to push them deeper into discord. Such inflection points, when the story of the United States and Turkey is open to reinterpretation, are therefore particularly fruitful subjects for a study of how the media depicts the bilateral relationship.

## 1.2 The Role of the Media

### 1.2.1 Foreign Policy and Media Effects

Bilateral discord does not only play out in closed-door meetings. It enters the public conversation, with each new twist recorded and debated in national media. The narratives that emerge from this process are worth paying attention to, not least because the media can shape the way foreign policy topics are viewed by both policy elites and the wider public. By making issues more or less prominent in their overall coverage, a process known as agenda-setting, outlets can influence media consumers' perceptions of those issues' relative importance (McCombs & Shaw 1972). And by framing an issue in a particular way—giving weight to particular causes, effects, proposed remedies, or normative judgments in connection to the topic at hand—media reports can inform the way people think about an issue (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley 1997; Entman 2003).

Like work on the intersection of media and foreign policy in general, research that zeroes in on the direct effects of media on public perceptions has largely been limited to issues of war and has overwhelmingly focused on the United States (e.g., Mueller 1973; Hallin 1986). Perhaps the most prominent theory debated in this literature is the "CNN effect," an idea first raised in the context of television reporting during the Gulf War in the early 1990s, suggesting that news reporting could drum up public support for the United States to enter a war as a combatant or engage in humanitarian intervention. Attempts to test this theory, however, have yielded little evidence of media coverage shaping public opinion and, by extension, policy choices (Livingston & Eachus 1995; Robinson 1999; Gilboa 2005). This avenue of research has not invalidated the basic premise that media affects foreign policy, but it does suggest that the relationship between the two is more nuanced than a dynamic in which exposure to the horrors taking place in a far-flung country rallies a national public to send troops to war.

Part of that nuance relates to the narrative-shaping power of media—the ability of news reports, over time, to set the parameters of common knowledge on a given subject and a baseline from which future developments are understood. Robinson argues that the media's primary function is not "driving policy," but rather propagating narratives that "structure the way policy-makers, journalists and the public perceive the world" (Robinson 2013). Media, true to its name, plays a mediating role between the events of the day and the consumer. A news report is not a perfect representation of a real-world event; the process of producing a news story necessar-

ily involves human choices about what to include, what to omit, and how to connect the dots between discrete pieces of information. That manipulation changes the way a reader, whether a policymaker or a member of the public, interprets the event; as Soroka puts it, the consequences of news reporting, termed "media effects," "lie somewhere in the gap that exists between media content and reality" (Soroka 2003).

### 1.2.2 Foreign Policy as an Elite Debate

The U.S.-Turkish relationship, although strategically important, is not a particularly salient topic in American public discourse. The visibility and influence of Turkish-centric interest groups in Washington are also relatively low. Because of this, the United States' Turkey policy is shaped largely within professional circles—circles that include not just policymakers but also academics, think-tank researchers and pundits, and journalists. In such an environment, the narratives that media coverage generates may be particularly potent. The perception of U.S.-Turkish relations as improving or deteriorating, as serving U.S. interests or not, informs the decisions of policymakers. There will always be a variety of opinion regarding the state of the bilateral relationship, but media coverage can set a tone and frame the range of acceptable debate.

Foreign policy is already more elite-driven than other issues on the political agenda in the United States. This dynamic enhances the media's role in shaping public discourse: a typical citizen is likely to have personal or secondhand experience with the country's education or healthcare systems, for example, and can generate opinions about education or healthcare policy on the basis of that experience. Far fewer people have direct experience with foreign policy. Media is thus the primary source of information about foreign policy for most of the public, as well as the primary means by which the elites who make foreign policy communicate their preferences to a wider audience (Aday 2018; Soroka 2003; Zaller 1992). This dynamic is not unique to foreign policy, but the media's influence is magnified in the absence of other channels through which citizens learn about international affairs.

Previous scholarship reveals complex interactions between media outlets and policymakers within the U.S. foreign policy ecosystem. The foundation of this literature is Bennett's indexing theory, which posits that the range of viewpoints the media presents on a given policy topic is determined by the range of viewpoints within the government (Bennett 1990). On foreign policy topics, Bennett argues, this range is particularly narrow—even more so when the country is at war. The practical reason that news reports and editorials tend to hew closely to the opinions of policy elites

is sourcing. Journalists covering a foreign policy beat typically speak to elected officials and other policymakers when they report their stories (Aday 2018; Hallin 1986). As a conflict carries on, however, the imperative to find novel story angles can push reporters outside their typical source pool—and push editors to commission alternate voices—leading to a gradual expansion of the scope of viewpoints that appear in the news (Aday 2018; Gans 1979).

More recent studies have built on indexing theory. In Entman's model, for example, the "interpretive frames" that ascribe meaning to a given policy topic filter from the top of the U.S. government down to lower-level policymakers, to news organizations, and finally to the public. Media coverage still maps onto the range of elite opinion, but, critically, influence can also move in the other direction, working up the hierarchical chain (Entman 2003). News organizations may adopt and disseminate politicians' opinions about foreign policy, but those organizations' reporting practices can also shape the way policy elites think about the issues of the day. A bias toward conflict is one element of news coverage that causes media intervention to change the way a topic is viewed, argue Baum and Groeling (2010). Disagreement among policy elites is newsworthy; consensus may be worth remarking on once, but it quickly loses its news appeal. Thus, when media coverage indexes elite viewpoints, it can overrepresent or exaggerate differences of opinion. To the reader or viewer, foreign policy topics—which in the United States have traditionally enjoyed more bipartisan agreement than domestic issues have done—may come across as more polarized, and the chances of compromise may seem lower, than they really are.

Research on elite dynamics in foreign policymaking also offers a response to those who doubt the ability of news reporting to change public opinion. The skeptics may be right—but it may not matter. There are only a handful foreign policy topics that are highly salient among the American public. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one example: since the attacks of October 7, 2023, and the onset of war in Gaza, U.S. policymakers looking to gauge public sentiment can log onto social media, walk past a protest on Capitol Hill, or check the emails and voicemails flooding into government offices as private citizens reach out to make their opinions heard. Those policymakers, in other words, do not need to rely on *The New York Times* to discover what their constituents may be thinking. But there are plenty of issues where this is not the case. Many important topics in U.S. foreign policy, the U.S.-Turkish relationship included, may never even make it into a reputable poll.

In such cases, media coverage can serve as a proxy for public opinion, and the fact that policymakers believe that the media has the power to shape public perceptions is what makes that power real (Gilboa 2005; Aday 2018). That world leaders—

including the leaders of Turkey—take the time to write (or direct their communications staff to write) for popular U.S. publications about matters of foreign policy lends credence to this point. Policymakers who consume the news may then make decisions on the basis of coverage that "creates impressions that [an] idea is held widely and intensely by large swaths of the public" (Entman 2003). On many foreign policy issues, an intra-elite feedback loop develops: reporters cover government decisions and debates, and government officials turn to the media to see how policy issues are playing in the public sphere.

It is beyond the scope of this study to find evidence that U.S. and foreign leaders read news reports and editorials concerning U.S.-Turkish relations in this way. But the literature on media effects suggests, at least, that what is written in American newspapers and magazines about Turkey has consequences, and that while interesting in its own right, it is also worth a closer look because of the role it plays in a larger foreign policy ecosystem. Previous research also proposes a set of assumptions we can make about the feedback mechanisms between media and policy elites in the case of U.S.-Turkish relations. We can expect media coverage of Turkish policy and the bilateral relationship to hew closely to official opinion, relying on policymakers as sources of information. We can anticipate an emphasis on the differences among policymakers when they appear. And, more generally, we can expect conflict between Ankara and Washington to garner more attention than the more routine aspects of their diplomatic relationship.

## 1.3 The Persistence of Bad News

### 1.3.1 Argument

The United States and Turkey entered the twenty-first century as close allies, and the American media's characterization of Turkey and the U.S.-Turkish relationship reflected as much. Media narratives presented Turkey in a positive light and assumed that Ankara's foreign policy decisions would support Washington's priorities. But, as this study will argue, bad news coverage is persistent. When significant bilateral disagreements emerged in the early 2000s and again in later decades, these developments ran counter to the media's expectations, which opened the door to criticism of Turkey in U.S. newspapers and magazines. When the initial, emotionally charged responses faded away, these incidents became reference points in future news coverage—the media did not forget historical examples of discord. And even

when Ankara and Washington began to mend fences, U.S. media narratives about Turkey and U.S.-Turkish relations did not fully return to their previous baseline. Real-world friction can launch a negative news cycle, and once that process is underway, the effects on media narratives are difficult to reverse.

This finding expands on research in political communications that highlights a media bias toward covering conflict. That dynamic is well-established in the literature, but it typically applies to decisions about what to cover—evident in the overrepresentation of negative news stories or disagreement among policy elites—rather than how such developments are discussed (Aday 2018; Baum & Groeling 2010; Hamilton 2004). This study focuses instead on narrative shifts in a set of case studies built around conflictual and conciliatory moments in the U.S.-Turkish relationship. It finds that the bias toward conflict manifests not only in what topics appear in print, but also in the narrative treatment of the subject—here, Turkey and U.S.-Turkish relations—even after the initial episode of disagreement has passed.

The way that U.S. media narratives shift in response to incidents of crisis or reconciliation between the United States and Turkey varies according to the overall status of the bilateral relationship. In different historical contexts, American news outlets have different expectations of Turkey and different thresholds for the kinds of bilateral disagreement that merit condemnation. During periods when the relationship was generally strong, as in the early 2000s, the U.S. media assumed that Turkey would act in lockstep with the United States—and it reacted harshly when that did not happen. When Ankara attempted to make amends, however, the strength of the earlier narrative of U.S.-Turkish friendship made it easier for some (but not all) of the coverage to reassume a positive tone and downplay examples of discord as temporary aberrations. In contrast, during the 2020s, when the U.S.-Turkish relationship was on rockier footing, the U.S. media already expected that Turkey would not always agree with the United States or support U.S. policies. It therefore took a particularly salient point of disagreement for the discussion of Turkey to turn negative, and it became more difficult for signs of bilateral reconciliation to change the tune of a skeptical American press. Thus, although bad news tends to linger on regardless of the context, the magnitude and durability of a real-world incident's effect on media narratives depends on the broader political environment.

### 1.3.2 Outline of the Study

This study features a paired comparison of media coverage across two time periods, both of which include stretches of time in which the U.S.-Turkish relations sour over

a foreign policy dispute and then bounce back when the issue is resolved. The first case focuses on Turkey's role in the planning and execution of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the second focuses on Turkey's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Chapter 2 explains the case selection, the news outlets included in the study, the methods used to analyze the source material, and theoretical expectations concerning the nature of media coverage.

Chapter 3 turns to media coverage of Turkish policies relating to the U.S.-led war Iraq in 2003. This case is split into two periods. The first includes the months surrounding the U.S. invasion on March 20, during which time Turkey and the United States fell out over the Turkish parliament's rejection of Washington's request to use Turkish territory as a staging ground. The second period includes a phase of U.S.-Turkish rapprochement in late 2003 and early 2004. Prior to the start of the war, bilateral relations were perceived to be strong, and the baseline narrative in mainstream U.S. newspapers and magazines presented Turkey as a longtime faithful ally. Expectations for Ankara's cooperation with—and even its deference to—Washington's foreign policy objectives came across clearly in news reports and commentary. Turkey's decision not to allow U.S. troops access to its territory as a base of operations thus came as a shock, and the United States' indignant response to this seeming betrayal by a dutiful partner was magnified in news coverage—so much so that American media coverage itself became a source of additional tension between the two allies. Reflecting the remaining goodwill between them, however, some later reporting on news developments returned to a relatively sympathetic framing, though traces of negative coverage persisted. This turn to positive coverage became even more apparent in late 2003, as the two countries began to reconcile. But even during this second period the remnants of past disputes are still apparent in the media narrative.

By the early 2020s, U.S. expectations of Turkey had declined, a product of both discrete disputes and larger structural forces that eroded the foundations of the alliance. U.S.-Turkish tension provides the backdrop to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the subject of Chapter 4. Like the case in the previous chapter, this case is split into two periods. The first includes another example of U.S.-Turkish disagreement, this time over Finnish and Swedish accession to NATO. The second period includes the resolution of that disagreement, when Turkey accepted Sweden as a member of the alliance in early 2024 as part of a broader reconciliation between Ankara and Washington. During both periods, the American media expected a disparity between the two countries' foreign policy priorities. Differences in Washington and Ankara's initial action as a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine loomed were reported in a perfunctory manner, rather than eliciting the affronted language that

any daylight between U.S. and Turkish policies had provoked in 2003. Essentially, as Ankara and Washington grew more distant, it took more for U.S. media to report on dissent between them and the less angry the framing of those disagreements became. Rocky relations were already built into the media narrative. But even though the threshold for media outrage rose, some expectations of Turkey remained—Ankara was still, after all, a U.S. ally—and a Turkish position that the U.S. foreign policy elite deemed particularly offensive could still elicit an angry U.S. media cycle. The resulting negative news coverage was, for the most part, less excessive than in 2003. But it had, if anything, more staying power, as new evidence of bilateral discord fit neatly into a preexisting narrative of deteriorating relations.

When Ankara and Washington reconciled, the media did not forget the previous crisis. U.S. news coverage of U.S.-Turkish rapprochement in early 2024, addressed in the second section of Chapter 4, reflected this dynamic. Even though both allies made significant efforts to make amends during this period, most of the reporting on these developments was skeptical, frequently citing the previous months of strife to cast doubt on the durability of recent positive steps. Although some pieces of commentary were more optimistic, others downplayed the significance of Turkey and the United States resolving their differences and doubled down on the argument that the two countries would remain at odds. A pessimistic narrative once introduced would not be easily excised from the U.S. media conversation.

Chapter 5 considers another potential means of building a positive narrative about U.S.-Turkish relations: Turkish government officials' direct interventions in the American media discourse. In the early 2000s, when U.S.-Turkish relations were relatively strong, friendly appeals could offer a corrective, or at least an alternative, to otherwise unfavorable media narratives. But as the relationship soured, and as Turkey's own pivot to a more independently minded foreign policy banished the possibility of making public statements that could be construed as supplication, most writing by senior Turkish officials assumed ambivalent or even openly hostile tones. The mere fact that Turkish leaders consistently contributed to U.S. and Anglophone news outlets, however, is evidence of the media's importance in foreign policymaking. Political leaders would not attach their names to articles in foreign media if they did not expect it to have some kind of effect. The broader implications of this study's findings about media narratives, including those for policymaking, are discussed further in the conclusion, along with the limitations of the study and opportunities for further research.

# 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

How can we tease out changes in the way U.S. media sources frame Turkish policies and U.S.-Turkish relations as real-world events unfold? This chapter will illustrate how media frames are discussed and understood in this study, as well as offer precursory comments on news practices and professional standards, such as the news-versus-opinion divide, the use of external sources in reporting, and the digitization of news media over the past two decades, that bear on the analysis of individual articles. It will also detail the study's methodology, including the choice of episodes in the bilateral relationship as cases, the choice of American newspapers and magazines as sources of data, and the text analysis methods employed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

## 2.1 U.S.-Turkish Relations in the Media: Theoretical Expectations

### 2.1.1 Changing Frames

Each case in the chapters that follow involves changes in U.S. newspaper and magazine coverage of Turkish policies during and after moments of bilateral disagreement or agreement. To identify change in tone and content, the analysis will first focus on the baseline expectations set for Turkish foreign policy and dynamics between Ankara and Washington by each publication's reporting—and then consider whether and how the characterization diverges when Turkish policies subvert those expectations.

In practice, baseline expectations are often reflected in the summary language that provides context for breaking developments in a given news article. The purpose of providing such a recap is simple: to remind the reader, who may or may not have been following an ongoing news story, of the events leading up to whatever recent

change is reported as news. An article in *The New York Times* on a new development in the U.S.-Turkish relationship, for example, will likely include background information about basic features of the relationship (such as Turkey's status as a NATO ally) and about past incidents that have some bearing on the present topic. Even though the details that are included and how they are presented differ from one article to the next, behind this variation it is possible to identify a common understanding of the state of U.S.-Turkish relations. This characterization serves as a starting point for the discussion of new information.

There are several ways a change in tone can manifest in news reporting. The most obvious is the introduction of emotionally charged language, such as a move from neutral adjectives in articles prior to the disagreement to negative ones as the crisis gets underway. Recurring mentions of a past disagreement, too, can contribute to an unfavorable impression of Turkey or its government's decisions. In this case, the language itself may be relatively neutral, but the choice to include an example that reminds the reader of a negative interaction still has the effect of casting bilateral relations in a negative light. Furthermore, quotes from government sources affect how the reader interprets a news item. Official quotes can emphasize the harmful effect of a development that the reporter otherwise conveys in neutral terms, for instance, making the incident come across as more dire than the facts alone might suggest.

These dynamics work in the other direction, too. Positive terminology accompanying positive developments in U.S.-Turkish relations can convey a friendly interpretation of Ankara's decisions. Mentioning Turkish policies that elicited approval in the United States—brokering the grain transport deal between Russia and Ukraine in summer 2022 is an obvious example—reminds readers of Turkey's beneficial contributions to international affairs. And citing government sources who play down a bilateral disagreement can make tensions seem less likely to harm the broader relationship. Journalists, of course, do not have control over what policymakers say, but they do make a choice when they include official statements in an article or treat them as newsworthy in themselves.

### 2.1.2 News vs. Opinion

Publications are not monoliths; their coverage of a given topic is often riven with internal divergences and contradictions. The analysis in the following chapters emphasizes in particular the distinction between news and opinion. Especially in newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, it is important

to separate the coverage trends in these two divisions. The works published in magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *The National Interest*, by contrast, can all be considered under the category of "opinion" for the purposes of this study, given that these articles, even when grounded in factual reporting, foreground the author's own interpretations. The difference arises from the institutional structures of these newspapers and of similarly reputable publications. On a procedural level, the reporters and editors on staff at either newspaper will work in either the news division or the opinion division—there is no overlap between the two. Editorial decisions on one side are made independently of the other; journalists in the news department may be entirely unaware of the goings on of the op-ed section until the point that articles are published, and the same is true in the other direction.

News coverage and opinion coverage can therefore be expected to respond in different ways to changes in on-the-ground circumstances. The purpose of news reporting is, naturally, to report the news, and to do so in a reasonably fair and balanced manner. Emotionally charged language is therefore less common in news articles than it is in opinion articles; indeed, professional standards often dictate that such language be removed on the grounds that it perpetuates the biases of the reporter. This is not to say that reported news lacks any ideological bent. Taking into account the practice of news reporting does, however, require bearing in mind that any assignment of normative value to news developments will be carefully calibrated by the writer—and will be identifiable to the reader in the form of subtle differences in word choice, use of sources, and inclusion or omission of relevant information. Change in the baseline characterization of Turkish foreign policy or U.S.-Turkish relations therefore happens slowly in news reporting. A disruptive event may not alter news journalists' frame of reference immediately; instead, crisis moments are likely to be reported in relatively neutral terms, with shifts in overall tone discernible only in aggregate or over time.

A newspaper's editorial and opinion pages, on the other hand, are not constrained by the same mandate to "stick to the facts" when a story breaks. Rather than conveying the details of an event as it unfolds, the editors of this section are tasked with offering one or several interpretive angles. A crisis moment thus becomes an opportunity to expand the aperture of debate on a given topic: when Ankara and Washington publicly disagree on a highly salient issue, for instance, contributors from within and outside the publication's editorial staff comment on who is responsible for the disagreement and what it means for the bilateral relationship going forward. They might downplay the long-term effects of the disagreement, but they might also take antagonistic positions that fan the flames. Such responses may not hew closely to opinions held within the U.S. government at the beginning of a crisis, contrary to

what the media effects literature predicts in the context of war reporting (Gans 1979; Bennett 1990; Aday 2018). Rather, because a low-salience issue (from the American perspective) such as U.S.-Turkish relations is debated within elite circles to begin with, a bilateral tiff can provide a window for media elites (the writers of editorials) and policy or academic elites (writing for newspapers and magazines as outside contributors) to voice criticism of current policy.

### 2.1.3 Other Media Practices

This dynamic in opinion-editorial pages underscores another important consideration: the output attributed to "the media" includes contributions from non-media professionals. Scholars and policymakers, both in and out of government, write regularly for prominent U.S. publications—including the four featured in this study. Publications thus not only advance narratives themselves, but also serve as forums for debates that bring in other foreign policy actors. These debates are not restricted to Americans, either. Turkish leaders and other government figures contribute to the public discussions that play out in the pages of U.S. newspapers, stepping in to promote Turkey's official agenda or push back against unfavorable coverage. Sometimes they do so during periods of tension, when the central narrative of U.S.-Turkish relations appears to be up for grabs. How a crisis and its outcome are perceived, after all, factor into reporters' and editors' baseline expectations of the bilateral relationship in later media coverage.

Thinking of the media as an industry also helps to shed light on certain editorial tendencies. In particular, it can clarify the mechanisms behind news outlets' bias toward conflict, and toward novelty more generally. An article that reports no change stands no chance of holding a reader's interest, and media is a business that relies on readers' attention (Hamilton 2004). What makes a topic newsworthy is the introduction of something new, whether twists and turns in a rapidly developing story or a fresh perspective on a slow-moving one. The picture of world affairs presented in the media is therefore only a model of reality, and it overrepresents the fluctuations in world events while underrepresenting the static trends that also drive international affairs. Reports of discord, after all, make for more enticing headlines than do the relatively mundane, routine aspects of a bilateral relationship.

Although the two major newspapers included in this study are generally understood to stand apart from each other on the ideological spectrum—*The New York Times* on the left and *The Wall Street Journal* on the right—in practice the strength of journalistic standards and the strict enforcement of the divide between news and

opinion serve to reduce the distance between their coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations. Because the topic not highly salient in the United States, it is not strongly polarized, either, and policy debates largely take place within the elite, expert circles that all mainstream publications engage in their coverage. And whereas the ideological bent of the opinion section as well as the top-level editorial staff in the news division may be expected to reflect the publication's left- or right-leaning inclinations, the same is not necessarily true of reporters or lower-level news editors. Among the latter group, the same person could just as easily work for the *Times* as for the *Journal*, and all adhere to the same basic professional standards. Thus, even though some difference between the two newspapers' coverage of Turkey and U.S.-Turkish relations is to be expected, there is quite a lot of overlap between them, too.

Finally, close analysis of U.S. media coverage must take into account the changes in industry practices that have occurred over the past few decades. Although the operational divide between news and opinion has been a constant over this period, editorial objectives and procedures have not remained static. On the news side in particular, the transition to internet-first publishing has changed the way stories are presented; a single article can be updated to incorporate new developments over the course of the day or week, rather than presented in individual dispatches filed once or twice daily in line with print publication deadlines. In the early 2000s, at the time of the first case in this study, the digital transformation had only just begun; *The New York Times*, for instance, began publishing articles online in 1996. By the 2020s, at the time of the second case presented here, online-first publication was the norm. News analysis had grown in popularity, too, making it more likely that reported stories would apply the kind of interpretative lens that historically had been reserved for the op-ed pages.

## 2.2 Methodology

### 2.2.1 Case Selection

The chapters that follow will examine coverage of Turkish foreign policy and U.S.-Turkish relations in mainstream American publications over the past two decades, starting with the U.S. war in Iraq in 2003 and continuing to the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022. Both conflicts became top-priority foreign policy issues for the United States, and Turkey's geographic proximity and political connections gave Ankara an intrinsic interest in both outcomes—and made it a valuable partner to

Washington. Moreover, in both cases, the two allies' discordant positions on a specific aspect of the conflict caused a rupture in their relationship.

The first case covers the months leading up to and immediately after the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003. It was a time of tension for the United States and Turkey, as the Turkish government deliberated—and the parliament ultimately rejected—a deal that would allow U.S. forces to use Turkish territory as a base to enter northern Iraq. The invasion was the first major crisis in bilateral affairs upon the AKP's rise to power; indeed, the new government was still finding its bearings as the debate over the base agreement heated up, and Erdoğan assumed the office of prime minister mere days before U.S. troops entered Iraq. Research in subsequent years frequently cites the Iraq War as the start of a period of deterioration in U.S.-Turkish relations (e.g., Güney 2005; Aydın 2009; Larrabee, 2010; Altunışık 2013).

The second case covers U.S. and Turkish responses to the buildup to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the two countries' policy choices in its wake. Once again, the United States sought the assistance of Turkey, an important regional player, in advancing its diplomatic and security goals. And once again, Ankara responded ambivalently; Turkey condemned Russia's invasion and allowed Turkish companies to export drones to Ukraine, but it also kept diplomatic and economic channels with Moscow open. The disagreement that caused the most problems for U.S.-Turkish relations in the early months of the war, however, had to do with Finland and Sweden's requests to join NATO. As with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Ankara and Washington took opposing views of a core security issue.

Of course, these two cases are not entirely analogous. In the case of Iraq, a war could lead to violence spilling across Turkey's borders; in the case of Ukraine, Ankara certainly had a stake in the conflict—especially given its complicated balancing of relationships with Kyiv, Moscow, and its NATO allies—but Turkey was not directly threatened by the fighting. Yet it is still possible to compare narrow instances of discord between Ankara and Washington over foreign policy matters of deep interest to both governments.

These two cases are purposefully selected to consider the effects of conflictual developments on media narratives, as both begin with incidents of disagreement. But do these processes work the same way when the developments are conciliatory rather than conflictual? In late 2003, half a year after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Turkey recalibrated its policies to accommodate U.S. requests. And in the early months of 2024, the United States and Turkey embarked on something of a rapprochement. Ankara at last approved Sweden's accession to NATO, and Washington resumed the process of approving the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey—resolving the very

issues that had most damaged bilateral relations in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Both cases therefore include analysis of U.S. media coverage during periods of warming relations as well as worsening ones, in order to uncover differences in the mechanisms of news framing when the latest developments are good instead of bad.

The analysis in Chapter 5 considers another potential means of building positive (or at least less negative) narratives about U.S.-Turkish relations: intervention by Turkish policymakers themselves. Erdoğan, both as prime minister and as president, contributed several essays to major U.S. media outlets, as did other high-ranking Turkish officials. These essays were meant to communicate with the broader American public and to send a message to U.S. policymakers directly. The Turkish government used this strategy mostly to counter narratives it considered unfair or damaging to its interests, as well as when it sought tangible changes in U.S. policy. Although political actors were effectively using the media as a tool in foreign policy, these cases can also be examined as part of a holistic study of U.S. media coverage. The media outlets, after all, are not passive vessels that allow politicians—however prominent—to write whatever they want. Editors closely guard their gatekeeping role, and they can and do decline to print articles that do not meet their standards for publication. An essay by a global leader, therefore, is not just an official statement by a foreign government, but also a reflection of the host publication's vision of what is fit to print, and when.

Although the cases included in this study were chosen because they possess qualities that allow for a paired comparison, they are hardly the only examples of episodes in the past two decades in which the United States and Turkey disagreed about a foreign policy issue. They are, however, rare examples where U.S. media outlets devoted sufficient coverage to Turkish policies and U.S.-Turkish relations to conduct a close analysis. Major U.S. newspapers and magazines devote significant resources to covering international news, the largest among them maintaining overseas bureaus and large staffs outside the United States. Even so, they are not truly international publications; the view of the world they offer is still a view from somewhere, and that somewhere is the New York–Washington corridor. Thus, the extent of their coverage of international developments is heavily determined by the salience of those developments to an American public and policy audience. The Iraq War in 2003 and the war in Ukraine in 2022 were highly salient in the United States, and so Turkey's role in both conflicts received a fair amount of continuous coverage. Other examples of foreign policy dissension in the intervening years that could be considered just as significant for the trajectory of U.S.-Turkish relations, such as Ankara and Washington's dispute over how to deal with Iranian nuclear development in the late 2000s

and early 2010s or their clash over Turkey's purchase of the S-400 missile system from Russia, received comparatively little media attention. What U.S. media considers newsworthy does not always map directly onto what scholars of U.S.-Turkish relations or of international politics more broadly consider important. In selecting cases for a close examination of U.S. media narratives, therefore, the options are narrowed by the media outlets' own editorial choices.

### 2.2.2 Media Sources

The aim of the text analysis in the following chapters is to identify changes in tone, phrasing, and themes of emphasis in both news articles and op-ed articles, and to understand those changes within the context of the real-world events the articles address. Given that the sample of articles is relatively small and includes articles that engage directly with Turkish policies and the U.S.-Turkey relationship to varying degrees, qualitative analytical methods allow for a comprehensive exploration of the nuanced factors behind individual editorial choices. By tracing micro-level changes in media coverage within each case, the causal mechanisms that produce a shifting narrative about Turkey and U.S.-Turkish ties come more clearly into view.

The study examines U.S. media coverage of each of the cases across two newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and two magazines, *The New Yorker* and *The National Interest*. The *Times* is the largest and arguably most influential newspaper in the United States, often setting the tone for international news coverage in particular in local and regional papers. It is therefore a popular choice for scholarly analysis of U.S. print media (Bennett 1990). It also is generally regarded as having a liberal leaning, which may manifest in more favorable coverage of a Democratic administration's policies and harsher critique of a Republican's in the newspaper's editorial pages. The *Journal* is the *Times*' conservative-leaning counterpart and the nation's second-largest newspaper by circulation. Articles from both publications are included in this study in order to account for variations in coverage based on partisanship and individual personalities.

Analysis of articles from *The New Yorker* and *The National Interest* supplements the examination of daily news coverage. Neither enjoys the readership of *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*, but the two magazines are influential, particularly within elite media and policymaking circles, and together they offer a range of commentary across the ideological spectrum. *The New Yorker*, which publishes weekly in print and daily on its website, represents the mainstream left; the magazine has endorsed the Democratic nominee in every U.S. presidential election

since 2004 (the first time its editorial board made an endorsement), and the majority of its readership holds liberal political views (Pew Research Center 2014; The New Yorker 2004; The New Yorker 2008; The New Yorker 2012; The New Yorker 2016; The New Yorker 2020). *The New Yorker* maintains robust coverage of international affairs, but it does not purport to be a comprehensive source on such topics. *The National Interest*, by contrast, is focused primarily on U.S. foreign policy. It was founded in 1985 as a bimonthly print magazine, but in recent years it has shifted to digital-first publication. The magazine has a self-declared affinity with the realist school of international relations, and it is generally associated with conservatism—its current publisher, the Center for the National Interest, was founded by former Republican President Richard Nixon (The National Interest 2024). Thus, even though foreign policy topics figure into *The New Yorker* and *The National Interest*'s editorial missions in different ways, the two magazines' overall coverage reflects the ideological range of mainstream thinking on the United States' international engagement.

The analysis in the following chapters is based on 536 news articles in total. Chapter 3, which examines coverage around the invasion of Iraq, focuses on articles published between December 20, 2002, and April 19, 2003—a four-month period that includes the three months prior to and one month following the U.S. invasion on March 20—and between October 1, 2003, and March 31, 2004. During the first period, the four publications ran 276 articles that mentioned or focused specifically on Turkey's role: 142 in *The New York Times*, 129 in *The Wall Street Journal*, five in *The New Yorker*, and none in *The National Interest*. During the second period, the same publications ran 74 articles in total: 37 in *The New York Times*, 31 in *The Wall Street Journal*, two in *The New Yorker*, and four in *The National Interest*. Chapter 4, addressing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, first examines coverage over a longer period of nine months—November 24, 2021, to August 23, 2022—as articles that address Turkey's role in the conflict are relatively infrequent compared to the case of the Iraq War. The analysis is based on 129 articles: 47 in *The New York Times*, 67 in *The Wall Street Journal*, four in *The New Yorker*, and 11 in *The National Interest*. The chapter also includes analysis of articles published during a phase of U.S.-Turkish rapprochement, specifically the three months between December 24, 2023, and March 23, 2024. Seven articles are from *The New York Times*, nine are from *The Wall Street Journal*, and 21 are from *The National Interest*, for a total of 37. Finally, Chapter 5 turns to writing by high-level Turkish officials that was published between 2003 and 2022. The analysis is based on an examination of 20 articles, most of them in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* in addition to a few in other U.S. and British newspapers and magazines.

All articles in Chapter 4 were retrieved and read on the websites of the publications themselves (nytimes.com, wsj.com, newyorker.com, and nationalinterest.org). In Chapter 3, all *Wall Street Journal* articles were retrieved and read the same way, but for the other publications this was not possible, given the limitations of website search functions and archive digitization. (*The New York Times* does have a digital archive on its main website, but its search-by-date function was broken at the time of the research.) Articles from *The New York Times* and *The National Interest* were therefore retrieved and read via LexisNexis, and articles in *The New Yorker* were cross-checked on LexisNexis and then read on the magazine's own website. Articles by Turkish politicians were retrieved via a combination of website searches, LexisNexis searches, and records on the government website of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye.

### 2.2.3 Text Analysis

A news article or an opinion essay can be an unwieldy object of scientific study; the reporter's knowledge and perspective, the editor they work with, word limits and other practical constraints, an article's relationship to the publication's overall coverage of a topic, and more affect the content and framing of the final product. These variables inevitably create a lot of noise in any empirical analysis. Yet reconstructing the progression of news coverage on a given topic can still yield some insights into how and why American newsrooms respond to events on the ground in the ways that they do.

The following chapters employ critical discourse analysis to identify shifts in the tone and scope of news coverage as developments unfold and to compare these discursive changes from one historical case to the next. The analysis focuses on micro-level choices, including word selection, linguistic tools and structure, inclusion and exclusion of information, and sources quoted and paraphrased in the headlines and body text of individual articles. Placing these choices in the appropriate historical and professional context—an emphasis of critical discourse analysis as a method (Aydın-Düzgit & Rumelili 2019)—is particularly important. Because claims of causality are based in how events affect media narratives about Turkish policies and U.S.-Turkish relations, it is necessary to consider each article's position in a longer chain of political developments. That context is key to understanding the motivation within the article to use particular language and to include particular information, and then to identify changes in these choices across time.

The methodology in this study takes some inspiration from Bennett's (1990) analysis

of elite opinion featured in *New York Times* coverage of U.S. policies in Nicaragua in the 1980s. That study, unlike this one, was quantitative in nature, and it focused on expert comments within articles as its primary unit of analysis, rather than the articles themselves. But it also distinguished several important characteristics of the Times articles that are relevant here: separate treatment of news and editorial writing, an emphasis on the professional identities of sources, and a three-part coding of the "direction" of opinion and tone as positive, negative, or ambivalent.

This study discusses articles within a framework of a three-part classification assessing their overall portrayal of Turkey. An article may be positive, negative, or neutral; "neutral" replaces "ambivalent" in this description in order to include articles that do not employ emotive language or information as well as those in which positive and negative aspects roughly balance out. Each article is also classified according to the type of Turkish policy, determined in relation to the United States, that the text mentions or focuses on: alignment with the United States, opposition to the United States, or balancing. The last category, balancing, usually refers to a decision that entails taking independent action that may not quite follow Washington's agenda, but does not directly challenge it, either. With these two dimensions—the real-world event and the tone of the coverage of that event—established, it becomes easier to paint a picture of media trends over time.

The framework provides a way into a discussion of linguistic variation within and across individual articles. The connotations of words and phrases, the contextual information the author chooses to provide, and, in opinion essays, the content and the forcefulness of the argument are the pieces that together make up the article's overall tone. To give an example: a typical article discussing Turkish foreign policy in an American newspaper may use a noun or noun phrase to identify Turkey, and the words chosen as identification serve a purpose, whether to provide the reader a piece of relevant information or to express a normative assessment. Referring to Turkey as "a NATO ally," for instance, may be a value-neutral identifier, but in specific contexts it might also implicitly indicate a positive or negative judgment. Other identifiers are more explicit in the normative value they assign: a reference to Turkey as "a pivotal intermediary" is positive, but describing it as an "obstructionist" is decidedly negative.

This methodology, focused on the text itself, has the benefit of mirroring the way the audience at the time received the information conveyed by news stories. Although the primary purpose of this study is to examine the change in media coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations as disagreements wax and wane between the two allies, the practical implications of its findings lie with how this media response shapes the

views of decision-makers. Tracing the ways in which media coverage did or did not affect U.S. policymakers' handling of the bilateral relationship is outside the scope of this research, but reading these texts the way a media consumer would have done provides some grounds to speculate about policy elites' takeaways from the debates playing out in the press.

# 3. IRAQ WAR

## 3.1 The Case

The United States' invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, came after months of planning. Washington considered Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, a menace to regional and international security, and it sought to convince U.S. allies to join a preventive war to eliminate the threat. Turkey, Iraq's neighbor to the north and at the time one of the United States' partners in the war in Afghanistan, was a key part of the puzzle. U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz visited Ankara in July 2002 to discuss the possibility of military coordination between the two NATO allies in Iraq (Voice of America 2009). By all accounts, Wolfowitz left with the impression that some arrangement could be reached. Yet even as U.S. war planning advanced, opinion among the Turkish public and segments of the Turkish political elite—not unlike their counterparts across much of Europe and the Middle East—strongly opposed a prospective invasion. And when a formal agreement for Turkey to serve as a base for U.S. troops reached the Turkish parliament on March 1, 2003, lawmakers rejected the measure by a narrow margin, shocking both American policymakers and the top leaders in Ankara who had championed the deal. Although Turkey later agreed to a smaller support role in the U.S.-led war, the clear differences in U.S. and Turkish interests and priorities that the incident revealed left a lasting mark on the relationship.

Part of the reason that the Turkish parliamentary decision was so surprising was that U.S.-Turkish ties were strong in the early 2000s. Even after the threat of the Soviet Union—the bilateral relationship's raison d'être—faded away, Washington and Ankara both benefitted from a security partnership grounded in complementary regional interests (Müftüler-Baç 2005; Larrabee 2010). The United States served as a security guarantor for Turkey and a supporter of Ankara's EU aspirations, while Turkey's position in an unstable neighborhood and support for the United States in

the wake of the 9/11 attacks elevated its value to Washington (Müftüler-Baç 2005). Both governments were committed to their partnership; neither sought to undermine or replace it. But the power differential between them helped set the stage for a fallout. The United States entered the twenty-first century as the world's largely uncontested hegemon, a position that shaped the expectations its leaders held for U.S. allies. Turkey, although loath to damage its relationship with its most powerful ally, had security interests of its own to protect—interests that were not necessarily top priority in Washington.

The early 2000s were also a time of domestic change in Turkey. Economic crisis had ushered the recently established AKP into power in elections in November 2002, which meant that the Turkish government was considering the United States' basing agreement request at the same time that a brand-new administration was finding its footing. AKP leaders supported joining Washington's war effort, but they were not the only political actors determining foreign policy—the Turkish military wielded significant influence, too, and any formal deal would require parliamentary approval. The AKP held a large majority of the seats in parliament, but its own members were divided over the role Turkey should play in a potential war.

In the United States, meanwhile, the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, transformed President George W. Bush's foreign policy. Buoyed by an outpouring of global sympathy, the United States invaded Afghanistan—whose Taliban rulers had allowed al Qaeda, the group behind the attacks, safe haven—in October 2001. This invasion was just the beginning. Bush's hawkish team of advisers drove the administration's effort to punish the perpetrators and enablers of the 9/11 attacks, an effort that snowballed into a globe-spanning "war on terror" and a campaign against other rogue actors, including Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Although this policy agenda had detractors both inside and outside the administration, the trauma of the post–9/11 environment granted the president extraordinary leeway, and the Republican Party's legislative victory in the November 2002 elections validated Bush's chosen path. America was a wounded superpower out to eliminate perceived threats, and as the country's leaders turned their attention to Iraq, they were not inclined to let dissenters get in their way.

The stage was set for unmet expectations in both Turkey and the United States. In Ankara's view, war in Iraq risked spillover violence in Turkey, damage to the already suffering Turkish economy, and momentum toward Iraqi Kurdish independence, which could galvanize Turkey's own Kurdish population to pursue a similar goal. In essence, Washington was entering a war of choice despite the potentially dire ramifications for its supposed partner. The United States, meanwhile, saw

Turkey's refusal to grant access to U.S. troops as disloyalty on the part of a close ally, as well as a move that undermined tactical planning and endangered American lives. The U.S. partnership with Iraqi Kurdish forces further drove a wedge between Ankara and Washington, highlighting the mismatch in the two countries' strategic priorities (Müftüler-Baç 2005). The resulting rift in the bilateral relationship never fully healed.

The following sections examine media coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations over two periods: first, in the three months leading up to and one month following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and second, six months in late 2003 and early 2004. The first period includes a moment of crisis for the bilateral relationship—namely, the Turkish parliament's rejection of the U.S. basing agreement. Prior to this event, news coverage generally characterized the U.S.-Turkish relationship as a close alliance based on long-standing friendship and, to a large extent, shared democratic values. When Turkey first delayed a decision on participation in the war and then rejected the United States' proposal in the March 1 parliamentary vote, the perception of unmet expectations on the U.S. side opened the aperture for acceptable criticism of Turkey. Some news coverage maintained a sympathetic or neutral view toward the United States' partner, whereas other published articles adopted a severely critical tone. The range of attitudes remained wide in later coverage. Some news articles maintained a framing that assumed U.S.-Turkish friendship, even as U.S. and Turkish officials fumed in private. But media outlets continued to publish skeptical and critical accounts, too. This disparity suggests that the media is not so fickle that it ignores years or decades of context when something goes wrong, especially when bilateral relations are otherwise strong. But it also shows that real-life disagreement is not easily forgotten, either, and eventually that negative experience will be integrated into the narrative.

During the second period discussed in this chapter, tensions between the United States and Turkey began to ease. In October 2003, the Turkish parliament approved a deployment of Turkish peacekeepers to Iraq in support of the U.S. war effort. The plan was never carried out, but it demonstrated to Washington the lengths to which Ankara was willing to go to repair the relationship. Then, in November, suicide bombers linked to al Qaeda struck two targets in Istanbul within the span of a week. Both sympathy for Turkey and recognition of Ankara's "strategic importance" helped reduce U.S.-Turkish tensions further, and the reconciliation culminated in Prime Minister Erdoğan visiting Washington in January 2004 (Müftüler-Baç 2005). In the U.S. media, these real-world developments were largely interpreted as a return to the previous baseline, a sign that Turkey was resuming its place as a close ally of the United States, and thus a trend that the United States

should applaud and encourage. Positive or ambivalent new coverage, however, was peppered with reminders of earlier months' disagreements and the potential for lasting discord that those disputes portended. In other words, bad news was not forgotten.

The analysis of the first period is based on articles published between December 20, 2002, and April 19, 2003. In this four-month span, 142 articles in *The New York Times* and 129 articles in *The Wall Street Journal* mentioned or focused on Turkey's role in the planning and execution of the U.S. war in Iraq. The *Journal*, as a conservative-leaning publication, can be expected to have stronger sympathies with the Republican Bush administration at this time than the liberal-leaning *Times*, which would be more amenable to opposition viewpoints. *The New Yorker*, also associated with the political left, published articles weekly magazine at this time; five articles in the four-month period discussed Turkey in the context of the war. *The National Interest* published quarterly; 19 articles across two issues addressed the war in Iraq either directly or in passing, but none mentioned Turkey's role. The analysis of the second time period is based on articles published in the same newspapers and magazines between October 1, 2003, and March 31, 2004. The set of 74 articles under review includes 37 published in *The New York Times*, 31 in *The Wall Street Journal*, two in *The New Yorker*, and four in *The National Interest*.

## 3.2 Period of Discord: December 2002 to April 2003

### 3.2.1 The New York Times

As Ankara deliberated Washington's request for assistance in late 2002 and early 2003, *Times* reports acknowledged the predicament Turkish policymakers faced. The coverage was largely sympathetic, highlighting Turkey's affinity with U.S. political values and status as a U.S. ally by describing the country with such terms as "a secular Muslim democracy" and "a longtime member of NATO" (Filkins 2002). News articles also recognized Turkish leaders' concerns about acting against the wishes of a domestic public that was "overwhelmingly against the war" (Gordon, 2003) and Turkey's desire to avoid a reputation "as a kind of Muslim policeman for the West" (Filkins 2002). Even though some reports noted U.S. officials' frustrations as time passed without a firm answer from the Turkish side, news coverage remained fairly neutral in tone (Gordon, 2003). Some reports suggested that U.S. policymakers were deliberately avoiding public statements that would inflame bilateral tensions during

delicate negotiations. A routine news update on February 2, for example, noted that Bush administration officials were "highly sensitive to political considerations in Turkey" and had declined to discuss the matter (Schmitt, 2003).

Although the *Times*' news division maintained a neutral line through the first few weeks of 2003, the editorial pages allowed harsher comments. William Safire, a conservative columnist at the paper, put forward a provocative reading of Turkey's delayed decision in an essay published on January 16: Ankara was trying "to attach a price tag" to its alliance with Washington, he wrote, and Turkish leaders' "Mistake No. 1" was their "failure to rally the Turkish voters' support for Turkey's long-range best interest" (Safire 2003a). In contrast to news reports that simply treated public opposition to the war as a factor that made Turkish leaders' political calculations more difficult, Safire's column blamed Turkish politicians for their inability to change the people's minds—and, in effect, condemned the public for not recognizing its own self-interest.

By the second half of February, however, news reports in the *Times* adopted more negative language than in previous weeks. A February 17 article, for instance, described Turkish officials as "apparently unhappy with American offers of economic aid"—notably flippant phrasing for a news story (Bernstein & Weisman 2003). Another article published on February 18, written by different reporters, characterized ongoing bilateral talks as "diplomatic brinkmanship" and a "deadlock," citing officials in both countries who were "speaking of each other in increasingly harsh tones" (Filkins & Miller 2003). A February 20 story made those harsh tones explicit, at least on the American side. Giving an example of U.S. officials "fuming" behind the scenes, the article quoted one source who referred to Ankara's delays while Washington offered additional incentives of economic aid as "extortion in the name of alliance" (Sanger & Filkins 2003). The same day, the Times editorial board offered a similarly disapproving assessment of U.S.-Turkish negotiations, but it aimed its criticism at the Bush administration. "Turkey is entitled to seek economic compensation," the editorial read, but U.S. effort to buy its ally's support "risks trampling on the very values America claims to be fighting for" (The New York Times 2003b). Notably, language suggesting anger or frustration mainly came from the American policymakers that *Times* reporters spoke to, rather than from the journalists themselves. Tension was building up between the two countries, but the newspaper, still basing its coverage in the understanding of Turkey as a U.S. partner, was relatively slow to adopt a harsher tone.

The shock of the Turkish parliament's rejection of the U.S. basing agreement derailed the prevailing narrative to some extent. An initial report on March 2 maintained

the news division's typical evenhanded tone, noting that the vote had "stunned" American officials while also acknowledging the "difficult position" in which Turkish lawmakers found themselves (Filkins 2003a). Follow-up reporting on March 3 further emphasized the Turkish government's desire not to let the decision bring irreparable harm to bilateral relations—and cited Turkish officials' complaints about "the United States' overbearing and sometimes petty approach to the negotiations" (Filkins 2003b). But the *Times*' op-ed pages were not so understanding of the Turkish position. An editorial on March 2 described Turkey's plans to play a role in northern Iraq, separate from the United States, as "troubling," "unacceptable," and part of a "mischievous agenda" (The New York Times 2003c). Overall, news reports conveyed surprise at the turn of events, but did not directly place blame on Turkey; the opinion section, while not necessarily taking the side of Bush administration officials, expressed frustration in line with the U.S. foreign policy establishment at the time.

News coverage remained mixed in the days after the parliamentary vote. Highlighting a theme that would play well to a U.S. audience, one March 5 article noted that, from a Turkish perspective, the process behind the decision "ushered in a new era in Turkish democracy" (Filkins 2003c). A column on March 7 attributed Turkey's rejection of U.S. troops in part to the Bush administration's inadequate diplomacy (Kristof 2003a). Other coverage was more critical of Ankara. A March 5 article that quoted Secretary of State Colin Powell's avowal of continued U.S.-Turkish friendship undercut those official statements by describing the "extraordinary tension" between the two countries and depicting the failed vote as "an embarrassing setback" for the secretary (Weisman 2003a). In a similar vein, a March 9 article contrasted U.S. officials' placating public remarks with their "dismayed" private reactions to the Turkish parliament's vote. The same report cited "many foreign policy experts" who characterized the Turkish leadership as inept, referring to the "government's unwillingness, or inability, to protect what were thought to be its own strategic interests" (Miller 2003). While the U.S. government attempted damage control in its public signaling to Ankara, resentments clearly lingered in media coverage.

Smaller concessions on Turkey's part did little to make media portrayals more favorable. When Ankara agreed to open its airspace to U.S. military planes but denied those planes the right to refuel on Turkish territory, a March 20 article presented the decision as "a remarkable slap from a NATO ally," conveying a perception that Turkey, on the basis of its close relationship with the United States, ought to be offering more (Sanger & Burns 2003). The next day, a report on the Turkish parliament's ratification of the airspace agreement called the decision "long-delayed," falling "dramatically short" of U.S. requests, and the culmination of negotiations

that "clearly left bad feelings on both the American and Turkish sides" (Bruni 2003a). Then, an article published on March 22 variously described U.S. officials as frustrated, exasperated, angry, and infuriated with Turkey's actions (Bruni 2003b). The change in the United States and Turkey's relationship status became a news topic itself, and a March 24 article illustrated the extent of the decline. "Only a few months ago," it began, "the relationship between the United States appeared to be as healthy as ever, a dependable friendship with many happy returns." But at the time of writing, and "the amity between the nations [was] under severe strain," plagued by "profound tensions that are likely to endure" (Bruni 2003c). In effect, the relationship had a new baseline—the expectation of a mutually supportive alliance was gone.

A stronger critique of the Turkish position, however, came from the *Times*' opinion section. In March 17 essay, William Safire, the conservative columnist, singled out Turkey's non-cooperation, among several allies' hesitance to join the war effort, as "the unkindest cut of all." He argued that the United States should respond by withdrawing active U.S. support for Turkey's EU bid or its applications for International Monetary Fund loans (Safire 2003b). The following week's column was even harsher. Titled "Turkey's Wrong Turn," Safire declared that the recently elected Erdoğan had "transformed that formerly staunch U.S. ally into Saddam's best friend." The United States "[owed] Mr. Erdogan nothing" after Turkey's "betrayal," he wrote, drawing on insulting stereotypes by referring to the country as a "time-consuming bazaar" (Safire 2003c). The vitriolic tone is obvious, but the policy implications are notable, too. Whereas most articles that highlighted recent tensions also acknowledged Ankara and Washington's long-standing ties—suggesting, at least implicitly, that the two could push through this rocky phase—arguments to meaningfully downgrade the entire relationship were also given a platform in a major U.S. publication.

The March 24 column was so provocative that it elicited a direct response from Turkey's representatives in the United States. Naci Sarıbaş, at the time serving as deputy chief of mission at the Turkish embassy in Washington, wrote a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* condemning Safire's claims about Turkey's "hidden agenda" and reminding readers that "Turkey and the United States are longtime friends and allies" (Sarıbaş 2003). Turkish diplomats had made similar points in the *Times* before: a March 7 letter to the editor titled "Turkey, a Staunch Ally," written by the Turkish consul general in New York, Ömer Önhon, broadly criticized American media coverage of U.S.-Turkish negotiations over Turkey's participation in the war in Iraq. "To question Turkey's credentials as an ally now is shameful," the consul general insisted, and the common portrayal of Ankara as "haggling for

more economic assistance" was not just inaccurate but "frankly offensive" (Önhon 2003). Clearly, the Turkish government considered the coverage of Turkey during this period—including but not limited to articles that appeared in *The New York Times*—as potentially damaging to broader bilateral ties. The foreign ministry sought to counter what it saw as unfairly critical portrayals by emphasizing the alliance at the heart of the two countries' relationship.

As the war in Iraq got underway, competing narratives about Turkey circulated in the *Times*. In the two months prior to the Turkish parliament's decision on the U.S. basing agreement, only a handful of articles had referred Turkey in disapproving terms. In many articles, in fact, Turkey was presented as a potential victim of Iraqi retaliation—and the newspaper directed its criticism at fellow NATO members, particularly France and Germany, that dragged their heels when it came to protecting their Turkish ally. "Obviously, Turkey should get what it needs" to defend itself against spillover violence, a February 11 editorial read, calling European powers' reticence to join U.S. efforts to protect Turkey NATO's "greatest crisis in a generation" (The New York Times 2003a).

As an invasion loomed, however, articles more commonly referred to Turkey as a potential aggressor in northern Iraq. The risk of violence spreading to Turkey had not disappeared, but increased coverage of the Iraqi Kurds' preparations for and participation in the U.S.-led war brought with it sympathetic treatment of Kurdish grievances with the Turkish state. One column, published on March 11 and titled "Hatreds Steeped in Blood," suggested that making a deal to secure Turkish participation in the U.S. war would have effectively "escorted the Turkish foxes into the Kurdish henhouse" (Kristof 2003b). Another column on March 14 condemned the "sheer immorality" of the United States preparing to acquiesce to a Turkish troop presence in northern Iraq (Kristof 2003c).

In later weeks, when news articles referred to the basing agreement—directly or obliquely—they often did so with a hint of derision. An April 19 article, for instance, noted that the vote had "bewildered Americans" and that as a result Turkey's military had "lost a special bond with the United States that had endured for half a century" (Cowell 2003). Another published on April 20 described Turkey's denial of basing access as an example of "an elected government [bowing] to domestic pressure" (Shanker & Schmitt 2003). Much of the coverage through March and April 2003 painted Turkey in an undeniably negative light, with a focus on the travails of the Iraqi Kurds and frequent references to Turkey's refusal to join the U.S. war effort after the March 1 parliamentary vote creating a picture of an erstwhile ally that was not only unhelpful, but perhaps dangerous as well.

At the same time, some of the news coverage reverted to more neutral language, or focused on the continuing negotiations between Ankara and Washington that seemed to show two allies working out their differences. Some articles elicited sympathy for Turkey's strategic quandary and even approved of its democratic decision-making. A few months into 2003, the aperture of acceptable discourse about Turkey's role in Iraq had grown wider than it was in late 2002. It was a dramatic enough change from the pre-crisis norm that the Turkish government felt compelled to correct the record in the pages of the *Times*. But the presence of contrasting depictions also meant there were still opportunities for the conversation to move in any number of directions. This crisis moment in U.S.-Turkish relations may have upset the baseline characterization of the alliance, but that did not mean the direction of future coverage was fixed.

### 3.2.2 The Wall Street Journal

Coverage of Turkey in *The Wall Street Journal* was similar to that in *The New York Times* in late 2002 and early 2003. If anything, the *Journal*'s coverage adopted a somewhat more optimistic tone than the *Times*. News reports largely focused on Turkey's role in a potential conflict and expressed confidence that Ankara would, in the end, accede to Washington's basing request. A January 13 report, for instance, emphasized the United States' "vital interest in the direction Turkey takes" and Turkey's "[eagerness] to be seen as a reliable Western ally," even as Washington was "ratcheting up the pressure" in its deliberations with Ankara. The same article assured readers that "Turkey will almost certainly offer use of its air bases for an Iraq operation" (Pope 2003a). An editorial published on January 14 also sympathized with Turkey's position, noting "Turkey's fears—given what it has to lose should things go awry—are understandable." It argued that the diplomatic tussle was "probably not as bad as it looks" and that Ankara would soon recognize how much it "stands to benefit" from a post-Saddam Iraq (The Wall Street Journal 2003a). An opinion essay by the historian Sean McMeekin, published on February 6, suggested that the back-and-forth over Turkish participation in a war in Iraq could even become an opportunity to improve the basis of the U.S.-Turkish alliance. McMeekin criticized the Bush administration's strategy of trying to win Turkey's cooperation "only through juicy carrots," which would "belittle" Turkish leaders. Instead, he pushed for an equal partnership in which Washington would not just hear Ankara's concerns but accept its counsel (McMeekin 2003). Throughout this period of coverage, *Journal* reports and op-eds emphasized the importance of the United States' relationship with Turkey, both in the event of an Iraq invasion and

more broadly. But they also reinforced the expectation that Ankara would end up working with Washington one way or another, helping to set up the disappointment to come.

In keeping with this generally pro-Turkish position, coverage in *Journal* placed more emphasis than the *Times* on NATO preparations to defend Turkey from the fallout of war. Both papers affirmed Turkey's need for protection in the event of fighting across its border, and both criticized NATO countries that were reluctant to provide Turkey the aid it requested. The *Journal*, however, devoted more space in its pages to developments in these talks (17 articles to the Times' 12) and more frequently upbraided the primary holdouts in NATO, France and Germany. A February 7 editorial, for example, portrayed those two countries as threats to the alliance (The Wall Street Journal 2003b); another on February 10 condemned their foot-dragging as "shameful behavior" (The Wall Street Journal 2003c). An editorial published February 11—which also prematurely asserted that "U.S. troops will be based on Turkish territory" in the event of a war—blamed NATO holdouts for leaving the alliance "divided and paralyzed" and declared that Turkey's security needs "will be met by its real friends," referring, among others, to the United States (The Wall Street Journal 2003d). News coverage echoed this sentiment: a February 11 report, for example, cited U.S. officials' "exasperation over the impasse" (Shishkin & Champion 2003). The manner of describing other NATO countries' uncooperative positions implicitly aligned the United States with Turkey at this time—but it also foreshadows the later shift in coverage when Ankara rejected Washington's basing request. Turkey was not the only ally that U.S. policy and media elites held to a high standard, nor was it the only country whose decision not line up behind U.S. policies elicited frustration and anger among those elites.

Similar to the *Times*, as February passed by without formal Turkish agreement to the United States' basing proposal, *Journal* coverage increasingly characterized Turkey as a disappointing ally. A February 20 news article, echoing the language used two days previously in the *Times*, referred to the talks as a "deadlock" and reported that Turkey was "demanding" additional funds in exchange for its cooperation hosting U.S. troops (Cloud 2003). An editorial published on February 21 used harsher terms (and followed a headline, "The Turkish Bazaar," that drew upon Orientalist tropes), saying the negotiation "[had] the feel of late-innings extortion" and implying that, if Turkey did not join the United States, it would not be acting like "a real friend" (The Wall Street Journal 2003e). An opinion piece from February 25, written by former NATO commander Wesley Clark, described the "weeks of haggling" as "embarrassing and ugly," and warned that the terms of a tentative U.S.-Turkish agreement could later cause "difficulties" between the two countries

(Clark 2003). These were not the only articles published in the weeks leading up to the parliamentary vote, and other news reports continued to employ neutral language to describe the status of the negotiations and explain the sources of Ankara's concerns. Yet still they showed the frustration that was bleeding into U.S. officials' comments to reporters.

*Journal* reporting on the March 1 parliamentary vote in Turkey maintained a mild tone, similar to the news coverage in the *Times*. A March 3 article, for example, quoted a lieutenant general who acknowledged that Turkey's decision "was a setback" but downplayed the effects on U.S. war plans (Cooper & Jaffe 2003). Another article, published the same day, described the outcome as "a sobering setback" for Washington and a "political crisis" for Ankara—conveying some sympathy for the "unprecedented strain" that the Bush administration's demands placed on Turkey, which was "deeply reluctant to sour relations with the U.S." (Chazan & Pope 2003). Echoing the news/editorial division in *The New York Times*, however, the more cutting response was reserved for the *Journal*'s editorial page. The editorial board, in a March 4 article titled "The Inscrutable Turks," described the vote as "short-sighted domestic politics sabotag[ing] the national interest." Sure, Turkish politicians had reason to "be wary of U.S. promises" and to be concerned about public opinion, but their rejection of the U.S. measure was a failure of leadership. Adding to this rather patronizing assessment, the editorial board threatened retaliation, arguing that "now the U.S. will have every right to ignore Turkish desires and work with the Kurds militarily and politically after the war" (The Wall Street Journal 2003f). There was no downplaying the effects on U.S.-Turkish relations; instead, the *Journal* gave policymakers in Washington license to take a harder line toward Ankara.

Disparaging language about the Turkish decision persisted in the weeks that followed. A March 14 editorial, for example, criticized Ankara for "siding" with other opponents of the war "over the U.S." The essay closed with a veiled warning: "If the Turks can't help out their most important ally now, American swill have real reason to wonder what their friendship still means" (The Wall Street Journal 2003g). Many news updates maintained neutral tones, but negative words and patronizing phrasing crept into a few articles. One published on March 14, for instance, referred to the bilateral disagreement as a "continuing imbroglio" and the Turkish vote as "balking at a U.S. request" (Dreazen 2003a). Another on March 19 described a contrite Ankara reconsidering its decision after "appear[ing] to understand" just "how badly" it had damaged its relationship with Washington (Chazan 2003a).

A few days later, when Turkey approved the U.S. military's use of Turkish airspace, *Journal* reporting did not exactly celebrate the achievement. A March 21 article's

first line qualified Turkey's cooperative move with an example of dissent: "Turkey agreed to open its airspace to U.S. warplanes but defied Washington by voting to send its troops into northern Iraq" (Chazan 2003b). The op-ed section offered no reprieve, either. A March 25 opinion piece by Morton Abramowitz, a former U.S. ambassador to Turkey, criticized the U.S. government's and, to a lesser extent, the Turkish government's handling of the negotiations, describing the U.S.-Turkish partnership as "in tatters, swept away in one day" with the Turkish parliament's vote (Abramowitz 2003). The former Republican Senator Bob Dole was even less charitable; in a March 28 opinion article grading various U.S. allies' responses to the war, he gave Turkey a D+ (Dole 2003).

At this moment of heightened tension and bitter recrimination in U.S.-Turkish relations, on March 31 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took to the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* to promote a more positive narrative. The message was clear in the title: "My Country Is Your Faithful Ally and Friend." And the terms Erdoğan used in reference to the bilateral relationship—"strategic ally," "long-standing friendship," "close consultation," "strategic partner," "close relations"—all evoked enduring ties. The article stressed the two countries' shared values, highlighting the democratic nature of the parliamentary vote and the broader public discussion about the war within Turkey. It refuted claims, reported in U.S. media, that portrayed Turkey in a negative light or positioned it in opposition to U.S. interests: bilateral talks leading up to the parliamentary vote "at no point entailed a bargaining for dollars," Erdoğan wrote, and Ankara had "no intention to fight a war in northern Iraq" that would complicate U.S. cooperation with the Iraqi Kurds (Erdogan 2003).

Without access to conversations within the Turkish foreign ministry and the prime minister's office, one can only speculate that Erdoğan's team elected to submit this op-ed—which any mainstream U.S. newspaper, presumably, would have published—to the *Journal* because of the conservative-leaning publication's political proximity to, and thus its perceived influence within, the Republican Bush administration. But the message in the article could also have been delivered through government channels, and yet the Turkish government chose this highly visible public platform to speak not just to U.S. policymakers but also to a broader opinion-making elite and to the American public. The fact that the newly elected Erdoğan (or his advisers) made his case in this U.S. media outlet speaks to the importance Ankara placed on maintaining its ties with Washington, as well as its perception of the newspaper as having real influence on the course of the bilateral relationship.

The Turkish government had good reason to try to counteract bad press. In the month after the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, no fewer than 25 *Journal*

articles—nearly one a day—referred to Turkey's refusal to host U.S. troops. Most of them cited the decision's negative effects on U.S. war plans or its damage to U.S. interests. The invasion strategy Washington opted for in the end "wasn't supposed to be this way," but Turkey's refusal to participate had forced a change of plans, one April 16 article lamented (Dreazen 2003b). An April 4 article quoted Republican Representative Mike Rogers saying Turkey's action "cost American lives" (Rogers 2003). And as Turkey indicated it might launch a military operation of its own in northern Iraq, the Journal editorial board, still bitter from the parliamentary decision, offered a deeply skeptical view of Turkish intentions. "There was of course blame to go around in the diplomatic kerfuffle that has disrupted U.S.-Turkish relations," the April 11 article conceded. "But maybe had Turkey allowed 60,000 U.S. soldiers to be based in southeastern Turkey for a move into northern Iraq those troops would now be keeping order in the region and Turkey would have a lot less to complain about" (The Wall Street Journal 2003h).

The *Journal* may have generally been more sympathetic to the Bush administration and its policies than the *Times*, but it was clearly still ready to blame Washington for its role in creating the U.S.-Turkish crisis. Yet even though the paper's coverage acknowledged the United States' fault, and at times acknowledged (but often downplayed) Turkey's difficult political position, articles published after March 1, as a whole, portrayed Ankara as an unreliable partner. This negativity was more widespread than in the *Times*, where the news division largely maintained its neutral tone and the editorial board did not devote as much attention to Turkey in general as did their colleagues at the *Journal*. The *Journal* did, however, set up higher expectations for the partnership at the outset—it paid more attention to U.S. efforts to get fellow NATO allies on board to protect Turkey, and some of its reporting in early 2003 referred to Turkey's cooperation in a potential war as if the agreement had already been signed. With farther to fall when that expectation was not met, it is not so surprising that later coverage took on a more persistently negative tone.

### 3.2.3 Magazine Coverage

Although Turkey's relationship with the United States during this period received minimal attention in *The New Yorker*, the coverage that did exist followed the same basic trajectory of coverage in U.S. newspapers. *The New Yorker*, a solidly left-leaning magazine, published a February 9, 2003, essay on U.S. plans for Iraq that only referenced Turkey in passing, but it established a positive baseline characterization of Turkey as a democratic, pro-American country (Lemann 2003). A

March 9 article published after Turkey "unexpectedly rebelled" with the March 1 parliamentary vote focused its criticism not on Ankara, but on Washington. "It is the policies, attitudes, and ideological blindnesses of the Bush Administration that have turned a chronic but manageable alliance problem into an acute crisis," the author, frequent New Yorker contributor Hendrik Hertzberg, argued (Hertzberg 2003). More substantial critiques of Turkey came through reporting on the Iraqi Kurds, who generally enjoyed favorable coverage in the U.S. media. A March 30 reported essay, for instance, cited the "sometimes... great brutality" of the Turkish government's treatment of its domestic Kurdish population and quoted a Kurdish official who promised, "We will be better allies to America than the Israelis or the Kuwaitis—and especially the Turks" (Goldberg 2003). Even though New Yorker writing in the immediate aftermath of the parliamentary vote did not directly condemn Turkey for damaging the U.S. alliance, separate criticism of Ankara in some of its coverage is in line with the broader general souring on U.S.-Turkish relations.

*The National Interest*, meanwhile, did not contribute to the conversation about U.S.-Turkish relations at all. To be fair, as a quarterly publication, it was not set up to cover every development in the news cycle at this time. Its articles in the issues published on January 1 and April 1, 2003, did address other important U.S. relationships—including those with Australia, Germany, Japan, Mexico, and Russia—in the context of the war in Iraq. But because there can be any number of reasons why Turkey did not make this list, including something as mundane as an author missing a submission deadline, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from the topic's absence.

## 3.3 Period of Reconciliation: October 2003 to March 2004

### 3.3.1 The New York Times

The Turkish parliament's vote to approve a peacekeeping force in October was received more positively in *The New York Times* than the legislature's decision to reject the U.S. basing agreement back in March. An initial news article published October 7 reported the development in neutral terms, and when it referred to the March dispute, it did so using mild language—the vote was merely described as an "unexpected move" that had "caused tension between the United States and Turkey" (The New York Times 2003d). William Safire, the same columnist who just a few months earlier had called Turkey's prime minister "Saddam's best friend,"

now wrote approvingly of Erdoğan's effort to "reassert. . . [Turkey's] historic position as America's stalwart strategic ally." Safire did, however, take the opportunity to remind readers of Ankara's recent vacillations, writing that its decision to commit to U.S.-led efforts in Iraq was "better late than never" (Safire 2003d). Generally, news reports and opinion essays acknowledged the work Ankara was putting in to repair its relationship with Washington (Safire 2003e; Sachs 2003).

Many *Times* articles included criticism of the plan for Turkish peacekeepers to join U.S.-led forces in Iraq, both in the immediate aftermath of the parliamentary approval and in later weeks after the arrangement was scuttled. The substantive grounds for much of this criticism was Iraqi, and specifically Iraqi Kurdish, opposition to a Turkish military presence inside the country. News articles were sympathetic to the Kurdish position; an October 8 report noted that Turkey "sometimes viciously suppressed a Kurdish independence movement" inside the country (Berenson 2003), and another the next day mentioned that Kurds "have suffered at the Turks' hands over the years" and "continue to view Turkey as a threat" (Fisher 2003). Both news and opinion articles, moreover, questioned the wisdom of inviting "Iraq's former colonial power" to support a present-day occupation (Friedman 2003; Whitney 2003).

The *Times* published a range of perspectives on the effect of the October deployment plan on U.S.-Turkish relations more broadly. Shortly after the Turkish parliament approved the arrangement, an opinion essay by the Turkish commentator Aslı Aydıntaşbaş argued that this kind of military cooperation would be "the only real way to repair the Turkish-American alliance" after the damage it suffered earlier that year (Aydintasbas 2003). After the plans were cancelled, however, *Times* coverage was more critical. Because the cancellation was a mutual decision—news reports suggested that the Bush administration had quietly approved Ankara's withdrawal of its offer, once the extent of Iraqi opposition became apparent—the negative tenor of the media narrative suggests that resentments lingered from the U.S.-Turkish disagreements of the previous months. A November 7 report, for instance, noted how the U.S. government was "sharply criticized for seeking Turkey's help" and quoted Richard Haass, then president of the Council on Foreign Relations, an influential American think tank, characterizing the abandoned deal as yet another instance of "damage to the relationship" (Sanger 2003). Another news article from November 9 described it as "the latest setback" in "a string of missteps" between Ankara and Washington; the same article brought up the fallout from the March 1 Turkish parliamentary vote, too, quoting U.S. officials who called that incident a "debacle" and a "fiasco" (Weisman 2003b).

After Istanbul fell victim to two terrorist bombings in late November, the general position of the *Times* toward Turkey grew more sympathetic, although small reminders of past disagreement still cropped up. The initial news report about the attacks, published November 20, is an illustrative example of the ambivalence in the narrative. It referred to Turkey as "a model NATO member," recalling the baseline expectation that U.S. publications held for Turkey in early 2003. But, in a nod to the disagreements of the intervening months, it also noted that Ankara had been "a reluctant player in America's Iraqi adventure." More recently, it concluded, "despite the waffling... Turkey appears committed to the American program" (Smith 2003). The words "reluctant" and "waffling" are clear in their qualification of Turkey's loyalty, but neither bears a strongly negative connotation; the past was not forgotten, but nor was it evoking particularly harsh feelings. The lasting damage of the March 1 vote remained a topic of discussion in later news reports, too, including a December 9 article that cited Turkey's "less evident" support of the United States compared to other allies (Jehl 2003) and a January 29, 2004, report that referred to the vote as "an initial blow" in the "battered" bilateral relationship (Weisman 2004).

The editorial pages of the *Times*, meanwhile, became markedly favorable toward Turkey in late 2003. A November 21 editorial blamed the Bush administration for its "ham-handed" approach to Turkey and urged Washington to "make amends" after Ankara had spent months after the fallout in March "[trying] to repair the resulting breach" (The New York Times 2003e). Another editorial published on January 28, marking Erdoğan's visit to the United States, echoed similar themes (The New York Times 2004). Overall, the coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations in the *Times* did in fact become more positive as this period of bilateral reconciliation got underway. Still, the memory of the discord of previous months was far from gone, preventing an unqualified return to the pre–Iraq War narrative of Turkey as a close friend and partner.

### 3.3.2 The Wall Street Journal

In a similar vein, coverage in *The Wall Street Journal* largely applauded the Turkish parliament's decision to deploy peacekeepers. Much like in the *Times*, reporting on the development itself used neutral language: the *Journal*'s October 8 news update was simply titled "Turkey Agrees to Send Peacekeepers to Iraq." But in the body of the article the precedent of the March vote foregrounded the new development: "Turkey's parliament, which voted to sit out the war in Iraq," the report read,

"agreed to send peacekeepers to supplement American forces there." The article proceeded to characterize the Turkish vote as a surprise, noting that U.S. policymakers had been "convinced" that "Ankara would again disappoint" (Cooper 2003).

The op-ed section was more generous toward Turkey. On October 13, the *Journal*'s editorial board described Turkey as "far and away the most important ally the U.S. could have hoped for" in its effort to recruit allies to its cause in Iraq (The Wall Street Journal 2003i). An October 24 opinion essay, moreover, declared Turkey "as important for the West today as West Germany was during the Cold war" and called on Washington to "start treating [Turkey] as a real partner... as opposed to a forward deployment base" (Asmus & Sanberk 2003). The positive development in real-world U.S.-Turkish relations, then, opened up space for arguments favoring a closer partnership with Turkey, even as reminders of the two countries' recent squabbles persisted in the news (see Lunsford & Jaffe 2003; Pope 2004).

After the terrorist attacks in Istanbul in late November 2003, writing in the *Journal* highlighted Turkey's offer of peacekeeping troops as a means of crafting a more positive narrative about Turkey and U.S.-Turkish relations—even though, by this point, the plan itself was off the table. A November 17 report, for example, mentioned that Turkey was "one of the few Islamic countries prepared to send troops to Iraq in support of the U.S.-led coalition" (Chazan 2003c). A November 21 editorial similarly emphasized Turkey's more recent accommodation of U.S. requests, noting that "its government may have refused to support the coalition in the Iraq war, but it has recently offered to send troops for peacekeeping" (The Wall Street Journal 2003j). A news report published the same day used nearly the same phrasing (Pope, Champion, & Cloud 2003). Not all *Journal* articles highlighted the positives and downplayed the negatives, however. An opinion essay published on November 24 criticized Ankara for being "ungrateful," "not... very constructive," and "at best a reluctant partner" with regard to Iraq (Stone 2003). And after publishing an opinion piece by Erdoğan, the Turkish prime minister, titled "Still the Best of Friends" on January 28 (Erdogan 2004), the *Journal* also ran a letter to the editor arguing that the article "would more appropriately have been titled 'Mediocre Friend, Worse Neighbor'" (Brevis 2004). Ankara's efforts to reconcile with Washington in late 2003 created material for media reports to paint a positive picture of U.S.-Turkish relations when U.S. sympathy for Turkey peaked, but later, more critical articles demonstrate that the disagreements of the early months of the year had not been purged form the narrative.

### 3.3.3 Magazine Coverage

Neither *The New Yorker* nor *The National Interest* published articles mentioning Turkey frequently during this period, making it difficult to draw out patterns in either publication. Their references to Turkey and its relationship to the United States were, however, in line with the narratives in the two newspapers under review. At a time of pervasive Islamophobia in the United States, both magazines tried to establish a kind of political kinship with Turkey by identifying it as a "Muslim democracy" or a "secular Muslim NATO ally" of the United States (Lieberman 2003; Packer 2004). Although Turkey was not the primary focus of any article in *The National Interest* in the October 2003 issue, the strained status of its relationship with the United States on account of the war in Iraq is mentioned in several essays (Lampton 2003; Black 2003).

The identification of Turkey as a "Muslim democracy," a "secular Muslim democracy," or a "model Muslim democracy" is a common trope across all four publications during this period. Without delving too deeply into the politics of this framing, for the purpose of this study the relevant point is that this language was intended to convey approval of Turkey's domestic political conditions and a sense of shared political values between Turkey and the United States. Thus, employing this identifier was a way to push a positive narrative about the current and future status of bilateral relations; in this telling, Turkey's secular and democratic status made it a like-minded country, and thus it could be counted among the United States' circle of close friends.

## 3.4 Discussion

### 3.4.1 Empirical Findings

The Turkish parliament's rejection of the United States' basing request was a crisis for the bilateral relationship. To be sure, this disagreement was one incident within a broader misalignment of U.S. and Turkish interests and priorities regarding the Iraq War. But until the parliamentary vote, U.S. media outlets (and the U.S. government officials they quoted) appeared to assume that the strength of the U.S.-Turkish alliance—and, specifically, Turkey's interest in preserving its relationship with its more powerful partner—meant Ankara would eventually accede to Washington's wishes. When that did not happen, the media narrative shifted. Close partnership

was no longer a dominant theme of the coverage of Turkey. Instead, space opened up for harsher criticism of Turkey's decision-making and for questioning of Turkey's commitment to its U.S. ally. As such arguments circulated, the media coverage itself became a potential danger to future bilateral relations—enough so that Turkey's prime minister published an article in a major U.S. newspaper to remind the U.S. audience of the countries' longstanding friendship.

From late 2002 to the first month or so of 2003, media narratives fit the theoretical expectation that when U.S.-Turkish relations are close, characterizations of Turkey and its actions vis-à-vis the United States will be described in positive, or at least neutral, terms. There was some conflict during this period, as Ankara had not yet agreed to assist Washington in its war plans, but the prospect of a positive outcome remained. Assuming that U.S.-Turkish relations would follow an established cooperative pattern until events proved otherwise, U.S. media outlets tended to paint Turkey's delayed decision-making in a sympathetic light up until the point when that delay angered U.S. officials. Coverage in *The Wall Street Journal* in particular exemplified this dynamic. A news article published on January 13, 2003, predicted explicitly that "Turkey will almost certainly offer use of its air bases for an Iraq operation" (Pope 2003a). The next day, even as it acknowledged that U.S. officials were becoming frustrated behind the scenes, an editorial suggested the disagreement was "probably not as bad as it looks" (The Wall Street Journal 2003a). *The New York Times* did not go as far as the *Journal*—it opted for more neutral descriptors, referring to Turkey, for example, as "a secular Muslim democracy" and "a longtime member of NATO" (Filkins 2002)—but in both newspapers the expectation holds that the tone and content of news coverage will be favorable when bilateral relations are strong.

In both newspapers, too, the tone of the language used in reference to U.S.-Turkish relations becomes more negative when the real-world tensions between the two countries escalate, especially after the Turkish parliament votes against a basing agreement with the United States on March 1. This pattern is also in line with the theoretical expectation that conflict will not just be covered in the media, but also elicit more critical coverage. This effect is much weaker in news articles than it is in opinion essays. In the *Times*, reporters largely maintained a neutral tone in discussing U.S.-Turkish disagreements, even when those disagreements worsened. Where their reporting leaves a negative impression of the state of bilateral relations, the effect can usually be attributed to negative language used by the official sources they quote (Sanger & Filkins 2003; Miller 2003). In the *Journal*, too, phrasing in news reports is only occasionally negative in tone. A February 20 article, for instance, described Turkey as "demanding" U.S. funds in exchange for military co-

operation (Cloud 2003). Articles published in the days after the parliamentary vote remain scrupulously neutral; more than one describes Turkey's decision simply as a "setback" (Cooper & Jaffe 2003; Chazan & Pope 2003). Where narratives in the *Times* and the *Journal* change more significantly in early March is in the editorial pages. The *Times*' editorial board describes Turkish policies related to Iraq as "troubling," "unacceptable," and "mischievous" (The New York Times 2003c). The *Journal*'s editorial board calls the parliamentary vote a case of "short-sighted domestic politics sabotag[ing] the national interest" (The Wall Street Journal 2003f). To some extent, the discrepancy between news and opinion can be explained by the professional standards and editorial remits that guide each division. Although news reports in the present day often contain more analysis, and are thus more prone to exhibit positively or negatively coded language, in the early 2000s a reporter was expected to maintain neutrality and let the facts speak for themselves. It is therefore not surprising that the effects of real-world disagreement on the tone of media coverage is most evident in opinion and editorial essays.

In the weeks after the March 1 vote, media coverage also provides evidence of negative narratives persisting. Again, this effect appears most strongly in the op-ed section: a *Journal* editorial on March 14 describes Turkey as siding against the United States and questioning "what their friendship really means" (The Wall Street Journal 2003g), for example, and a Times opinion essay on March 24 refers to Turkey's "betrayal" (Safire 2003c). But it is visible in news articles, too. In part, the persistent negative effect on the news side is connected to the structure of news articles—they report a new development, and then go on to provide relevant background or context. After the United States launched its invasion of Iraq on March 20, part of the relevant context was that the U.S. military did not open a northern front from Turkish territory, as it had previously planned. Thus, nearly every day in the first month of the war the *Journal* published a news update that mentioned Turkey's decision not to allow U.S. troops to use Turkish territory to launch an attack on Iraq. Many of these articles included or referred to comments from U.S. officials who pointed out that this made the U.S. military operation more difficult or more dangerous. Sometimes, mentions of the basing disagreement were accompanied by negative commentary. In the *Times*, references to the event in news articles in late March or April often included mild criticism; an April 19 article, for example, noted that Turkey had forfeited its "special bond with the United States" (Cowell 2003). Overall, news and op-ed articles from this time illustrate two mechanisms by which the negative media coverage that accompanies a discrete moment of bilateral disagreement can endure: by providing a negatively coded data point for future news articles, building a precedent of discord into the standard characterization of U.S.-

Turkish relations, and by eliciting emotionally driven criticism of the alliance that lingers on in negative tones and harsh arguments in articles going forward.

Granted, further disagreements between Ankara and Washington after the March 1 parliamentary vote complicate an argument about the causes of persistent negative coverage. Some Turkish actions in the ensuing weeks, such as Ankara's decision to allow the U.S. military to use Turkish airspace, did align with U.S. requests. But Turkey was also considering military operations of its own in northern Iraq, contrary to U.S. wishes. These events fed bilateral tensions, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to separate the contributions of new developments and lingering resentment over old disagreements to the continued negative news narratives. Even so, references to the March 1 vote suggest that it remained front-of-mind in the coverage. A March 25 opinion essay in the *Journal* highlights the continued significance of that event, arguing that it left the bilateral relationship "in tatters, swept away in one day" (Abramowitz 2003). The cumulative effects of U.S.-Turkish discord during this period seemed to create a new baseline narrative about the direction of the alliance, too. One *Times* report, published March 24, described the shift explicitly. It contrasted the United States and Turkey's "dependable friendship" a few months before with a new era of "profound tensions that are likely to endure" (Bruni 2003c). In this case, the decline in bilateral ties was itself a topic of news. But it also represents a broader shift in the framing of the relationship: news reports began to assume that Ankara and Washington's disagreements would continue, in sharp contrast to late 2002 and early 2003, when they typically assumed that U.S.-Turkish friendship would prevail.

The writing of Turkish officials in U.S. newspapers corroborates the finding from the text analysis that media narratives underwent a tonal shift during this period. Examples discussed in this chapter—including the two letters to the editor by Turkish diplomats, published in the *Times*, and the 2003 opinion essay by then Prime Minister Erdoğan, published in the *Journal*—are framed as reactions to U.S. media coverage. They are not reacting to the fact that American outlets are discussing incidents of disagreement. Rather, they take issue with the manner in which those incidents are discussed. It is the negative language and harsh tone directed toward Turkey that elicits an official response. Moreover, the language that Turkish officials use to characterize the relationship harkens back to the positive depictions that frequently appeared in the American press before bilateral tensions began to escalate. They emphasize the two countries' history as "longtime friends and allies" and their enduring "close relations" (Sarıbaş 2003; Erdogan 2003). The articles employ the language of an earlier, comparatively positive baseline, and they can be read as an effort to guide the U.S. media narrative back to that point. Whether or to what

extent they succeeded would be difficult to assess, but the fact that they tried suggests that Turkish officials were concerned that an enduring shift may already be underway.

During the second period discussed, in late 2003 to early 2004, relatively positive media framing emerged in response to Turkey acting in ways that fit U.S. media's expectations of what a close ally should do. Ankara's steps to support the U.S. war effort with a peacekeeping mission—and the terrorist attacks in Istanbul, which showed that Turkey was as much a target of al Qaeda's as was the United States—fit the baseline expectations of Turkish foreign policy and U.S.-Turkish relations that prevailed before the start of the Iraq War. An article could use the recent example of Turkish cooperation to portray previous instances of U.S.-Turkish disagreement as a temporary deviation from the norm, rather than an indication of a new direction for bilateral relations. But, of course, the existence of prior disagreement was not and could not be erased from the narrative entirely. The Turkish parliament's decision in March to reject a basing agreement with the United States retained a prominent position in news articles months later, and some articles continued to use negatively coded language to discuss the vote's effects on U.S.-Turkish relations. Thus, even though elements of a more optimistic media narrative about the relationship reemerged during this period, the coverage as a whole did not fully return to its earlier baseline.

### 3.4.2 Concluding Remarks

Some additional patterns that emerge from U.S. media coverage in this period are worth noting, particularly given the significance of the United States and Turkey's fallout over the Iraq War for the long-term trajectory of their relationship. First, in many instances in which official government statements were reported in the news—both on and off the record—those comments served to amplify tensions. In the weeks leading up to the Turkish parliamentary vote, much of the reporting in both the *Times* and the *Journal* emphasized the frustration that sources in the U.S. government conveyed to journalists. These comments could have been part of a deliberate strategy to pressure the Turkish government—which it is safe to assume was monitoring major U.S. newspapers, given that Turkish officials wrote in both the *Times* and the *Journal* during this period. Alternatively, U.S. officials could simply have been expressing a genuine emotional response. Either way, the news media's heavy reliance on government sources ensured that real-world tensions would be reproduced and reinforced in the public narrative as the U.S.-Turkish relationship

entered a rocky period.

Second, media coverage underscored a widening gap between Turkey's and the United States' security perceptions when it came to the Iraqi Kurds. For Turkey, northern Iraq was a source of potential threats, including the PKK's use of the territory as a staging ground for terrorist attacks inside Turkey and the possibility of rising Kurdish nationalism across the border inciting further unrest among Turkey's Kurdish population. For the United States, however, Kurdish forces became important military partners during the war in Iraq (Müftüler-Baç 2005). The coverage of the Iraqi Kurds in the U.S. media reflected Washington's perspective far more than Ankara's. News about the disagreement in the realm of high-level politics did note the views of both governments. But *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New Yorker* all featured in-depth reporting that portrayed Iraqi Kurdish fighters (and their grievances with the Turkish state) in a sympathetic light. Iraqi Kurdish political leaders and military commanders were presented as friends of the Americans, their sacrifices in the war dedicated both to their own cause and to U.S. war aims. These publications reinforced a positive characterization of the Iraqi Kurds at the same time that their criticism of Turkey sharpened. A very real disagreement over policy, then, took narrative form in U.S. media coverage that seemed to set up a clear dichotomy: Turkey may be fickle, but the Kurds are on our side.

The divergence between U.S. and Turkish security interests that rose to the surface during the Iraq War had repercussions long after the 2003 invasion. The war strained bilateral ties, jeopardizing the very concept of a "strategic partnership" (Parris 2005; Müftüler-Baç 2005; Larrabee 2010). It also opened a new phase in the U.S.-Turkish relationship. Parris (2003) identified a "silver lining": tensions would force "a clearer awareness in both Ankara and Washington that neither side can take the other for granted, and that each needs to make a more systematic effort to understand and be responsive to the needs of the other."

Although this analysis refers to policymakers, it can also apply to the media. When Turkey declined to participate in the United States' invasion of Iraq, the decision wholly contradicted the U.S. media's baseline assumption, fueling, at times, an emotional response and creating a space for a wide range of views on how to interpret and respond to Ankara's position. In later years, the standard story that U.S. outlets told about Turkey no longer assumed that Ankara's foreign policy would always follow Washington's lead. An expectation of some disagreement was, eventually, built into the narrative. Thus, later policy divergences were more likely to adhere to existing U.S. understandings of Turkey—and provoke a less strongly negative

response as a result. The next chapter, which addresses coverage of the Turkish response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, considers how the media's response to U.S.-Turkish conflict changes when these baseline expectations are lowered.

# 4. RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

## 4.1 The Case

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was both expected and a total shock. The U.S. government published intelligence that indicated a buildup of Russian forces along the countries' shared border months in advance, but publics and politicians alike still had trouble believing that Russian President Vladimir Putin would decide to invade until the moment Russian troops crossed into Ukrainian territory. Yet global unease grew in the weeks ahead of the incursion. Worrying that Russia's threat might, after all, be real, political leaders in countries across the world, including the United States and Turkey, made pleas for peace.

The Russian attack on February 24 elicited condemnation from both Washington and Ankara. The two capitals proceeded to adopt different—but in some cases complementary—policies after the outbreak of hostilities. The Biden administration rallied its European partners to bolster the Ukrainian war effort with weapons deliveries, military advice, and diplomatic support, as well as a harsh set of sanctions that aimed to weaken Russia. Turkish companies had already been selling drones to Ukraine, and military production continued as the violence escalated, but the Turkish government declined to join the Western sanctions regime as it maintained trade and other financial links with Russia. Turkey also hosted Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in a series of talks in the early weeks of the war. Although those sessions were unsuccessful, Ankara's maintenance of relationships with both Kyiv and Moscow paid off in July 2022, when in Turkish- and UN-mediated talks Russia and Ukraine reached an agreement to allow the export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. By that point, however, Turkey had ruffled feathers in Washington and in capitals across Europe by threatening to block Finland and Sweden's bids to join NATO after both Nordic countries applied in May.

Turkey's support for U.S. policies and priorities in some areas but neutrality or

active opposition in others was in keeping with the country's move toward strategic autonomy in previous years. Closer alignment with Russia, in particular, has been a notable feature of this policy in practice (Yavuz 2022). But Turkish ties with Moscow have not foreclosed cooperation between Turkey and the United States. As Goren (2018) points out, although Ankara has tightened its economic and political links to Moscow, it is well aware that Russia poses a security threat. Even as Turkey seeks greater independence from the United States and NATO, then, it still sees values in the security alliance. Buhari Gulmez (2020) affirms that Turkey's new foreign policy, including its challenges to U.S. authority, have been calibrated so as not to "entirely [undermine] its formal alliance" with NATO. The U.S.-Turkish partnership persists, even if the relationship is an uneasy one, with sharp policy divergences the norm.

Before the Russia-Ukraine War heated up in early 2022, the prospects for a breakthrough in U.S.-Turkish relations were not optimistic. Ankara had little intention of changing its policies to better suit U.S. preferences, and Washington was not inclined to embrace Turkish priorities. The best-case scenario, Danforth argues, seemed to be "perpetuating the status quo" (Danforth 2021). U.S. President Joe Biden entered office in January 2021 on the promise of reviving and expanding American alliances and reinvigorating U.S. leadership on the world stage (Biden 2020)—articulating a more traditional vision of U.S. foreign policy than that of his predecessor, Donald Trump. The Russian invasion of Ukraine gave Biden a golden opportunity to put that vision into practice. Washington rallied its allies to take swift action to support Ukraine and punish Russia, breathing new life into NATO and the broader transatlantic relationship (Daalder & Lindsay 2022; Beckley & Brands 2022). Turkey's new orientation, however, was out of step with this development—many of its Western partners readily embraced a revival of NATO, but Ankara had moved on. As Kara (2023) explains, Turkey's leaders in recent years had "aimed to reposition Turkey within the changing global shift of power"; they were designing foreign policy for a multipolar world, not the return of Cold War–era blocs. Both Ankara and Washington denounced the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and both wanted the war to end with Ukrainian sovereignty intact. But given the discrepancies between the two capitals' broader worldviews, it comes as no surprise that, on a tactical level, U.S. and Turkish responses to the war diverged.

The news coverage made clear the distance between Ankara and Washington at this time. No outlet evinced surprise or anger when, in the weeks after the invasion, Turkey balanced its ties to Russia with its ties to Ukraine and the NATO countries backing Kyiv. Much of the reporting, in fact, was fairly sympathetic to Turkey's delicate geopolitical position—even when the policies that position demanded did

not align with U.S. preferences. Immediate frustration and simmering resentments surfaced in news coverage, however, when Turkish action threatened a core U.S. priority. Washington may have lowered its expectations of Ankara in some domains, but ensuring the strength of NATO was clearly not one of them. When Turkey dragged its heels on accepting Finland and Sweden into the alliance, U.S. media began to describe Turkey in more negative terms, revive old grievances against Erdoğan's domestic and foreign policies, and publish writers who urged Washington to take a harder line on Turkey. As the weeks went on and some real-world developments suggested better days ahead for the United States and Turkey, the immediate anger eased, but media narratives retained negative features that had not been present before tensions flared up.

Then, on January 23, 2024, the Turkish parliament voted to approve Swedish accession to NATO, ending a disagreement that had soured relations between Ankara and Washington for more than a year and a half. Turkey's agreement to lift its objection to Swedish membership came on the heels of high-profile diplomacy with the United States, including a visit from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Shortly after the parliamentary vote, too, the Biden administration advanced long-delayed plans to sell F-16 fighter jets to Turkey. But even though these months saw the resolution of the primary issue that drove a wedge between Turkey and the United States, U.S. media treated the new developments with ambivalence. Some articles conveyed optimism about the beginnings of a positive trend in bilateral relations, but the criticism of Turkish policies and pessimism about the state of U.S.-Turkish ties that had built up in 2022 persisted in the coverage, too.

The sections that follow examine U.S. news coverage of the conflict during two periods: the first between November 24, 2021, and August 23, 2022 (three months before Russia's February 24 invasion and six months after), and the second between December 24, 2023, and March 23, 2024. The analysis of the first period is based on 47 articles in *The New York Times*, 67 in *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 in *The National Interest*, and four in *The New Yorker*. The analysis of the second period features seven articles in *The New York Times*, nine in *The Wall Street Journal*, and 21 in *The National Interest*. *The New Yorker* did not publish anything about Turkey during this period. Some of the articles featured Turkey as a main character; some merely touched upon Turkish policies in discussions of other aspects of the war.

## 4.2 Period of Disagreement: November 2021 to August 2022

### 4.2.1 The New York Times

Prior to the Russian invasion on February 24, coverage in *The New York Times* presented Turkey as a country with an ambivalent relationship with the United States and NATO. The Turkish government had attempted to bring Russian and Ukrainian leaders together for negotiations and it condemned the prospect of a Russian incursion. Both were constructive contributions from the United States' perspective, as Washington, too, wished to avoid war. A February 3 *Times* article highlighted the significance of Turkish support for Ukraine coming from "a sometimes-wavering NATO ally," qualifying Ankara's credentials as a close partner with allusions to past disagreements. The same article recognized that Turkey was "walking a fine line between backing Ukraine and disrupting a complicated relationship with Russia" (Kramer 2022). That "complicated relationship," the author explained, included Turkish-Russian economic and defense ties that had irritated the United States. But the use of neutral ("complicated") or only mildly critical ("sometimes wavering") language stands out. Building on recent Turkish policies that aligned with U.S. priorities, this downplaying of past and ongoing disagreement left open the possibility of positive momentum in Ankara and Washington's joint responses to the crisis.

Coverage in the early weeks of the war continued to point out Turkey's ties to Russia, but it maintained an even tone and acknowledged the pressures of Ankara's geopolitical position. A March 1 article, for instance, noted that, although "much distrust [had] built up" between Turkey and NATO because of Ankara's ties to Moscow, Turkey had fostered this relationship "partly as leverage against the West, but also out of necessity" (Gall 2022). The following week, on March 9, another news report cited Turkey as an example of a U.S. ally that had "stepped up" during the war. The article applauded Turkey's provision of drones to Ukraine, but tempered its praise with the caveat that Turkey had not joined its NATO allies in imposing economic sanctions on Russia (Troianovski, Kingsley, & Crowley 2022). This area of divergence in U.S. and Turkish policies became a recurring topic in *Times* coverage. Still, as Ankara persisted in its efforts to mediate, news reports recognized the upsides of Turkey's relationship with Russia: Ankara's credibility in both Moscow and Kyiv made it a "pivotal intermediary" in peace talks (Troianovski 2022a).

If coverage of Turkish policies ranged from neutral to mildly positive in the early months of 2022, *Times* articles became more openly critical of Turkey in May, when

Ankara took steps to block Finland and Sweden's NATO applications. Previous coverage of Turkey's response to the Russia-Ukraine War had focused on foreign policy and omitted any discussion of internal Turkish politics; now, domestic critique was fair game. A headline on May 18, for example, read "Strongmen in Turkey and Hungary Stall Unity in NATO and the E.U."; the article went on to describe Erdoğan and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán as "two authoritarian leaders" who were "insisting on the priority of their national interests and playing to domestic audiences" at the expense of "Europe's effort to stand up to Russia" (Erlanger & Stevis-Gridneff 2022).

On May 30, as the standoff continued, another headline identified Turkey as "a disruptive ally"—a clear escalation of the language *Times* editors used in February when Turkey was merely a "sometimes-wavering" ally (Crowley & Erlanger 2022). In the body of the article, Erdoğan was at various times described as "the Turkish strongman," "something of a stickup artist," and an "obstructionist" under whose rule "Turkey has increasingly become a problem to be managed." The set of grievances with Turkish policies that reporters cited in these articles, from Ankara's 2019 acquisition of the S-400 missile system to its more recent refusal to participate in Western sanctions on Russia, were the same ones that *Times* articles referenced in previous weeks. But the direct criticism of Erdoğan's governance and description of Turkey as a "problem" (as opposed to a "pivotal intermediary") was new.

*Times* reporting conveyed a sense that the Turkish president was unfairly exploiting his leverage within NATO and undermining an opportunity to strengthen Western alliance. Erdoğan, per a May 18 news report, "seemed to be calculating that his cooperation was at a premium at a moment of global crisis." The same article did, however, cite the Turkish foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, assuring NATO allies that Turkey's objection could be overcome (Hopkins, MacFarquhar, Nechepurenko, & Levenson 2022). On May 26, the *Times* published an opinion essay by the U.S.-based sociologist Cihan Tuğal that offered sharper criticism of Turkish domestic and foreign policies. At the same time that Ankara demanded Finland and Sweden crack down on Kurdish expatriates the Turkish government deemed a security threat, Tuğal wrote, Turkey was also carrying out a "repressive agenda" bombing Kurdish militant camps in northern Iraq and Syria, and NATO made itself complicit by "[turning] a blind eye" (Tuğal 2022). Additional *Times* coverage highlighted diplomats' mounting frustration with what many saw as the Turkish leader's "double game" of using a critical moment for NATO to play domestic politics. As a June 22 article put it, in a reference to comments by Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, "Erdogan is annoying his allies at a time of war, when the security of Europe is in question" (Erlanger 2022a).

Signs that Turkey might soften its position on the Finnish and Swedish bids to join NATO lightened the tone of *Times* coverage, to a certain extent. But elements of previous weeks' negative portrayals of Turkish policy persisted. News reports on June 28, for instance, characterized Turkey's change of heart as a "blow" to Russia and a win for NATO (Shear, Erlanger, & Bilefsky 2022; Erlanger, Hopkins, Troianovski, & Shear 2022). But an article published on June 29 followed the recent trend of foreign policy–focused reports including criticism of domestic politics. Erdoğan, the article read, had "over the years become more authoritarian, more mercurial and more difficult as an ally, while increasing repression at home" (Shear & Erlanger 2022). Real-world events may have taken a positive turn, but past ill feelings lived on in the news.

*Times* articles also delved into the nuances of Turkey's balancing act. Reporters treated Erdoğan's visit to Iran in July to meet with Iranian and Russian leaders, for instance, as an opening to examine the complexity of Turkey's position. On July 12, the day the visit was announced, one article presented two sides to the Turkish president: Erdoğan was "the most engaged mediator" between Russia and Ukraine, but he and Putin were also "like mirror images" of each other, both displaying "little appetite for dissent" and both "keen to project power internationally" (Bilefsky 2022). Another July 12 article described Erdoğan as "a prickly ally for NATO, sometimes working in tandem with other member states but often pursuing his own agenda even when it disrupts Western consensus" (Troianovski 2022b). On July 20, after the meeting took place, a *Times* report offered a more favorable view. The article pushed back on the idea that the trilateral summit presaged "a new anti-American alliance" and applauded Turkey's "very artful" management of "a foreign policy that is diversified and open to all sides" (Erlanger 2022b). Depending on the examples they chose to include and the developments they chose to emphasize or downplay, different articles could shape a sense of either positive or negative momentum in Turkey's relationship with the United States and the West.

Turkey and the UN's brokering of a deal between Russia and Ukraine to allow the export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea offered a prime opportunity to highlight the positive side of Turkish balancing. The *Times*' initial report of the news on July 22 was hardly effusive, but its description of the deal as "a coup" for Erdoğan and "the most significant compromise between the warring nations since Russia invaded Ukraine" created good press for Turkey (Stevis-Gridneff 2022). The next day, however, a second article undercut Ankara's achievement with a critical headline: "Turkey's Leader Remains a Headache for Biden Despite Aiding in Ukraine Deal." Although Erdoğan "played the role of benevolent statesman" in the recent negotiations, the article acknowledged, "the Turkish autocrat" had

"remained a source of substantial irritation for Biden administration officials" by undermining other U.S. efforts to pressure Russia (Crowley 2022). *The New York Times*, it seemed, was not ready to let one praiseworthy event direct attention away from Turkey's recent clashes with the United States and other NATO allies.

The ambivalence in *Times* coverage of Turkish policies persisted in the wake of the grain deal. An article on August 5, reporting on a meeting between Erdoğan and Putin, noted Turkey's "role as an important mediator between Ukraine and Russia, as well as between Russia and NATO," and recognized that "Erdogan is treading a fine line" to ensure those channels remained open (MacFarquhar 2022). But another article, published less than a week later, took a harsher tone. The August 11 report described Erdoğan as "mercurial" and his equivocation on Finland and Sweden's NATO membership as "obstructionism." The article also took a more personal line of attack: "some wonder where Mr. Erdogan's real loyalties lie, beyond his own self-interest" (Erlanger 2022c). In contrast to the previous article's measured language, this one evinced anger and frustration. Overall, *Times* coverage gave space to the geopolitical considerations behind Turkey's relationship with Russia and acknowledged the benefits that Turkish mediation could bring. But the sting of Ankara's dissent when it came to NATO—a core U.S. security interest—simmered beneath the surface of subsequent writing on U.S.-Turkish affairs.

### 4.2.2 The Wall Street Journal

A reader of *The Wall Street Journal* might come away with a more optimistic perspective on the bilateral relationship than a reader of *The New York Times*. The general trajectory of *Journal* reporting tracked that of its competitor—the coverage took a negative turn when the NATO accession issue arose. But whereas the *Times* largely assumed that the United States and Turkey had divergent interests that inevitably prevented tighter alignment, the *Journal* held out hope for closer ties. As the specter of a Russian invasion of Ukraine loomed in late 2021 and early 2022, the *Journal*'s coverage of Turkey's role highlighted the country's security contributions as part of the NATO alliance (Norman & Marson 2021). The newspaper published an op-ed by Ric Grenell and Andrew Peek, both former Republican officials who served in foreign policy positions in the Trump administration, on January 10, 2022, condemning the United States' "[failure] to show strategic patience with Turkey" and emphasizing the importance of Turkey's role as "a historic balancer of Russia" (Grenell & Peek 2022). *Journal* reporting highlighted Turkey's deepening trade relations with Ukraine, its supply of drones, and its rhetorical backing of Kyiv in

February as "coming down on the side of the [NATO] alliance by backing Ukraine" (Coles & Marson 2022). New reports, similar to those in the *Times*, did not shy away from Ankara's past and ongoing disagreements with Washington, but the *Journal* generally presented more recent Turkish policies as positive developments.

Indeed, several *Journal* reports and opinion pieces during this period evinced a qualified optimism that the threat from Russia could drive Turkey and the United States closer together (Malsin & Forrest 2022; Malsin & Ostroff 2022). Shortly after Russian troops invaded Ukraine, an article published on February 27 suggested that Ankara showed signs of distancing itself from the Kremlin (Simmons & Luxmoore 2022). In a March 3 op-ed, the scholar Walter Russell Mead suggested that Turkey would be "open to a new kind of relationship with Washington" (Mead 2022). The *Journal*'s editorial board, however, described Turkey as "still on the fence" and asserted that Ankara's role as a member of NATO demanded it harden its stance against Russia (The Wall Street Journal 2022a). "Whose side is Mr. Erdogan on," the editorial asked, "other than his own?"

This push for Turkey to step up its commitment to Ukraine and the West took more concrete form in an opinion article by Paul Kolbe, an analyst and former CIA officer, published on March 17. Kolbe suggested that Ankara send the S-400 missile defense system it had purchased from Russia several years prior to Ukraine, where the Ukrainian military—in an act of "poetic justice"—could use it to ward off the Russian air assault. Combined with a commitment from the United States to replace Turkey's lost equipment, the transfer could have the added benefit of repairing frayed U.S.-Turkish relations (Kolbe 2022). The proposal was practically dead on arrival: on March 23, the *Journal* ran a letter to the editor from Fahrettin Altun, communications director for the Turkish Presidency, rejecting such a deal as "quite unrealistic" and urging the United States to unilaterally "normalize relations with Turkey" (Altun 2022). The letter was not presented as a rebuke to the West; Altun asserted that Turkey "takes pride in its NATO membership." But it did quash the idea that Turkey might take dramatic steps to rebuff Russia and fully align with Ukraine and its NATO backers. Even after this exchange, however, the *Journal* continued to report on weapon sale discussions as a possible means of luring Turkey away from Russia and improving U.S.-Turkish relations (Malsin 2022a).

*Journal* coverage of Turkey's response to Finland and Sweden's NATO applications followed a similar pattern to the coverage in the *Times*: news reports treated the matter in a fairly even-handed way while critical assessments appeared in the opinion section. News articles published on May 16 and May 18 did not employ strong language, but they did characterize Turkey's efforts to negotiate over Finnish and

Swedish accession as an example of Ankara choosing to "leverage its role" in the crisis and seek "concessions" from its Western partners (Malsin 2022b; Rasmussen 2022). *Journal* op-eds adopted a much harsher tone in descriptions of the same events. For example, Garry Kasparov, the Russian dissident, offered a disparaging take on Erdoğan's motives, commenting that "it's likely he's looking to gain something for himself, as usual" (Kasparov 2022).

The most serious charges against Turkey, however, were leveled by Joe Lieberman, the former Democratic-turned-independent U.S. senator, and Mark Wallace, who served as a UN diplomat under the administration of President George W. Bush. Their co-authored May 18 opinion piece, titled "Does Erdogan's Turkey Belong in NATO?" derided the Turkish president's mediation efforts during the war as "cover for a pattern of cooperation with Moscow," referred to Russia as "a kindred antidemocratic ally" of Turkey, and argued that Turkey under Erdoğan's leadership met "neither the principled nor the practical requirements for membership" in NATO (Lieberman & Wallace 2022). Questioning Turkey's position in NATO at this moment—and, implicitly, its alliance with the United States—was clearly meant to be inflammatory. It spoke to the depth of frustration with recent Turkish policies felt in some quarters of the U.S. foreign policy community. Even if actual steps to push Turkey out of NATO were never seriously considered in Washington, the publication of an op-ed making this case, coming from a bipartisan pair of former senior-level U.S. officials, marked a significant expansion of the lens of media discourse around Turkey's relationship to the United States.

Articles in the *Journal* in subsequent weeks continued to portray Turkey's qualms with Finnish and Swedish NATO membership as opportunism. A May 21 report noted that Erdoğan's position had "grown steadily more hard-line" as the president attempted to "secure concessions" not just from Finland and Sweden, but also from the United States (Malsin & Salama 2022). On June 6, another article reported that "whatever goodwill Mr. Erdogan may have generated from his initial handling of the Ukraine crisis evaporated in May" (Malsin 2022c). And a June 28 article highlighted the way "Erdogan has managed to transform the Ukraine crisis into an opportunity to extract concessions from allies and opponents" (Malsin 2022d). The *Journal*'s editorial board questioned the validity of the Turkish president's motives, too, arguing on June 26 that Erdoğan's "opposition seems more about stirring up nationalist sentiment at home than legitimate security concerns around Kurdish terrorism" (The Wall Street Journal 2022b). Altogether, the coverage conveyed the frustration that NATO allies felt toward Turkey as the dispute dragged on and suspicions grew that Ankara may not be engaging entirely in good faith.

Later breakthroughs in the negotiations over NATO expansion boosted Turkey's image in *Journal* coverage. A June 29 article about the terms of Turkey's deal with Finland and Sweden quoted an anonymous U.S. official who affirmed that "the Turks actually meant what they said"—an implicit turnaround from previous reporting that doubted the sincerity of Ankara's demands on Helsinki and Stockholm (Malsin & Parti 2022). Some skepticism remained in a *Journal* editorial the same day, though, which acknowledged that "Turkey has legitimate concerns about terrorism" but suggested that its specific objections to the Nordic countries' NATO bids seemed "arbitrary" (The Wall Street Journal 2022c).

Descriptions of Turkey's balancing between Russia and the West moved away from language emphasizing Ankara's efforts to take advantage of an international crisis, returning to the early-2022 practice of using such terms as "arbiter," "mediator," and "key interlocutor" to describe Turkey's role (Gershkovich, Faucon, & Malsin 2022). Turkish- and UN-mediated talks between Russia and Ukraine over a Black Sea grain deal gave Turkey a steady stream of positive press in the *Journal*, too. A half dozen articles about progress in the negotiations, and another half dozen leading up to the first shipments of Ukrainian grain after the deal was reached, all highlighted Turkey's central contribution to an agreement universally acknowledged as a diplomatic success.

Still, the grain deal did not paper over all complaints about Turkey's position on the Russia-Ukraine War. The *Journal* had been reporting on Turkey's role in Russia's circumvention of Western sanctions since an April 7 report on the "superyachts, seaside apartments and suitcases full of cash" flowing from Russia to Turkey (Malsin & Kivilcim 2022). But the critique of Turkey's status as "a haven for Russian money" grew sharper in late August, as Ankara and Moscow deepened their economic ties and U.S. officials spoke out more strongly about the consequences for the Western sanctions regime (Malsin 2022e; Malsin 2022f). These articles did not revive the emotive language of earlier coverage of the NATO dispute, but they did reinforce a narrative focus on the differences between U.S. and Turkish priorities.

### 4.2.3 Magazine Coverage

The conservative-leaning magazine *The National Interest* offered a range of views on Turkey's policies in the early months of the war. The most sympathetic article, published April 9, 2022, praised Ankara for its "measured and nuanced" response and for playing "one of the most complex and constructive roles of any NATO member" during the crisis—and urged Washington to be more sympathetic to Turkey's

foreign policies and less critical of its domestic politics (Jefferies 2022). Later articles offered similarly realist views of Turkey's decision-making, accepting the country's balancing posture as a logical consequence of its geopolitical position, but offered less optimism about the prospects of U.S.-Turkish rapprochement (Ellis 2022a). A May 14 essay, for example, avoided normative judgment of Ankara's decisions and concluded that Turkey would maintain "a pragmatic foreign policy that is neither pro-Ukraine, nor pro-Russia, but entirely pro-Turkey" (Karčić 2022).

Compared to articles published in April and early May that more or less accepted Turkish balancing, those written after the NATO accession issue emerged were more critical of the status quo. In a June 11 article, for example, a former Turkish diplomat argued that even a transactional U.S.-Turkish relationship was becoming harder to maintain and warned of the prospect of a "messy divorce" (Tekines 2022). Another article on June 15 suggested that Erdoğan was at risk of "overplay[ing] his hand" and furthering Turkey's "diminishing standing as a NATO ally" by getting in the way of Finland and Sweden's membership bids (Tol & Coşkun 2022). Robert Ellis, a frequent National Interest contributor who had written about Turkish foreign policy in fairly neutral terms the previous month, switched gears in a June 22 piece that called Erdoğan "a shrewd operator" trying to "extort" NATO and condemned the Turkish leader for failing to uphold the alliance's democratic principles (Ellis 2022b). Several articles called on the United States and other NATO allies not to cave to Turkey's demands, arguing that "appeasement" of "Ankara's anti-NATO and anti-Western behavior" would, in the long run, undermine the alliance (Ciddi 2022; Aktar 2022). Altogether, this set of essays in *The National Interest* evoked a sense of sharp deterioration in U.S.-Turkish and Turkish-NATO relations—presenting a more extreme pivot in coverage than either *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* over the same period.

*The New Yorker*'s coverage of the early months of the war included only brief mentions of Turkey, apart from one feature essay on Turkish drones and their role in Ukrainian military operations (Witt 2022). Given *The New Yorker*'s liberal credentials, it should come as no surprise that, although its primary subject is the Turkish defense industry, the essay highlighted instances of domestic repression and injustice—leaving the reader with a less-than-positive impression of Turkey, despite its useful contributions in support of Ukraine. It was not the only New Yorker article to call out Turkey's drift away from democracy (see Wright 2022). Overall, however, Turkish policies amid the Russian-Ukrainian conflict do not receive sufficient coverage in the magazine to draw further conclusions.

## 4.3 Period of Reconciliation: December 2023 to March 2024

### 4.3.1 The New York Times

The most notable feature of articles in *The New York Times* that addressed improvements in U.S.-Turkish relations in late 2023 and early 2024 was the qualification they added to reports of positive developments. Headlines maintained neutral language: an article on January 23, 2024, for example, was simply titled "Turkey Backs Sweden's NATO Bid." In the text of the articles, however, the headline news was quickly followed by discussions of the tensions of the preceding months. An article published on December 26, 2023, referred to Ankara's "repeated delays" of the Swedish application process multiple times and noted that Turkish actions "have exasperated other members of the alliance, who view Turkey as leveraging its position for domestic gain" (Hubbard 2023). The January 23 article, too, acknowledged the positive turn of events but also highlighted how the delayed resolution damaged the U.S.-Turkish relationship. It described the Turkish vote to approve Swedish accession as "a big moment for NATO" and as "easing a diplomatic stalemate that has clouded Turkey's relations with the United States." But the authors of the article also used pointed language to pass judgement on Ankara. They noted, for example, that despite Sweden's "extensive steps to assuage Turkey's objections" the Turkish president continually changed his rationale for opposing Swedish membership, "prompting a diplomatic guessing game over what issue he would drag into the debate next." The whole affair, according to an analyst quoted in the article, made Turkey "appear unpredictable and unreliable to its NATO allies" (Hubbard & Jakes 2024).

Coverage of further steps toward rapprochement was similarly ambivalent. Blinken's visit to Turkey only merited mention in a January 7 article that primarily focused on the secretary's other stops across the Middle East (Wong 2024a). News articles on the Biden administration's push for congressional approval of the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey—a significant indicator of easing bilateral tensions—conveyed the development itself in a neutral tone but also highlighted American lawmakers' qualms about finalizing the deal. A January 24 article cited concern "about Turkey's aggression" in Syria and the Aegean Sea in particular among U.S. policymakers (Wong 2024b). Two days later, another article conveyed hope that the sale of fighter jets could help "bring to a close" a chapter of strained U.S.-Turkish relations—but it qualified this hope by reminding readers that the recent reconciliation had required a "drawn-out process" and "intense diplomacy ... to try to change the Turkish

leader's mind." The same article cited criticisms that U.S. congressional leaders levied on Turkey's foreign and domestic policies, too (Wong 2024c). The overall impression of Turkey in the *Times* was not particularly positive, despite the fact that the articles cover seeming progress in repairing the bilateral relationship.

### 4.3.2 The Wall Street Journal

Coverage in *The Wall Street Journal* was comparatively optimistic, but still not entirely favorable toward Turkey. Ankara's approval of Swedish NATO accession would, according to a January 23 article, "likely [end] a nearly two-year-long diplomatic standoff" and "could help ease relations with Washington" (Malsin 2024). The same article quoted "a former senior Turkish diplomat" who described the move as "a message that NATO is unified" and "that Turkey is an important member" of the alliance. Missing from the report was the clear framing in *Times* articles that characterized Ankara's linkage of the NATO accession issue with U.S. arms sales as an underhanded ploy. Yet the portrayal was not all positive. The article mentioned past Turkish policies that drew objections from NATO allies, recent tensions over Turkey's maintenance of economic ties to Russia, and criticism of Ankara's human rights record among U.S. politicians. The *Journal*, however, offered sympathy for Turkish positions that the *Times* did not, presenting an interpretation of the positive news development that mirrored policymakers' expressed hopes that it could launch a wider rapprochement.

A January 26 report on progress in the U.S. sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey cited the same criticisms of Turkish policy from U.S. Senator Ben Cardin, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as the *Times* article published the same day (Mauldin & Salama 2024). The remainder of the *Journal* report was ambivalent, balancing discussion of a "diplomatic standoff" initiated by Erdoğan with a mention of Blinken "work[ing] closely with Turkey" to secure a deal. The latter description, however, was more charitable than the *Times*' mention of Blinken's "intense diplomacy," which suggested a one-sided effort on the part of the United States.

In the months that followed, however, *Journal* coverage related to Turkish foreign policy largely focused on actions that ran counter to U.S. objectives in the war in Ukraine. Four articles published between February 22 and March 19 mentioned Turkey's persistent economic ties to Russia facilitating the latter's war effort and undermining Western sanctions (Norman & Kantchev 2024; Leong & Lin 2024; Kantchev & Wallace 2024; Faucon, Paris, & Wallace 2024). The sole bright spot was a reminder in a March 16 article of Turkey's role in brokering the Russian-Ukrainian

grain deal in 2022 and Ukrainian ships' continued use of Turkish waters after Russia declined to extend the agreement (Marson & Pyrozhok 2024). Ultimately, *The Wall Street Journal* presented more arguments for optimism than *The New York Times* in the series of constructive developments in U.S.-Turkish relations in early 2024. Yet the overall tone and content of the coverage remained neutral at best.

### 4.3.3 Magazine Coverage

*The New Yorker* published no articles that mention Turkey in this three-month period, but *The National Interest* devoted more attention to Turkish policies and U.S.-Turkish relations than either of the major newspapers discussed in the previous sections. Coverage in *The National Interest* was largely unfavorable to Turkey. A headline on December 20, 2023, characterized Ankara's pursuit of a U.S. arms purchase "as a 'bribe'" for its cooperation on Swedish NATO accession (Suciu 2023). Another headline on January 2, 2024, read, "with friends like these, NATO doesn't need enemies," referring to both Erdoğan and Orbán (Ellis 2024a). A January 9 article then declared Turkey "the sick man of NATO" (Atlamazoglou 2024a).

The tone of *The National Interest* coverage following the Turkish parliament's approval of Swedish NATO membership was more ambivalent. A January 25 article, for example, offered a value-neutral presentation of the discussion about Turkey's acquisition of F-16 fighter jets (Suciu 2024). But another article on the topic, published four days later, highlighted Erdoğan's recent history of "antagonizing ... the U.S. and NATO" and called Turkey's behavior "anything but that of a friend" (Atlamazoglou 2024b). Perspectives on long-term prospects for U.S.-Turkish relations were also mixed. A March 17 article offered a skeptical view, citing "doubt... about Turkey's commitment to [NATO's] principles and aims" (Ellis 2024b). A March 18 essay, meanwhile, described recent months as "a remarkably positive phase" in the bilateral relationship, yet warned that the future did "not appear too bright" (Mammadov & Gasco 2024). Overall, the magazine presented the events of early 2024 as exceptional moments of cooperation, while the main story of U.S.-Turkish relations remained one of pervasive tension and mismatched security interests.

## 4.4 Discussion

### 4.4.1 Empirical Findings

The ambivalence of U.S. media coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations from late 2021 through the first few weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, reflects both the troubled status of the bilateral relationship at the time and the continued influence of previous instances of disagreement on present-day news narratives. As argued in the case of the Iraq War, there is a set of baseline expectations written into U.S. media coverage of Turkey. At the start of 2003, the expectation was that Turkey's alliance with the United States meant Ankara would ultimately comply with Washington's wishes. By the start of 2022, that expectation no longer holds. Turkey's public stance opposing a Russian invasion represents an example of agreement with the United States' own position, but news coverage is notably ambivalent—a *New York Times* article published February 3, for example, qualifies Ankara's support for Kyiv by describing Turkey as "a sometimes-wavering NATO ally" (Kramer 2022). In both the *Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, news articles acknowledge the value in Turkey's role as an intermediary between Russia and the West in this moment of crisis, and approve the steps it took to support Ukraine (Troianovski, Kingsley, & Crowley 2022; Coles & Marson 2022).

Articles in both newspapers and in *The National Interest*, some more critical than others, emphasize that Turkey's policy of juggling its commitments to NATO and its complicated relationship with Russia prevents it from firmly aligning with the United States and the West more broadly. Even when the tone of an article remains neutral and the description of Turkish positions remains balanced, therefore, it is clear that Ankara and Washington are no longer close-knit partners. The fact that Turkey maintains economic ties to Russia after the invasion, in this context, is not reported with much shock, as it meets previously established expectations. But it does offer an opportunity for past examples of Turkey's divergence from U.S. positions to serve as relevant background information for the latest news, which reinforces and perpetuates the narrative of Ankara and Washington no longer seeing eye to eye.

The event that drives the clearest rupture in the tone and content of news coverage in 2022 is Ankara's reluctance to admit Finland and Sweden into NATO. U.S. policymakers may not have been pleased with other measures Turkey took that supported Russia, but this incident clearly aggravated them more than the others, and media narratives shift accordingly. This response would appear to support the expectation of Bennett's (1990) indexing hypothesis that the media's positions on

foreign policy issues hew closely to the positions of government officials. The existing media narrative presupposes some divergence in U.S. and Turkish policy, and the media's coverage of earlier cases in which Ankara's policies contravened U.S. wishes is comparatively mild. Changes in the tone and content of U.S. media narratives in response to the NATO dispute may therefore be a result of the gravity with which policymakers treated the issue.

The evidence of a narrative shift is clear. In *The New York Times*, news articles in late May use harsher language than they did previously to describe Turkish actions. The identification of Turkey as "a sometimes-wavering NATO ally," for example, is downgraded to "a disruptive ally." Erdoğan is described as "obstructionist," and Turkey is described as "a problem" (Crowley & Erlanger 2022). Whereas earlier articles discussing Turkish foreign policy steer clear of domestic politics, references to Turkish authoritarianism begin to appear after the NATO issue emerges. The nature of the Turkish political system does not meaningfully change between March and May of 2022. But descriptions of the president as a "strongman," an "authoritarian," and, more pejoratively, "a stickup artist" are meant to convey disdain and suggest to an American audience not only that is Turkey disagreeing on a policy level, but also that the country does not share their values. News articles in the *Journal* do not contain negative language as strong as that in the *Times*, but they do adopt a similar interpretation of Turkey's actions—specifically, that Ankara is taking advantage of the situation to gain concessions from the West. This theme appears in both the news and editorial pages of the *Journal*, but only in the latter is the tone more derisive (Kasparov 2022). Of the publications examined here, the strongest negative language appears in *The National Interest*. Much of the magazine's commentary strikes a neutral tone at the beginning of the war, but by June it condemns Turkey for trying to "extort" NATO (Ellis 2022b). These articles all address an instance of genuine disagreement between Turkey on one side and the United States and most other NATO allies on the other. What is notable in the coverage is the way the narrative about Turkey's leadership and political motives changes. Articles use increasingly evocative language to describe Turkish policies, and they instrumentalize the authoritarian trend in Turkish domestic politics as a discursive strategy to create normative distance from a country that disagrees with the United States.

In addition to using these discursive tools, media outlets begin to give space to critical opinion articles about Turkey after the NATO dispute emerges. Some are related to the war, and some are not. As the incident unfolds, the *Times* published an opinion piece condemning Turkey's military action in Iraq and Syria (Tuğal 2022); *The National Interest* published an article warning that the West should not

"appease a malevolent actor," referring to Turkey (Ciddi 2022); and the *Journal* printed an op-ed that questions Turkey's membership in the alliance (Lieberman & Wallace 2022). The real-world crisis thus creates an opportunity to air arguments condemning Ankara's past actions and calling on Washington to adopt a harsher policy line—arguments that may have been circulating earlier, but are then given an airing on major media platforms because the disagreement over NATO accession makes them newsworthy.

There is also evidence of negative narratives persisting in the months after the dispute over Finnish and Swedish accession to NATO first arose, in mid-May. In the *Times*, references to Turkey's domestic authoritarianism in articles about foreign policy topics continue; a June 29 article, for example, cites Turkey's "increasing repression at home" (Shear & Erlanger 2022) and a July 22 identifies Erdoğan as "the Turkish autocrat" (Crowley 2022). An article well into August references Ankara's "obstructionism"—using the same term as media reports when the NATO issue first emerged—and questions the Turkish president's motives "beyond his own self-interest" (Erlanger 2022c). The dust-up over NATO accession remains a key piece of context in articles on new, positive developments, too. When Turkey and the UN facilitate a Russia-Ukraine grain deal in late July, the headline in the *Times* places the ongoing bilateral disagreement before the good news: "Turkey's Leader Remains a Headache for Biden Despite Aiding in Ukraine Deal" (Crowley 2022). The *Journal*'s reporting on the grain deal is comparatively favorable toward Turkey, but some news coverage in June and July criticizes Ankara's handling of the NATO issue. An article on June 28, for instance, notes that the Turkish president "transform[ed] the Ukraine crisis into an opportunity to extract concessions" (Malsin 2022d). The *Journal*'s editorial board goes further, directly questioning the legitimacy of Turkey's objections to Finnish and Swedish accession (The Wall Street Journal 2022b; The Wall Street Journal 2022c). Thus, the same negative language and other discursive tools that publications use to convey disapproval of Turkish policies at the initial moment of disagreement appear again and again in the following months.

That the dispute over NATO triggered a narrative shift in U.S. media is clear, but complicating the discussion of the unfavorable narrative's durability is the fact that the dispute itself was not resolved by the end of the first period under review. Washington and other NATO allies were actively trying to convince Ankara to reach an agreement with Helsinki and Stockholm, and each new unsuccessful attempt could encourage the media to draw upon negative tropes again. This makes it difficult to disaggregate the initial disagreement from its later iterations as the causes of unfavorable press about Turkey. Even so, the mechanisms by which the narrative shift appears at all, in both news and opinion articles, support the argument that nega-

tive turns in media coverage prove lasting. When news articles refer to authoritarian politics inside Turkey, they are drawing upon topics of contention between Ankara and Washington in previous years. And when the editorial pages are opened up to arguments condemning Turkish foreign policies more broadly, those arguments are based on past examples of U.S.-Turkish discord as well. At one point, these issues would have been the news in the headlines. But now, when another issue takes center stage, they are part of an existing media narrative that is used to reinforce a sense of downward momentum in bilateral relations.

In the second period under review, the NATO issue is, in fact, resolved. But this and other steps toward U.S.-Turkish rapprochement are not enough to dislodge a narrative of bilateral discord that is already well established in the U.S. media. As has previously been established, it is standard journalistic practice to place new developments in context. In the case of the United States and Turkey's early 2024 reconciliation, the context for the resolution of the NATO accession issue is more than a year of frustration and diplomatic wrangling. That is not to say U.S. media coverage during this period wholly dismisses the steps toward reconciliation, or that it is uniform in its skepticism. Reporting in the *Journal* conveys some tentative optimism about the prospects of U.S.-Turkish relations going forward, whereas the *Times* is comparatively restrained. In the *Times*' telling, the resolution of the NATO dispute may have closed a negative chapter in U.S.-Turkish relations, but it does not necessarily open a positive one. Media reports commonly feature ambivalent language to describe episodes of bilateral agreement, and they continue to mention earlier sources of tension in close proximity to the positive news.

U.S. media coverage during this period demonstrates that news reporting on the resolution of bilateral disagreements can inject skepticism into the story policymakers try to spin of positive momentum in the broader relationship. The reasons for past and ongoing quarrels are not omitted from the coverage. The result is an asymmetric response to new information: moments of disagreement may inspire severe warnings about the future of the relationship, but moments of agreement bring, at best, cautious optimism.

### 4.4.2 Concluding Remarks

A few additional patterns emerge from the analysis of U.S. newspaper and magazine coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations during this period. First, although frustration over the NATO accession issue filtered through all the publications, their coverage was not uniform. Each presented a different range of views in the early months of the

war. Reporting in *The New York Times* assumed balancing or "strategic autonomy" to be the foundation of Turkish foreign policy; for the most part, news articles did not express surprise when U.S. and Turkish policies and priorities diverged. Turkey's reservations about Finland and Sweden's NATO applications became an exception. The discrepancy between Ankara's action and the assumed responsibility tied to Turkey's membership in the alliance—that an alliance member would act as a team player, even if that meant accepting restrictions on the independence of its foreign affairs—created a large enough expectation gap for even the generally cynical *Times* to highlight the incident as an indicator of eroding U.S. ties with Turkey.

*The Wall Street Journal*, in comparison, began this period with higher expectations of U.S.-Turkish relations. Writing in the *Journal* leading up to and immediately after the Russian full-scale invasion contained glimmers of hope that the crisis could become an opportunity for Ankara and Washington to repair their relationship; the *Times* featured no such optimism. The *Journal*'s coverage, in this sense, was more consistent with post–Cold War assumptions of friendship, as well as with Washington's official line that Ankara is one of its closest partners in the region. Notably, when the disagreement over NATO accession arose, the *Journal*'s opinion section went further than that of the *Times* in questioning Turkey's membership in the alliance—a potentially incendiary suggestion, given the high stature of the authors who made it. One might speculate that the wider gap between the expectation the *Journal* held for Turkish policy and the reality of this conflict facilitated a correspondingly larger swing from positive to negative coverage. But without being privy to editorial conversations in both newsrooms, such an argument remains speculation. The *Times* may or may not have considered publishing an essay just as provocative as the *Journal*'s; it is possible that the *Journal* simply beat the *Times* to it. Either way, the differing apertures of coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* do at least indicate that elite opinion on U.S.-Turkish relations in the United States was not uniform.

Second, the way policymakers featured in U.S. media coverage in 2021-2022 was different than in 2002-2003. Quotes from government officials largely had a tempering effect in news coverage during this period—a change from the inflammatory statements that often popped up in media reports around the Iraq War. Several news articles in the *Times* and the *Journal* reported that both U.S. and Turkish foreign policy officials had been surprised when Ankara held up Finland and Sweden's NATO accession, but official comments to the press (both on and off the record) consistently provided assurance that any obstacles were surmountable. A May 18 *Times* article, for example, cited the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu saying that Turkey would find a way to "overcome the differences through dialogue

and diplomacy" (Hopkins et. al. 2022). The one instance of a Turkish diplomat writing into either major U.S. newspaper, moreover, is with the purpose of dismissing a specific policy suggestion—not, as happened during the Iraq War, responding to inflammatory coverage in the U.S. media. There could be many reasons for the relatively calm nature of official quotes in this case: a change in reporting practices, a better disciplined communications strategy in Washington, or simply a less aggrieved, less personalized reaction to the bilateral dispute.

This leads to a final point on the broader shift in foreign policy elites' understanding of the U.S.-Turkish relationship over the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The generally charitable treatment of Turkey's early response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, despite the fact that not all Turkish policies complied with those of the United States or its other European partners, showed that the mainstream American media had come to expect some divergence in U.S. and Turkish policies by early 2022. With bilateral relations already strained, and some assumption of disappointment already built into each side's calculations, not every sign of disagreement pushed media narratives to take a pessimistic turn. Only a truly surprising development that threatened a core U.S. security interest triggered a shift in tone. Clearly, U.S. media elites and policymakers did still have some expectation of Ankara's cooperation, and they vented their frustration when that expectation was not met. News outlets continued to portray Turkey and its leader in a negative light as the dispute dragged on; not even the success of the grain deal could fully turn things around. Yet the media also recognized that even a disagreement as significant as the one over NATO was not entirely out of character for U.S.-Turkish relations at this time. Coverage after this dispute arose remained more critical overall than coverage before it, but some of the initial furor did die down.

# 5. TURKISH LEADERS IN PRINT

## 5.1 Media Interventions

The previous cases show that the U.S. media sharpens its criticism of Turkey and conveys pessimism about the U.S.-Turkish relationship in periods of bilateral tension—and that these changes in tone do not entirely fade away after the initial disagreement has passed, even when the real-world relationship improves. This chapter considers another mechanism by which positive narratives of U.S.-Turkish relations might gain traction: direct intervention by senior Turkish officials in the form of articles published in the U.S. and Anglophone press. For two countries such as the United States and Turkey, which often hold differing views and interests, favorable—or at least neutral or ambivalent—coverage is often that which gives due consideration to the other's perspective. Bringing Turkish political representatives into this dialogue could, in theory, reframe or redirect the U.S. media discourse, promoting positive narratives about Turkey.

Whenever a head of government, a foreign minister, or another high-level representative lays out Turkey's policy positions in a foreign news outlet, they have clear political reasons for doing so. In some cases, Ankara is responding directly to prevailing media narratives, whether to correct what it considers to be an unfair characterization of its actions or to proactively advance Turkey's preferred policies. Turkish leaders have placed articles in the foreign press to advocate specific policy action, such as urging the U.S. Congress not to pass a 1915 Armenian Genocide recognition bill (Erdogan 2007) or calling for the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, who the Turkish government identified as the orchestrator of the 2016 coup attempt (Kalin 2016; Erdogan 2017). In other cases, they have published articles in U.S. outlets to emphasize Turkey's leadership on issues of bilateral or global importance, such as cross-cultural understanding (Erdogan & Zapatero 2006), NATO policy in Afghanistan (Gul 2009), a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Gul 2011),

and United Nations reform (Erdogan 2018c). After the journalist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018, Erdoğan wrote twice in *The Washington Post*, where Khashoggi had been a columnist, to make sure Ankara's position on the matter was clear, underscoring in particular his government's commitment to investigating the incident in line with international convention (Erdogan 2018d; Erdogan 2019b).

Amid U.S.-Turkish conflict during the Iraq War, Turkey's top officials made interventions in the U.S. media narrative with an aim to calm tensions. Then Prime Minister Erdoğan's 2003 article "My Country Is Your Faithful Ally and Friend," published in *The Wall Street Journal*, is a prime example. As discussed in Chapter 3, the essay circulated just weeks after the Turkish parliament rejected of Washington's request to use Turkish territory as a base of operations and U.S. forces proceeded to invade Iraq. Responding to the U.S. foreign policy elite's strong condemnation of Turkey's decision not to participate in U.S. war plans directly, Erdoğan's article urged the United States to recall the two countries' "long-standing friendship" and emphasized Turkey's "determin[ation] to maintain our close cooperation" (Erdogan 2003). Nearly a year later, Erdoğan published another essay in the Journal, titled "Still the Best of Friends." He affirmed that Turkey was "as robustly committed to the alliance as we ever were," describing the U.S.-Turkish relationship as "one of the great transcultural alliances in modern history" (Erdogan 2004). In August 2005, Erdoğan wrote once again in the *Journal* and reiterated Turkey's "support [for] U.S. efforts toward democracy and stability in Iraq" (Erdogan 2005). The main thrust of his writing changed between 2003 and 2005, however. In 2003, correcting unfairly critical narratives was an explicitly stated goal of Erdoğan's essay. In 2005, his language remained cordial, but instead of foregrounding assurances of Turkey's friendship toward the United States the content emphasized Turkey's objectives in Iraq.

Articles in the next decade and a half illustrate the Turkish government's increasing willingness to criticize U.S. policies, sometimes forcefully. A series of essays about Syria policy make this shift clear. The first, a 2014 essay in *The Wall Street Journal*, pushed back against Western critiques of Turkey's response to the rise of ISIS but offered assurances of Turkey's willingness to "work with the U.S. and other allies" (Kalin 2014). A 2018 article in *The New York Times* was far more pointed. Titled "America Has Chosen the Wrong Partner," the Turkish foreign minister insisted that the United States end its collaboration with Syrian Kurdish militant groups: "A NATO ally arming a terrorist organization that is attacking another NATO ally is a fundamental breach of everything that NATO stands for," he wrote (Cavusoglu 2018). Çavuşoğlu's second article in the *Times*, published in 2019, protested that

Turkey's military intervention in Syria was "being spun in the American news media as an attack on Kurds," and that he was "compelled to set the record straight" for the sake of "the 67-year-old NATO alliance that Turkey has with the United States" (Cavusoglu 2019). Interestingly, essays by Erdoğan's top advisers adopted a consistently more accusatory tone than ones published under the president's own byline. In the three articles Erdoğan wrote about topic, even when he criticized the policies of the United States and other foreign powers, he avoided calling out Washington directly (Erdogan 2018b; Erdogan 2019a; Erdogan 2019c).

The most openly hostile piece of writing is Erdoğan's August 10, 2018, essay in *The New York Times*, "How Turkey Sees the Crisis With the U.S." Published at a time when bilateral strain had been building due to persistent disagreement over the response to the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and further clashes over Syria policy, the Turkish president made Ankara's displeasure with its ally clear. "The United States has repeatedly and consistently failed to understand and respect the Turkish people's concerns," Erdoğan wrote. Unless Washington changed course, the "partnership could be in jeopardy." He asserted that the United States should stop treating Turkey as a junior partner, ending the essay with a threat: "Failure to reverse this trend of unilateralism and disrespect will require us to start looking for new friends and allies" (Erdogan 2018a). It was certainly no secret that U.S.-Turkish relations were at a low point, and presumably Turkish officials had opportunities to communicate these grievances to their U.S. counterparts through diplomatic channels. But by publishing an unreservedly critical essay in the United States' newspaper of record, Erdoğan raised the stakes. The essay, moreover, marked the beginning of a prolific period for Erdoğan in the English-language press. Within six months of the *Times* article in August 2018, his byline appeared four more times—a testament to the Turkish government's intention to shape the international conversation.

Most recently, the Turkish government turned to the foreign media when it dissented from the United States and other NATO members over Swedish accession to the alliance. In an article published on May 30, 2022, in the British-based magazine *The Economist*, Erdoğan outlined Turkey's position. Although not devoid of belligerent language— Erdoğan referred to "the ignorance and obtrusiveness of those who dare to question" Ankara's relationship to NATO—the intent of the essay did not appear to be to burn bridges. It advanced Turkey's self-presentation as a pivotal power and a prescient observer of international affairs, and it made only vague references to "certain member states" whose criticisms of NATO were proved wrong by the war in Ukraine, contrasting those positions with Ankara's own, which history had proved "absolutely right" (Erdogan 2022). Turkey wanted specific action to come from this outreach. But unlike in Erdoğan's essays two decades before, when he declared that

Ankara was Washington's "faithful ally and friend," in 2022 the Turkish president took pains to assert Turkey's independence even as his comments aimed once again to bring his country's treaty partners around to Ankara's point of view.

## 5.2 Can the News Be Good?

Government officials' efforts to change the framing of a policy issue or a news story face an obstacle similar to the one that makes it difficult for positive news to create positive narratives in everyday reporting. Namely, a positive development or a positive spin does not erase what came before it. When a Turkish government official writes an essay to try to reset the narrative, then, doing so may expand the scope of the broader media conversation around U.S.-Turkish relations, and it may add more weight to the sympathetic side of a debate over Turkish policy in the United States. But the original story they are trying to refute or correct is still in circulation.

As with regular media coverage of the ups and downs of U.S.-Turkish relations, the tenor of Turkish leaders' writing in American news outlets varied with the overall status of the relationship. Specifically, the language in these articles often hewed closely to the baseline expectations that U.S. media held for U.S.-Turkish relations at the time of writing. In the early 2000s, when the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq followed a relatively positive period for bilateral relations, Erdoğan's essays advancing the Turkish perspective appealed to positive themes of friendship and long-standing alliance—using the sorts of words and phrases that appeared in U.S. publications prior to the two countries' dispute over Iraq. By playing into those earlier expectations apparent in the U.S. media narrative, the articles attempted to serve as a corrective for negative coverage.

Compare that to Kalın's accusations of U.S. hypocrisy in 2017 or Erdoğan's threats that Turkey would seek new friends in 2018. Their words reflected the depths to which real-world relations had fallen, but it is also difficult to imagine an American journalist—or policymaker—who read either essay coming away with a more favorable opinion of Turkey. If the main goal is to communicate Ankara's position at pivotal moments, the media can provide a platform. But when the relationship is at a low point, printing harsh language is unlikely to change the way the country is portrayed in the American press.

Finally, take Erdoğan's 2022 essay outlining Turkey's stance on the question of

Finnish and Swedish NATO accession. Here, too, the language reflects U.S. media's expectation of Turkish balancing and distancing from Western positions. The article does not try to appeal to U.S. or Western friendship the way articles in 2003 and 2004 did; instead, it firmly presents Turkey's own expectations of (and criticisms of) its allies. But it does not convey the same hostility as articles published a few years earlier, either; the tenor and the substance of its arguments largely fit the media's established narrative about the nature of Turkey's relationship to the West. Turkish officials' writing may not always be pushing positive narratives, but it can offer correctives at times when the dominant narratives circulating in the U.S. foreign policy community discount the valid perspectives of U.S. allies.

# 6. CONCLUSION

## 6.1 Research Findings

Media cycles ebb and flow. Breaking news becomes a front-page headline, and then it gets distilled into a sentence that provides context for the next new development. Later it fades into the background, where it is baked into writers' and editors' understandings of the general topic, either by reinforcing their preexisting ideas or motivating a change in their usual framing. The past two decades of U.S.-Turkish ties have provided plenty of fodder for narrative change—behind short-term ups and downs lies a long-term trend of growing apart, and the shifting status of the relationship has compelled the American media to change the way it writes about Ankara and its ties to Washington.

This study set out to understand how discrete developments in U.S.-Turkish relations affect the attitude of news coverage in the United States. In doing so, it aimed to explore a gap in the literature on the intersection of media and foreign policy. There is a large body of research on the question of whether media coverage can affect Washington's decision to go to war or otherwise intervene in a conflict—the phenomenon dubbed "the CNN effect"—as well as a set of studies that test and expand upon Bennett's indexing hypothesis (1990), considering the nature of interaction between U.S. media and policy elites and the manner in which media coverage reflects policymaker opinion. In the latter group, too, most research focuses on cases where U.S. policymakers grapple with a decision to go to war. Left unaddressed is how the news media treats a bilateral relationship such as that between the United States and Turkey—allies, not one country that intervenes militarily in the other. They often both have interests in conflicts in third countries, however, and when those interests clash it can alter the relationship as a whole. The primary focus of this study, in contrast to earlier literature, was how such clashes and their resolution affected media narratives—not about U.S. involvement in a third-country conflict,

but about the implications for the United States' relationship with Turkey.

The expectations for the study were grounded in previous research on both U.S.-Turkish relations and the ways in which media biases shape news coverage. Focusing on the twenty-first century, the bilateral relationship has transitioned from one of close partnership—though not without its problems—to a more transactional dynamic in which a number of core security issues remain unresolved. The media is hardly unaware of this shift. In the early 2000s, when this study begins, the tone and content of news coverage would factor in the assumption that the two parties, being on friendly terms, would ultimately reach an agreement when their views differed. If events were to contradict that assumption, the media could be expected to react strongly. By the 2020s, the bilateral relationship had grown more distant. The media narrative would thus treat as normal some degree of disagreement between the United States and Turkey, and respond with less shock when a dispute broke out. Media practices, the literature tells us, privilege coverage of conflict: decisions about what is newsworthy and what is not result in an overrepresentation of war and of disagreements among policy elites. This study expected that the same would hold true for media narratives themselves. When a crisis in bilateral relations emerged, the media would not just cover the topic, but also use discursive tools to emphasize conflictual dynamics. Mentions of crisis would endure in narratives about U.S.-Turkish relations. And examples of bilateral agreement would have a comparatively smaller effect, failing to push narratives in a positive direction to the same extent that disagreements push narratives in a negative one.

To test these expectations, the empirical chapters feature a paired comparison of two cases in which a foreign policy matter first caused strain in U.S.-Turkish relations and then was more or less resolved: the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Both Ankara and Washington had significant interests in the conduct and outcomes of both wars, and at times those interests clashed. The U.S. media turned against Turkey first when the Turkish parliament rejected a U.S. basing agreement before the Iraq invasion in 2003, and then when Ankara declined to admit Finland and Sweden to NATO straightaway as the war in Ukraine got underway in 2022. But by the end of 2003, Turkey was fine-tuning its policies in Iraq and making amends with the United States. Similarly, the NATO accession issue was resolved by early 2024, and U.S.-Turkish relations were again on an upswing. Given their temporal distance, the selection of these two cases allows for a comparison of how media narratives react to discrete bilateral disputes during different phases of the bilateral relationship. And the presence of both a period of disagreement and a period of resolution in real-world relations makes it possible to compare the effects of good news on media coverage to the effects of bad news. Finally, the study

discussed essays by Turkish political leaders in U.S. and Anglophone publications as a means of intervening directly in and potentially shifting the direction of U.S. media debates.

Each of the three cases comprises a critical discourse analysis of articles published in U.S. newspapers and magazines: *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, and *The National Interest*. The analysis identifies shifts in the use of positively and negatively coded words and phrases, the sources quoted, the information included, and other linguistic devices employed in the articles under review, with an aim to explain narrative shifts in response to real-world events through these micro-level decisions by writers and editors. Key to this analysis is attention to both the political and professional context in which those decisions were made. The significance of a particular word usage or topical mention would often depend on the broader political environment and the phase of U.S.-Turkish relations in which the choice was made, and consideration of journalistic practices is essential to explaining why certain decisions are made or not made, and why some are more significant than others.

The findings of the study provide evidence for the hypotheses that, in U.S. media coverage of Turkish foreign policy and U.S.-Turkish relations, bilateral tensions produce heightened negative media narratives, that those negative tropes persist, and that positive developments have a comparatively weak effect on the direction of the narrative, especially when baseline expectations for the bilateral relationship are low. The previous chapters have shown that moments of discord between the United States and Turkey provoke negative responses in segments of the press, manifesting in harsh language or arguments that paint Ankara in an unfavorable light. And although the bad feeling wanes, media coverage does not fully return to the baseline that preceded the crisis. Where that baseline begins depends on the overall status of the relationship; the media is more likely to expect Ankara to agree with Washington when the alliance is perceived to be strong, and less likely to do so when U.S.-Turkish relations are on the rocks. It is easier for positive new developments to compel the media to write off an unpleasant episode—such as the parliamentary vote rejecting a basing deal with the United States in 2003—as an aberration when the previously dominant narrative was one of friendship. But in both cases, incidents in which Turkey, from the United States' perspective, does not to live up to expectations are not forgotten. Even when the two countries take steps toward reconciliation, overcoming bad press proves difficult. Positive developments following a period of strife are met with skepticism, and although Turkish leaders occasionally write for U.S. publications to present their perspectives, their words can only do so much to shift the narrative balance.

Conflictual moments in U.S.-Turkish relations entrench conflictual media narratives in a few ways. First, they create opportunities for newspapers and magazines to publish critical commentary that may not get a hearing at times when U.S.-Turkish relations are proceeding as usual, effectively expanding the range of published opinion. In part, the negative events may compel commentators to form opinions that are more negative than the ones they previously held. But they also simply provide an occasion to voice arguments that—especially given the typically low salience of U.S.-Turkish relations in the American media discourse—a publication may not deem newsworthy enough to publish at a time when relations are less volatile.

Second, the conflictual events themselves become data points for use in future coverage. As the preceding chapters have shown, news articles do not use emotive language as much as opinion articles do, although the gap has narrowed somewhat in recent years as publications seek more "analysis" and "voice" from their news divisions. What news articles consistently provide, however, is context. If the United States and Turkey fall out over a particular issue, that dispute will be mentioned repeatedly in future articles that are related, even tangentially, to U.S.-Turkish relations.

A notable use of both of these mechanisms in the U.S. media is the instrumentalization of Turkish domestic politics to convey a normative assessment of Turkish foreign policy. This discursive strategy manifested in different ways across the two cases. In the Iraq War case, after Turkey took steps to reconcile with the United States in late 2003, media outlets often identified the country as a "Muslim democracy," a "secular Muslim democracy," or a "model democracy" for the region, the intention being to underscore the political values that Turkey shared with the United States and thus create a positive impression of the country. In the case of the Russia-Ukraine War, on the other hand, news stories highlighted Turkey's authoritarian turn when they wanted to condemn Ankara's foreign policy decisions. Domestic and foreign policies are connected, of course, but in neither of these cases were positive or negative characterizations of Turkey's domestic politics introduced to the articles for the purpose of exploring that connection. Rather, writers used comments on the domestic political environment as rhetorical tools for expressing approval or disapproval of Turkey's actions in the foreign policy arena.

The notion that media narratives perpetuate bilateral conflict is consistent with the literature on the intersection between media and foreign policy. Because this study focuses on the United States' relationship with an ally, however, its perspective is different than most previous research. In cases where the main topic of focus is the United States' decision whether or not to go to war, not the ups and downs of

working with U.S. partners, U.S. news coverage tends to follow a familiar trajectory: it may hew closely to U.S. government positions in the leadup to war, and then deviate more and more from the official line as the conflict proceeds (Gans 1979; Aday 2018). This study also examines U.S. media coverage during times of war, but the wars were not taking place between the United States and Turkey. Rather, the two countries were responding to a war elsewhere, and they were maintaining their alliance even when they disagreed on what that response should be. Accepting the argument in previous literature that U.S. policy and media elites generally form a consensus around the start of a war to which the United States is a party—directly or indirectly, as in the case of the war in Ukraine—it follows that those same elites would become angry when Ankara takes action that upsets their position. And, given the other key finding in the literature that the media is more likely to cover conflict than agreement, it should come as no surprise that in media narratives, too, references to conflict and negative characterizations derived from conflict have a long shelf life.

The study's findings also shed light on the gaps between U.S. and Turkish security perceptions and role perceptions. The existence of misaligned or even incompatible threat perceptions is well established in the literature on U.S.-Turkish relations (Buhari Gulmez 2020; Özdamar 2023). During the 2010s, Özdamar has argued, some of the tension in bilateral relations derived from U.S. policymakers' perception "that Turkey [was] not behaving according to the roles one would expect from an ally"—a finding based on interviews with those same policymakers (Özdamar 2023). The present study supports these arguments with additional evidence from media narratives. During both the war in Iraq and the war in Ukraine, U.S. media narratives about Turkey and U.S.-Turkish relations turned negative when Turkey took a policy position that contravened expectations of a U.S. ally. It is not just policymakers that develop expectations of the other country; the producers of media do, too. The media reacts when expectation gaps manifest in a significant policy disagreement, and in doing so, they change the way Turkey and U.S.-Turkish relations are portrayed in public discourse.

## 6.2 The Implications of Media Coverage for Political Decision-Making

Although beyond the scope of this study, narrative shifts in the media can have consequences for political decision-making. The reports that news outlets produce are consumed by the same actors who drive policy developments forward. So how

do the messages conveyed in media coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations affect the way members of the U.S. foreign policy elite think about the state of bilateral ties? Do media narratives change their perception of the policies, whether confrontational or conciliatory, that their domestic audiences would consider acceptable?

The existing literature suggests that such effects may exist. Entman's contributions to indexing theory, for example, emphasize that causal relationships run in two directions: official positions feed down into media coverage of a foreign policy event, but reporting also affects policymakers' thinking, moving back up the chain (Entman 2003). But precisely how these dynamics would work in the case of a typical diplomatic relationship, such as the one between the United States and Turkey—rather than in the case of discrete decisions about whether to launch a humanitarian mission or stage a military intervention abroad—has not yet been explored. Neither has the effects of change to dominant media narratives over time. As the characterization of Turkish policies changes, for instance, and boundary-pushing ideas about how to engage with Ankara begin to circulate in prominent U.S. media outlets, these discursive shifts could very well affect American policymakers' sense of the scope of policy choices available to them.

Understanding these dynamics has value, especially if they shed light on factors that affect the trajectory of an important bilateral relationship. From the restriction of Russian advances in Ukraine and in the Black Sea to the stability of Iraq and Syria to the vitality of NATO, the United States and Turkey have common interests in security matters that are not going away anytime soon—even if the two countries often do not agree on how best to proceed. A years-long buildup of tensions may make it difficult to maintain even a transactional relationship today, but neither Ankara nor Washington would benefit from throwing away their alliance.

Negative portrayals persist in media coverage of the U.S.-Turkish relationship. If the media's bias toward unfavorable narratives were also to push political leaders to adopt more confrontational policies or simply remain pessimistic about the odds of better outcomes, then negative on-the-page narratives could end up fueling negative real-world developments. The resulting cycle would not improve the United States' or Turkey's perceptions of one another, nor would it make it any easier for the two countries to reconcile.

The news is not all bad, though. By giving space to different points of view or detailing the wider context beyond the conflict of the day, media coverage may also provide the long-term perspective that is necessary to preserve a relationship as inherently uneasy as that between the United States and Turkey. New reports chronicle the two countries' travails, but they can also be a reminder that bilateral

ties have survived hard times before.

### 6.3 Limitations and Future Research

A clear way to extend this study, and to fill in some of its gaps in the process, would be to examine the full span of media coverage between late 2002 and early 2024. This research focused on two narrow cases, choosing moments when media narratives were most likely to change. Although such a design made it possible to identify the various ways in which media reacts to real-world crisis and to trace the durability of that reaction in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, it cannot fully explain how acute disruptions are incorporated into baseline narratives over the long term. It is clear that sharply negative characterizations do not last forever; if that were the case, coverage of Turkey's actions in the leadup to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 would not have adopted the neutral-to-positive tones that it did. It does not explain the full process of establishing a new baseline framing of U.S.-Turkish relations, either. After all the tumult in the bilateral relationship in the two decades between the war in Iraq and the war in Ukraine, by early 2022 the media had come to expect a measure of dissent from Ankara and to present some (but not all) examples of U.S.-Turkish disagreement in neutral language. A continuous study would allow for closer examination of how that baseline came to be. It would also provide an opportunity to identify other moments where positive and negative characterizations emerge, and to trace the lifecycle of these flare-ups to find out how and when they simmer down into a new baseline. Such a study could also employ other research tools, including quantitative methods, to complement the text analysis, providing a birds-eye view into the patterns of tonal shifts and the introduction and omission of certain pieces of information in media coverage.

Time and resource constraints are limitations of this study in its current design. On a methodological level, a systematic content analysis should employ more than one coder. This would improve the replicability of the study by corroborating both the readings of positive vs. negative vs. neutral tones in each text and the overall impressions of the shifts in coverage. In terms of the data sources, too, it would be useful to include a broader a set of news outlets—including widely read newspapers such as *USA Today* or *The Washington Post*, and influential magazines such as *The Atlantic* or *Foreign Policy*. Furthermore, the explanations of and arguments about the mechanisms of American journalistic practice are based here on a combination of findings in the literature and nearly a decade of personal experience in the field.

Although these are valuable sources of knowledge about the general workings of the media, they do not provide direct insight into the process of publishing news about U.S.-Turkish relations in the time periods and the publications that are reviewed here. To complement text analysis of these cases, it would be helpful to conduct interviews with reporters and editors to probe the thinking behind their decisions about how to cover Turkey and the bilateral relationship as they related to the Iraq War and the Russia-Ukraine War.

This study's findings are also limited to the U.S. media ecosystem and to coverage of U.S.-Turkish relations specifically. To test the external validity of the mechanisms uncovered, further research can be done on media narratives about other U.S. relationships—such as the more consistently close U.S.-British relationship, or the more adversarial and more starkly changeable U.S.-Chinese and U.S.-Iranian relationships. Finally, an obvious next step would be to study how changes in Turkish-U.S. relations manifest in media narratives in the Turkish press and then compare the findings. Such research is necessary to reveal a more comprehensive picture of the multiple, varied ways that news outlets in both the United States and Turkey build and rebuild narratives about the critical relationship between the two countries.

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