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A NEOREALIST PERSPECTIVE REGARDING DRONE DIPLOMACY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN TÜRKIYE AND JAPAN'S USAGE OF DRONES

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Abstract
The landscape of international relations is currently shaped by new technologies, along with the development of AI, drones transformed some nations into providers and others into consumers in the ongoing technological race. The motivation behind the acquisition or production of drones is rooted in the cost-advantage associated with their use. In neorealism, due to the importance given to security, the use of drones for targeting strikes aligns with the objective of security prioritisation. This study entails a comparative analysis between Türkiye and Japan's usage of drones intended to showcase the importance of this tool in a state's priorities through the lens of structural realism.

Keywords: Drone diplomacy; Neorealism; Japan; Türkiye; Security.

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Introduction and Research Questions. Methodological Framework

In the ongoing technological race, the employment of drone diplomacy has transformed some states into providers and others into consumers. The advancements in new technologies have impacted the evolving landscape of international relations, and primarily the tool representing this shift is the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones, this aspect fostered unexpected new alliances based on pragmatic considerations as well as chipping away at the dissolution of former close partnerships formed on traditional arms supply dynamics. Author Christof Heyns notes that while these instruments contribute to the "depersonalization of the use of force"[2] in their delivery, they can lead to a rather personalised outcome, as they can minimise harm to civilians when employed accordingly.[3]

Before expanding the neorealist perspective on drone diplomacy, it is worth acknowledging that drones are versatile tools capable of causing considerable harm as well as safeguarding or assisting civilian needs. Drones are products, therefore placed beyond a state's control regarding their usage – not only state representatives can purchase them, and beyond this consideration, they can be employed for various agendas. In contemporary conflicts, drones have been regarded as lifesaving technology due to their role in reducing the risk of soldier casualties, but this came with the price of increases in human rights abuses.

There have been countless observations related to the multiple uses of drones, not only in warfare – a field deeply impacted by their use, but also surveillance and their endurance in prolonged operations. There is a well-known fact that they are cheaper to produce and fix rather than other aircrafts and require little human effort. The most significant argument for their use in missions is their "loiter capacity" described best by authors David Cortright and Rachel Fairhurst: "The ability of remotely piloted aircraft to remain aloft for extended periods allows operators to identify potential targets with precision and creates the possibility for greater discrimination in the use of force."[4]

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[2] Christof Heyns, "Preface: Coming to Terms with Drones," in David Cortright et al. (eds.), *Drones and the Future of Armed Conflict: Ethical, Legal, and Strategic Implications*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. vii.

[3] *Ibidem,* p.viii.

[4] David Cortright, Rachel Fairhurst, "Assessing the Debate on Drone Warfare," in David Cortright et al. (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 7.

Due to the nature of today's hybrid conflicts, drones provide significant advantages in information warfare, as they can fly over areas and document changes on the ground, transmit it to the forces back home and therefore have strategies changed and implemented within minutes – therefore reducing the risks of having surprise attacks.

The drone producing states noticed that their developments in this industry do not lead just to domestic advantages through generating jobs opportunities and stimulating the economy, but rather impact the international sphere by opening up dialogues with possible buyers that may not share geographical or ideological proximity, but prove to be valuable partners in the drone industry and creating long-term partnerships by joining forces with other producers – these collaboration efforts ensure a steady supply of spare parts, mutual training in their usage and create a leverage on the states that persistently demand the newest and highly developed models to have them used for domestic or employ them in ongoing conflicts.

Of course, the prospect of cooperation is ideal, unfortunately just like any other product, there are more discussions concerning competition rather than cooperation. Currently the market is dominated by China in relation to small drones production with the estimation of Da-Jiang Innovations controlling over 70% of the global drone market.[5] The United States remains the largest producer of weapons, and in regards to drones, remains a serious producer, but the attention was always focused on bigger drones with military uses rather than civilian ones – the differences between Chinese and American drones should not be ignored as their pieces are evaluated differently and there is a large disparity concerning their price.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, there have been discussions concerning a more proactive stance on the drone producing capabilities of the US and European states, but here lies the complications of both Western partners, they have small firms that cannot produce at the same peace as China, where the state owns these companies. Another time-consuming obstacle is that an increase in this field would lead to endless discussions concerning their manufacture, standards, purposes as authors Matthew Rose

[5] Ishveena Singh, "The secret to DJI's drone market dominance: Revealed", *DroneDJ*, 28 June 2024, [dronedj.com/2024/06/28/dji-china-drone-success-secret], 12 August 2024.

and Kathryn Levantovscaia put it: "The deceptive simplicity of drone production and launch stands in stark contrast to the complexity of developing effective countermeasures and policies."[6]

The methodological framework of this paper is intended to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of drones through the lens of neorealism, as well as their importance in the foreign policies of Japan and Türkiye. Due to the topic at hand, qualitative tools are particularly suited for this analysis as they can capture the complexities of the subject – the legal, moral, financial dimensions of their employment and production, as well as the novelty of the subject, with the war in Ukraine being regarded as the first drone war.

In relation to the interpretation of the employment of drones in neorealism, a short incursion in the theory will be provided as well as the considerations related to strategic thinking, policy decisions and security considerations, and finally whether these technologies align with neorealist principles. Secondly, a comparative analysis between Japan and Türkiye's use of drones in their foreign policies has been chosen to portray the differences and similarities posed by these technologies. The arguments will be constructed through content analysis, particularly relating to each state's national security agendas, policies and prospects communicated by officials. The chosen states are in different categories with Japan currently acting as a buyer of such tools and Türkiye being a recognized and highly regarded producer.

I. Neorealism and drones

The neorealist perspective presented by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 work *Theory of International Politics* provides an appropriate framework for the study of the application of drone diplomacy - structural realism or neorealism is further divided into offensive and defensive realism, the distinctions between the two branches revolve around how states navigate the anarchic international system and their motivations for seeking power.

[6] Rose, Matthew, Kathryn Levantovscaia, "The drones are small—the arms race may not be. Here's how the US can win", *Atlantic Council*, 8 May 2024, [www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-drones-are-small-the-arms-race-may-not-be-heres-how-the-us-can-win], 12 August 2024.

In offensive realism, states pursue power "to achieve security through domination and hegemony"[7] while defensive realism proposes that states seek power due to the anarchic nature of the international system. The latter pinpoints that the increase in security measures results from interactions with states that harbour hegemonic aspirations and provide them with a considerable threat to their own security and survival as a state.

A state may be enticed to obtain or manufacture drones to exploit the asymmetric cost-benefit advantage associated with their use. Since the main objective of states within neorealism is to prioritise security, the deployment of drones in targeted strikes against perceived threats and elimination of specific targets can eliminate specific targets, thus mitigating the costs and long-term consequences associated with large-scale military operations. The incorporation of drones alongside traditional air force would bolster a state's ability to project power while diminishing the need for large ground troops.

Through neorealist lens, the use of drones can be regarded as a means of deterrence, as well as a projection of a state's military capabilities since the simple existence of drones in a state's military apparatus has the potential to impact the strategic calculations of other states, acting as a deterrent that may contribute to conflict prevention. Although drones cannot substitute traditional air forces, they offer cost-effective tools that can be readily replaced without endangering human lives. Losing equipment is easier to accept and employ rather than losing a soldier's life. Their survivability becomes less crucial,[8] and as technological advancements progress, investing in or procuring their production and development could reduce a state's reliance on conventional aircraft and ground forces.

The nature of current day warfare and the reluctance and objections raised against ground combat have led to this shift – it was only a matter of time until technology would be employed as part of hybrid warfare, states would rather purchase new technology and use in combat to spare its troops and put up with complaints and criticism related to the procurement of the technology, the motivation behind this argument is that is more detrimental

[7] Steven E. Lobell, *Structural Realism/Offensive and Defensive Realism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

[8] Stacie Pettyjohn, "Evolution Not Revolution", Center for a New American Security (en-US), [www.cnas.org/publications/reports/evolution-not-revolution], 12 February 2024.

to a state to lose human lives rather than lose credibility due to some contracts concerning weapons procurement.

The prior arguments can be related to the assumption of the rational actor model of state behaviour - even though Kenneth Waltz did not showed support for one of realism's main concepts,[9] the justification of the usage of drones by states comes first with the argument that they are acquired for combat with the intention of having them used for surveillance and combat in missions that would put human lives at risk, thus emphasising the pragmatic thinking prevalent in the media discourse regarding the purchase of drones.

It is important to highlight that justifications for acquiring other defence tools may not be justified through the same perspective; for drones, public support is more cohesive, given their familiarity with the surveillance capabilities they possess. Due to the lack of a higher authority in charge of addressing states' concerns with their own security, unilateral action becomes a natural outcome, and drones serve as an ideal tool not only for surveillance, but also strikes. It is worth mentioning that only in the aftermath of assessing whether the perceived threats provide a clear danger to one's security, action is taken, since drone strikes are not preferred in the absence of provocations since they could escalate a conflict to a higher degree than desired. Drones can be used without approval from international organisations, thus empowering states to act as independent actors.

There have been discussions among experts whether the availability of drones would increase the chances of political leaders to use more force,[10] and while these tools appear attractive due to their capacity of reaching places unavailable to human forces, and less chances of having individual attacks traced back to a state, they are rarely used for more than surveillance among states that do not have terrestrial conflicts or other tensions already in place.

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[9] Brian C. Schmidt, Collin Wight, "Rationalism and the 'rational actor assumption' in realist international relations theory", *Journal of International Political Theory*, 19, no. 2, 2023, pp. 158-182, [https://doi.org/10.1177/17550882221144643], 14 April 2024.

[10] David Cortright, Rachel Fairhurst, "Assessing the Debate on Drone Warfare" in David Cortright et al. (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 9.

A concern can be traced to the fact that they lower the psychological barriers related to the drones attacks as due to their asymmetric nature, while one state may lose human lives, infrastructure or other important resources, one state may lose a few of these tools, no life is endangered, and that may lead to a "distant, secretive process of robotic strikes"[11] targeting a secret "kill list"[12] – overtime, the inequality between the losses of the sides will lead to a disconnect among the members of the countries that conduct these attacks, as they remain a distant job carried by machines, none of their own brothers are hurt in the process, and the less they know of the suffering of the other side, the less they have an interest in getting involved in the first place.

Therefore, drones remain at the disposal of the states, and they are used in order to secure one's security concerns and position. There is a difference between these states that simply stack up these tools via purchases and those that stack up via production as the latter has a greater chance of separating the international arena into friends and foes, both with equal chances of being brought closer through their need of such equipment. Alliances can be formed in a region by bringing together states that have a shared vision of perceived threats.

II. Japan's foreign policy and the use of drones

In order to respond to the question regarding Japan's interest and need of drones through the lens of neorealism, one has to take into account the following factors: the influence of China in the region as one of the largest drone producers globally and the power it exerts in the region though this aspect single handedly; the fact that countries with shared security concerns are proactive in regards to their security in the wake of China's development of new technology alongside with other states doing so in the recent years and finally the fact that Japan has a decreasing population, therefore alternatives that require fewer human capital are recommended.

The Kishida government's National Defense Strategy (NDS), places a great importance on drones as they would provide Japan with an

[11] *ibidem*
[12] *ibidem*

asymmetric advantage regarding the possibility of war.[13] The interest given to drones is supported by a broader strategy encompassing unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) for maritime operations.

Japan is slowly opening to the prospect of investing more to bolster the defense capabilities. In terms of drones, the current administration seeks to invest in dual-use technology for both civilian and military purposes. The Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno declared the following in August last year: "We will effectively use the resources and capabilities of Japan as a whole, break down vertical divisions between ministries and agencies, and strengthen our comprehensive defense system"[14] ACSL is Japan's biggest developer of drones and recently has shown interest in entering the US market.[15]

In an article published in 2021, author Tsuyoshi Minami identified Japan's need for the acquisition of drones, as the country is lagging, solely using the ones already bought for reconnaissance.[16] One factor contributing to Japan's delayed interest is its geographic isolation, with a focus on investing more in warships equipped with air defence systems; these systems regardless of their advancement are facing serious threats coming from drone strikes.[17]

At the beginning of this year, Japan announced joint research with the US on artificial intelligence to use the technology for drones and the next generation fighter jet developed in tandem with Britain and Italy. In an article for The Japan Times, the efforts made in Japan's defence industry have been presented as follows: "The three-way fighter jet development deal was reached in December 2022, with the United States announcing its support of

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[13] Dan Gettinger, "Japan's Growing Drone Budget", *The Diplomat*, 21 July 2023, [https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/japans-growing-drone-budget/], 12 February 2024.

[14] Kana Baba, Yusuke Takeuchi, "Japan sets AI, drones among 9 critical tech fields for defense R&D", *NikkeiAsia.com*, August 26, 2023, [https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/Japan-sets-AI-drones-among-9-critical-tech-fields-for-defense-R-D], 12 February 2024.

[15] Brian Heater, "Japan's biggest drone maker sets its sights on the US", *TechCrunch.com*, [https://tcrn.ch/3p9kZWs], 12 February 2024.

[16] Tsuyoshi Minami, "Japan Needs a Better Military Drone Strategy", *East Asia Forum*, 7 December 2023, [eastasiaforum.org/2021/08/20/japan-needs-a-better-military-drone-strategy], 12 February 2024

[17] *Ibidem.*

Japan's defence cooperation with the two NATO members as the Asian nation faces a severe security environment, particularly in the face of an increasingly assertive China."[18] This argument solidifies the aforementioned reason for the development of drones in neorealism, it brings closer states that have a shared vision on perceived threats, as well as responding to hegemonistic drives of other states, in this scenario, China is already a well-established drone producer and exporter. Japan's regulations on military equipment exports may change due to the production of the fighter jet and it is a possibility that the parties would enable Japan to directly supply components and technology to third countries.[19]

Another benefit coming from the development of drones is that it should help with the cost benefit and the reduced need for soldiers operating military tools, as it was signalled by author Tsuyoshi Minami: "Drone technology would also help cover the shortfall in human resources. Japan has long faced a falling birth rate — its productive-age population has been decreasing since 1995. As a result, the SDF is facing a shortfall in numbers. While the total fill rate is 92 per cent, the fill rate of the lowest-rank enlisted personnel is only 77 per cent. This is expected to worsen over time."[20] Kishida's administration's new security approach triggered a response in the region – China indicated that the enhanced cooperation between the US and Japan, as well as the partnerships with Britain and Italy shall be closely monitored and scrutinised.

III. Türkiye's foreign policy and the use of drones

Türkiye is the most tackled example of a state shifting one's position through drone diplomacy. The development of the drone industry was the

[18] Japan Times, "Japan and U.S. Agree on AI Research for Drones to Assist New Fighter Jet", *The Japan Times*, 28 January 2024, [https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/01/28/japan/politics/japan-us-ai-research-for-drones/#:~:text=Japan%20and%20the%20United%20States,Britain%20and%20Italy%20by%202035], 12 February 2024.

[19] Gabriel Dominguez, "Japan's next-gen fighter project with U.K. and Italy hits milestone", *The Japan Times*, 14 December 2023, [https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/12/14/japan/politics/japan-uk-italy-joint-fighter-jet-development/], 12 February 2024.

[20] *Ibidem.*

response of increased Turkish autonomy and desire to reduce dependence on foreign defense procurement. This shift marked a new position for the state in negotiations, since the dynamics with Western states became more strained, a closer proximity with Russia and China was noted, but due to the employment of Turkish drones in the war in Ukraine, Russia also presented a more aggressive stance in relation to Ankara.

Türkiye initiated the development of drones as early as 2005, therefore the idea that this development emerged as a response to the current security threats in the region is inaccurate. The prolonged investment in drone developments, reflects the Turkish concern with the changing nature of the dynamics between states and the need to act proactive in the technological race. Drones are accessible and cost-effective and require minimal or no support required from external actors in their production, therefore present an ideal defence tool to produce domestically.

The use of drones brings a great advantage in crafting an accurate response to an attack or perceived threats, by having it first assessed through surveillance. An observation that is interconnected with the employment of drones in combat is that they generate erosion wars, as the sides are more involved in observing the other party and generating a response in accordance with the developments on the ground and focusing on targeted strikes.

The Turkish drones are highly efficient at a lower cost, a TB2 priced at around $5 million, stands in sharp contrast to the $20 million cost of an American-built MQ-9 Reaper and the $28 million expenditure for the more advanced US-made Protector RG Mk 1 (soon to be used by the British Royal Air Force). The sector has been historically dominated by the US, Israel, and China, therefore the appearance of Türkiye in this domain has gathered the interest of states that have a difficult time acquiring from the prior mentioned states, and the sales are reflecting the growing interest with over $700 million from drones' transactions and an additional $3.2 billion in Turkish defence exports. [21]

[21] Federico Borsari, "Turkey's Drone Diplomacy: Lessons for Europe", *ECFR*, 1 February 2022, [ecfr.eu/article/turkeys-drone-diplomacy-lessons-for-europe], 21 February 2024.

Türkiye benefited from the employment of drones in ground operations and as a cost-effective method for intelligence gathering and neutralising enemy defences, this approach provided the state with the execution of military campaigns with a minimal footprint, thanks to the portability of drones and their ability to withstand attrition while preserving plausible deniability.[22]

Another fundamental concept in neorealism is the security dilemma and to tackle it, it is crucial to address the specific factors that trigger security concerns for Japan and Türkiye. China is the main actor contributing to Japan's security unease, as one of the world's leading drone manufacturers and strong presence in the region, China poses a threat to all surrounding countries. At this moment, drones are regarded as a tool for surveillance in Japan, especially regarding maritime borders and territories; they're sought after as boosting the already existing defence tools; while the current administration understood the extent of the current technological race, drones are not the main tool in ensuring Japan's position or security.

For Türkiye, the correlation between the development of its drone industry emerged due to regional instability and volatility. By seeking to maintain its position in the region, the state needed to develop the capabilities necessary to survey the area and prepare in the instance of a possible attack. Therefore, drones are a fundamental component of Türkiye's defensive strategies, as well as a tool for shaping the state's foreign policy – since they have been already used in conflicts and shown successful usage, Türkiye's regional standing as a defence producer has been recognized.

In the context of states acquiring or producing drones, John Herz's which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening"[23] can be applied to highlight the role of uncertainty in shaping military strategies.

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[22] *Ibidem.*

[23] John Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma", *World Politics 2*, no. 2, 1950, p.157.

Herz's observations account for the inherent fear and uncertainty that arise despite all parties' desired peaceful resolution – by acquiring and using advanced drone technology the states are regarded as pursuing an aggressive strategy by the states that either don't have this type of technology or are only in the incipient stages of developing it.

Conclusions

Drones play a significant role in enhancing a state's ability to project power without deploying large military forces – having drones alongside traditional air force and ground forces proves to be the recipe for success, as major power are interested in keeping up with the technological advancements which could be more easily replaced and more affordable, while traditional instruments are maintained and kept for urgent security matters. This reflects the importance of the balance of power, as states can influence power dynamics without engaging in war, but rather growing their capabilities and remaining finely attuned to technological improvements.

UAVs are useful in surveillance and intelligence gathering – components that affect a state's position and survival in relation to perceived external threats; if a state can identify and monitor the perceived threats, an accurate and informed strategy can be established to reduce the possibilities of surprise attacks. Experts have identified that in the recent conflicts and on-going wars, information gathering has been the key to reducing casualties and improving a state's position in a conflict even though it may lack in terms of physical capabilities.

In neorealism, the importance and scarcity of resources is emphasised, as each can account to a state's demise or security, therefore a tool that is easily replaced, crafted and employed, proves to be a much more budget-friendly solution in contrast with expensive and massive aircraft. The prospect of reducing the risks posed to human lives should not be undermined, as it had been presented in the case of Japan, there's a growing refusal to endanger lives especially when a state is demographically challenged.

Afterall, drones currently present a symbol of technological superiority, especially when coupled with artificial intelligence – the military industry is adapting to the new realities of present-day conflicts, which are hybrid in

nature, and do not occur in between delimited clear territorial boundaries.

While neorealism puts significant importance on states and their sovereignty, drones are tools that can be employed in cross-boundaries operations without entailing a direct invasion, and they can be used not only by a state's military but also terrorist groups, separatists' factions etc.

Finally, in relation to the case studies presented, Japan and Türkiye employ drones to enhance their security, but the specific drivers and regional dynamics shape their approaches differently, Japan's concerns are often centred on China, surveillance, and maritime security while Türkiye's employment of drones is more diverse, comprising domestic and international objectives.

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