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The Evolving Balance of Power between Greece and Türkiye

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The theory of the balance of power has garnered substantial attention within the discipline of international relations. This study applies the theory to two states in the Eastern Mediterranean region: Greece and Türkiye. Military expenditures, gross domestic product (GDP), and population size are employed as indicators to empirically test the balance of power hypothesis. Additionally, Granger causality tests are conducted to examine whether the accumulation of (military) power by one state elicits a corresponding response from the other. The analysis utilizes data spanning a seventy-year period. The results indicate that the hypothesis of a balance of power between Greece and Türkiye cannot be rejected.

Keywords: *Balance of Power, Greece, Türkiye, Military Spending, Population, Gross Domestic Product (GDP)*

> Justice among equals is of necessity;
> the strong enact their will,
> and the weak yield.
> Thucydides (*History*, Book 5, §89)

Introduction

The balance of power constitutes a foundational principle in the study of international relations. It rests on a strong theoretical framework that assumes human nature and the state's core needs—survival, security, and expansion—ideas that trace back to Thucydides.[1] Moreover, it yields empirical hypotheses that can be systematically tested against historical evidence. Although the balance of power is a global historical phenomenon, it is often most clearly observable in peripheral

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[1]Healy and Stein (1973) examine the balance of power in international history, analyzing both its theoretical foundations and practical applications. Utilizing the 11-year period of the Bismarckian system (1870–1881), they empirically test the theory of the balance of power. They propose seven testable propositions, of which the second is particularly pertinent to our discussion. Kaufman et al. (2007) examine the history of the balance of power through case studies spanning from the ancient world (biblical times, Greece, Persia, Rome, India, China) to the 19th century. Their findings suggest "…that some form of hegemony rather than balance is the norm in international history" (p. 230). However, the interpretations presented in the book's concluding chapter are open to debate. The concept of balance of power is dynamic, and the existence of a hegemon, such as Persia, does not necessarily invalidate the balance of power assumption. For instance, the Athenians—under the leadership of Themistocles—were able to counter Persian power through superior strategy, securing victory at the Battle of Salamis despite possessing a smaller army and navy. This outcome suggests that in the Persia–Athens conflict, a balance of power was operative, as reflected in the Athenian triumph after building up its navy strength. Similarly, during the Greek War of Independence, the Greeks balanced Ottoman power by combining hard power (military force) with soft power (alliances), ultimately overcoming the Ottomans.

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arenas, such as the Mediterranean basin. At the regional level, neighboring states commonly engage in arms races to forestall relative decline vis-à-vis rivals perceived as potential adversaries. While the prospect of war does not invariably escalate into open conflict, enduring concerns with survival, security, and expansion consistently function as the underlying drivers of such military competitions.

In this paper, I examine the balance of power between two key states in the Eastern Mediterranean: Greece and Türkiye. The two countries share a long history of conflict, dating back to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The Byzantine Empire collapsed under persistent Ottoman attacks, and the Ottoman Empire itself eventually declined in the face of Britain's rising dominance in the Mediterranean (Papanikos, 2025a). Greece is often regarded as the historical heir of the Byzantine Empire, while Türkiye is viewed as the successor of the Ottoman Empire. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Greece and Türkiye engaged in a series of wars, beginning with the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s and culminating in the Balkan Wars of the 1910s and the Asia Minor War of the 1920s. In all of these conflicts, the role of foreign powers proved instrumental in shaping the balance of power between Greece and Türkiye, as I have demonstrated in Papanikos (2022a).

I organize the paper as follows. The next section briefly outlines the concept of the balance of power in international relations theory. The subsequent section presents data on total military spending in Greece and Türkiye from 1953 to 2024, illustrating how the balance of military power has evolved over time and its relation to actual conflicts or the threat of war. This section also examines military spending relative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to further support the balance-of-power argument. Granger causality tests are then applied to both indicators to assess whether military spending in one country helps predict that of the other. The following section focuses on the most recent period of the 21st century, marked by Greece's uneven power development relative to Türkiye, and incorporates total GDP into the analysis. The next section estimates the additional military spending required for Greece to achieve a balance of power with Türkiye, introducing population trends as a further factor. The final section concludes.

Balance of Power in International Relations Theory

This paper assumes that the balance of power theory provides a useful framework for explaining the competition between Greece and Türkiye, particularly in terms of military spending by the two neighboring states in the Eastern Mediterranean. The theory and practice of the balance of power in international relations have been thoroughly reviewed in a volume edited by Paul et al. (2004). The book reflects the intellectual climate of its time, when many scholars criticized balance of power theory as failing to capture contemporary realities. As Paul (2004) notes in the introduction, *"This volume arises from the need to reevaluate balance of power theories in view of recent changes in world politics. Skeptics and critics of realism believe that balance of power theory has become irrelevant in the face of growing global social forces, while proponents—in particular, realists—contend* *that balance of power dynamics still operate in world politics in varying forms and intensities"* (p. 2).

The balance of power is defined as an attempt to prevent a rising power from achieving hegemony, which could lead to war, the loss of independence, or even the physical destruction of states. It is rightly pointed out that the balance of power is essential for preserving peace, given human nature and the tendency of states to pursue egoistic self-interest. Such interests may involve not only survival but also expansion through the acquisition of territory.

In the theory of international relations—see, for example, Waltz (1979)—sovereign states and their governments can impose legitimate internal order and security. However, in the international realm, there is anarchy,[2] meaning that no universal government holds the sovereign right to impose global order and security. Within such a political system, the traditional hard balance of power (i.e., an arms race) may be replaced by a system of lobbying at the international level—a form of soft diplomatic power. A good example of such a lobbying process can be seen among European Countries within the European Union, particularly those in the eurozone.

Paul (2004) distinguishes among hard balancing, soft balancing, and asymmetric balancing. Hard balancing refers to the traditional realist notion of rival states countering one another through military buildup. Soft balancing, by contrast, involves the formation of alliances, while asymmetric balancing addresses threats posed by nonstate actors such as terrorists, individuals (so-called "lone wolves"), and organized groups.

This distinction is not novel. The primary function of the balance of power has historically pertained to relations among states and the threats they pose to one another, threats that are grounded principally in hard power. Alliances, by contrast, are more appropriately associated with soft power, irrespective of whether they entail joint military operations. In practice, these two forms of power are often combined in order to protect states against external adversaries, with the overarching aim of securing survival in the international system. Terrorism, however, is more closely related to questions of internal security. No individual actor or terrorist organization can realistically jeopardize the survival or security of a state without substantial support emanating from within that state. Consequently, asymmetric balancing does not properly fall within the theoretical scope of international relations.

Nonetheless, Paul (2004) recognizes that while hard balancing may be less visible at the global level, it remains evident at the regional level. As he notes, *"At the regional level, evidence exists that hard balancing continues, especially in regions experiencing high levels of conflict, enduring rivalries, or protracted conflicts ..."* (p. 4).

[2]Waltz (1979, p. 114) "Anarchy is seen as one end of a continuum whose other end is marked by the presence of a legitimate and competent government. International politics is then described as being flecked with particles of government and alloyed with elements of community-supranational organizations whether universal or regional, alliances, multinational corporations, networks of trade, and what not. International-political systems are thought of as being more or less anarchic."

In this context, the present paper contributes to balance of power theory by examining its applicability at the regional level.[3] The Eastern Mediterranean, as Papanikos (2005) notes, has long been a region characterized by continuous wars and conflicts. In recent years, military confrontations have involved Israel, Syria,[4] Libya, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran, the Kurds, and Türkiye. It is only natural to assume that Greece, situated at the edge of these conflicts and facing longstanding disputes with Türkiye, remains particularly sensitive to the latter's rhetoric and threats of using force to resolve disagreements.

Although Türkiye is involved in multiple conflicts in the region, Greece's primary concern remains exclusively Türkiye.[5] None of Greece's other neighboring states currently poses a threat of war, nor has Greece ever claimed it would resort to force to resolve disputes with Albania, North Macedonia, or Bulgaria. Similarly, Greece has reached agreements with its maritime neighbors, Italy and Egypt, to delimit their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and it has chosen to resolve its differences with Albania through international arbitration. A comparable approach was attempted with Libya, but no agreement was ultimately concluded.

Many Greeks believe that Türkiye has played a role in both Albania and Libya to obstruct the signing of EEZ agreements—an action they view as further evidence of Ankara's ambition to use both hard and soft power to assert its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. They often cite the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974—during which Türkiye occupied nearly two-fifths of the island's territory—as a precedent that underscores these concerns.

Apart from these historical facts, Greece and Türkiye meet several of the conditions identified in the literature as potential drivers of conflict. First, the two countries differ significantly in their political systems. Greece is a liberal democracy, whereas Türkiye has historically been an authoritarian democracy—a tendency that has further deteriorated under its current president. It is rare for two democracies to resolve their disputes through war.[6] Second, countries that are economically interdependent are generally less likely to resort to war. Greece and Türkiye share a moderately interdependent economic relationship. Trade—particularly in energy, agriculture, and manufacturing—constitutes the main connection, but its

[3]The theory of the balance of power meets the methodological criteria of being both logically coherent and empirically testable. No theory—including those in the field of international relations—can be regarded as academically valid unless it can be tested, primarily through the use of hard quantitative data. Examples of such data include variables such as defense expenditures, the annual production of final goods and services by each country (i.e., Gross Domestic Product, or GDP), and national population size. These three indicators, among others, have been widely employed in the international relations literature as measures of hard power.

[4]See Kizilkaya et al. (2021).

[5]Van Dyke (2005) offers a comprehensive analysis of Greek–Turkish disputes through the lens of international law.

[6]This is the essence of the so-called Democratic Peace Theory, an idea that traces back to Immanuel Kant. For a 20th-century review of this theory, see Doyle (1983a, 1983b), who argued that: *"Even though liberal states have become involved in numerous wars with nonliberal states, constitutionally secure liberal states have yet to engage in war with one another. No one should argue that such wars are impossible; but preliminary evidence does appear to indicate that there exists a significant predisposition against warfare between liberal states. Indeed, threats of war also have been regarded as illegitimate"* (Doyle, 1983a, p. 213).

overall scale remains limited. Infrastructure and investment linkages exist but do not create deep systemic interdependence. This leaves room for growth, which both countries are pursuing, but also creates vulnerabilities to geopolitical and economic shifts.[7] Third, Greece and Türkiye lack similar institutional affiliations. Greece is firmly anchored within the European Union's institutional framework, whereas Türkiye remains semi-integrated through the customs union and periodic dialogues, yet politically distant.[8] Greece participates actively in EU-backed Mediterranean structures, while Türkiye promotes parallel regional arrangements in energy and security.[9] Both countries are active regionally, but their approaches differ: Greece's Balkan role is largely EU-driven, while Türkiye relies more on bilateral initiatives and soft power. Türkiye also projects influence eastward—toward Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Turkic world—while Greece remains primarily engaged within EU and Black Sea frameworks. Moreover, Türkiye aligns itself with Islamic and Global South networks, whereas Greece is firmly tied to the EU and Mediterranean pro-Western partnerships.

The Greek–Turkish rivalry constitutes a salient case for evaluating the balance of power theory at the regional level. The following section empirically assesses this hypothesis by examining data on Greek and Turkish total military expenditures from 1953 to 2024, as well as military spending as a percentage of GDP from 1960 to 2024.

Greek and Turkish Military Spending

Greece and Türkiye both joined NATO in 1952. Established in 1949, NATO initially imposed no formal requirements for member states' defense spending, allowing them to rely on U.S. military leadership. However, by the early 21st century, concerns arose regarding equitable burden-sharing, leading to the adoption in 2014 of a guideline recommending that members allocate at least 2% of their GDP to defense (NATO, 2014). In June 2025, NATO leaders agreed to a new defense spending target: 5% of GDP by 2035. This target comprises 3.5% for core defense expenditures—such as personnel, operations, and equipment—and 1.5% for broader defense-related investments, including infrastructure, cybersecurity, and resilience measures (NATO, 2025). Nevertheless, in the case of Greece and Türkiye, military expenditure has been shaped less by NATO commitments—given that no member faces penalties for falling below the threshold—and more by their mutual drive to preserve a balance of military power. Both states fear that peace could be jeopardized should one side acquire a significant strategic advantage.

This section presents data on Greece and Türkiye's total military spending (Figure 1) and military spending as a percentage of GDP (Figure 2), with the goal of examining how the balance of military power has evolved over nearly three-

[7]This issue is further discussed by the World Trade Organization (2022).
[8]Bilgin (2018) examines EU–Turkey relations, with particular focus on the 1996 Customs Union agreement, highlighting the longstanding challenges for Turkey, which has been awaiting EU membership since 1963, and the broader implications for regional economic and political integration.
[9]Aslim (2018) and Papanikos (2015a) provide a detailed discussion of energy issues in the Eastern Mediterranean, whereas Papanikos (2015b) examines the issue of trade.

quarters of a century.[10] Analyzing these data allows for an empirical test of the balance of power theory, which is formally stated in the following hypothesis:

Balance of Power – Main Hypothesis

> According to balance of power theory, changes in the military spending of country A—either in absolute terms or as a percentage of GDP—are expected to induce corresponding changes in the military spending of country B. This dynamic reflects the strategic imperative for states to prevent relative decline and maintain equilibrium in regional military capabilities.

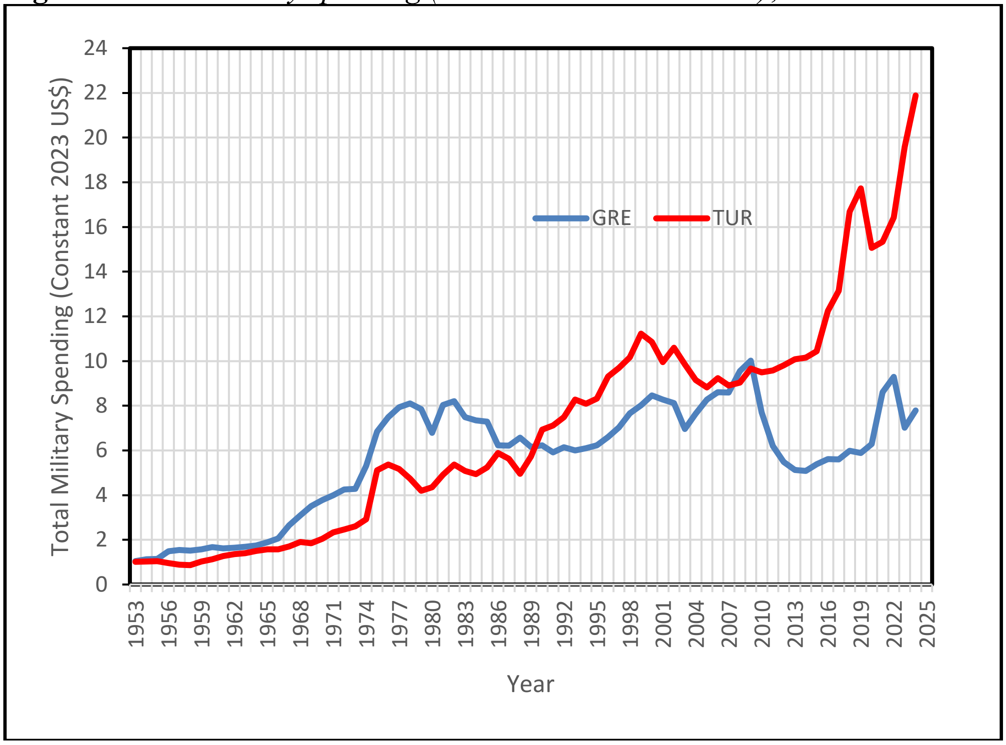
The above hypothesis represents a dynamic interpretation of balance of power theory. It does not necessarily assume equal hard power, either qualitatively or quantitatively, but rather emphasizes administrative capacity (strategic and tactical ability) as well as the role of alliances. In this context, balance of power does not imply absolute equality in military strength; instead, it suggests that when the military power of one state increases, *ceteris paribus*, the military power of its rival is expected to increase as well.

To test this hypothesis, Granger causality tests are employed. The strong version of the balance of power theory emphasizes comparisons of absolute military spending in monetary terms (dollar-to-dollar), rather than military spending as a percentage of GDP. Granger causality is particularly appropriate for this analysis because it allows for the examination of temporal precedence—whether changes in one country's military expenditure systematically precede and predict changes in the other's—thus providing empirical evidence of the reactive dynamics central to balance of power theory.

Figure 1 presents total military expenditures in billions of constant 2023 US dollars. On its own, the figure provides limited evidence regarding the strong version of the balance of power hypothesis. To further investigate, a Granger causality test was conducted to assess whether past military expenditures of one country predict the total military expenditures of the other. The results are reported in Table 1. The null hypothesis that Türkiye's total military spending does not Granger-cause Greek military spending cannot be rejected. The findings indicate that past values of Türkiye's military expenditures are statistically significant predictors of Greece's military expenditures. In other words, Turkish military spending Granger-causes Greek military spending at the 2.31% significance level. Conversely, the null hypothesis that Greece's total military spending Granger-causes Türkiye's total military spending is rejected. A plausible interpretation is that Greece adjusts its total military expenditures in response to Türkiye's spending behavior.

[10]It is not the purpose of this paper to engage with the theoretical, empirical, or measurement challenges associated with assessing national power, as discussed extensively in the context of balance of power theory and composite indicators of state capability. A detailed critical treatment of these issues is provided by Beckley (2018). In any case, Beckley's transformation of the indicators implies a shift from a quantitative to a qualitative empirical analysis, which raises a new set of criticisms in its own right.

Figure 1. *Total Military spending (Constant 2023 US dollars)*, 1953-2024



Source: The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex)

It is essential to situate Greece's and Türkiye's military expenditures over time within the context of broader political developments that cannot be fully captured through descriptive statistical analysis. As shown in Figure 1, until the mid-1960s, Greek and Turkish total military expenditures remained absolutely balanced. After 1964, however, Greece's military spending rose sharply, largely in response to developments in Cyprus, and this upward trajectory persisted until the 1990s. Thereafter, Türkiye's military expenditure began to exceed that of Greece, although the gap remained relatively modest until the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, which led to an unprecedented contraction in Greece's GDP and, consequently, a significant reduction in its defense budget.

Table 1. *Total Military spending: Granger Causality Test, 1953-2024*

Null Hypothesis	Observations / Lags	F-statistic	Probability
Turkish military spending does not Granger cause Greek military spending	68/4	3.07	0.0231
Greek military spending does not Granger cause Turkish military spending	68/4	0.92	0.4611

Source: Author's calculations using EViews

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, Greece's military spending declined dramatically. More noteworthy, however, is the simultaneous surge in Türkiye's military expenditure, which cannot be adequately explained by balance of power theory alone. Between 2010 and 2024, Türkiye more than doubled its defense budget, from approximately 10 billion USD to 22 billion USD. A plausible explanation for this trend is Türkiye's aspiration to assume a regional hegemonic role and to position itself as a leading power within the Muslim world.

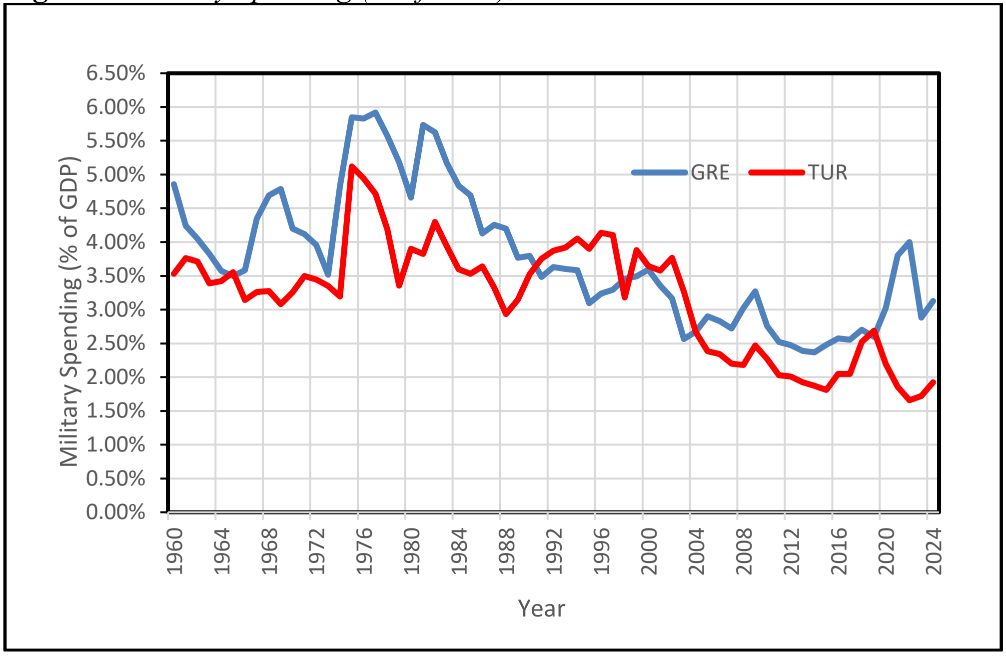
This interpretation is consistent with Türkiye's extensive military involvement in regional conflicts throughout the 21st century, including the Iraq War / Post-2003 Iraq Conflict (2003–present), the Syrian Civil War (2011–present), the Libyan Civil War (2014–2020), the Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020 and 2023), the Yemen Civil War (since 2015), and operations in Somalia (2011–present). Taken together, these interventions underscore that Türkiye's rising defense expenditure over the past two decades is best understood as part of its broader strategic ambition to consolidate a more prominent regional role.

An alternative explanation might be that Turkish policymakers do not decide on total military spending but rather on military spending as a percentage of GDP.[11] Figure 2 presents military spending as a percentage of GDP, with data available from 1960. It is important to note at the outset that, for both countries, the share of GDP allocated to military spending has been declining. Until 2000, the share for both countries exceeded 3%, far surpassing the 2% mark set by NATO. Beginning in the new century, both countries have opted to decrease the percentage of GDP devoted to military spending. The Turkish share is now below 2%. Thus, the reason Turkish military spending has increased in absolute terms is due to growth in real GDP, as illustrated in Figure 3 discussed in the next section.[12]

[11]Actually, this is consistent with Wagner's Law in public finance, once the peculiarities of military spending are taken into account. Wagner's Law suggests that as states grow wealthier, their defense budgets tend to rise in absolute terms, since advanced militaries are resource-intensive and security is a core public good. However, unlike health or education, defense spending is highly sensitive to external threats and strategic choices, so it does not always follow a smooth upward trajectory.

[12]Bakan and Gökmen (2016) examined the role of education in Turkey's unprecedented economic growth. Their analysis demonstrated a strong cointegrated relationship between the two variables. Berk and Biçen (2018) investigated the role of construction investment in Turkey's economic growth, highlighting its significant implications for economic policy and development planning. Dayioglu Ocal and Kavak (2018) emphasize the role of university–industry relations in promoting innovation and economic growth in Turkey, highlighting their significance for national development and policy planning.

Figure 2. *Military Spending (% of GDP), 1960-2024*



Source: The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex)

Table 2. *Total military spending as a % of GDP: Granger causality test, 1960-2024*

Null Hypothesis	**Observations / Lags**	**F-statistic**	**Probability**
Turkish military spending as a % of GDP does not Granger cause Greek military spending as a % of GDP	62/3	0.27	0.8457
Greek military spending as a % of GDP does not Granger cause Turkish military spending as % of GDP	62/3	3.92	0.0132

Source: Author's calculations using EViews

The key issue is whether Greek and Turkish military expenditures, as a percentage of GDP, can predict the trajectory of either country—or both—consistent with the balance of power theory. A Granger causality test, reported in Table 2, shows results opposite to those in Table 1. The hypothesis that "Greek military spending as a percentage of GDP does not Granger-cause Turkish military spending" is rejected at the 1.32% significance level. In contrast, the hypothesis that "Turkish military spending does not Granger-cause Greek military spending" cannot be rejected.

The main conclusion of this section is that Greece is lagging behind in its balance-of-power objectives. In response, the Greek government has recently launched a major defense initiative known as "Agenda 2030." This program seeks to reshape the Hellenic Armed Forces through structural reforms, technological upgrades, and closer integration with society and the domestic defense industry. Cost estimates vary somewhat, but most place total investment at around €25–28 billion over a period of 10 to 12 years, which serves as the core benchmark for Agenda 2030. These resources, however, have not the potential to restore the balance of power between Greece and Türkiye. More spending is needed. The following section explores this issue in greater detail.

Restoring Balance of Power Between Greece and Türkiye

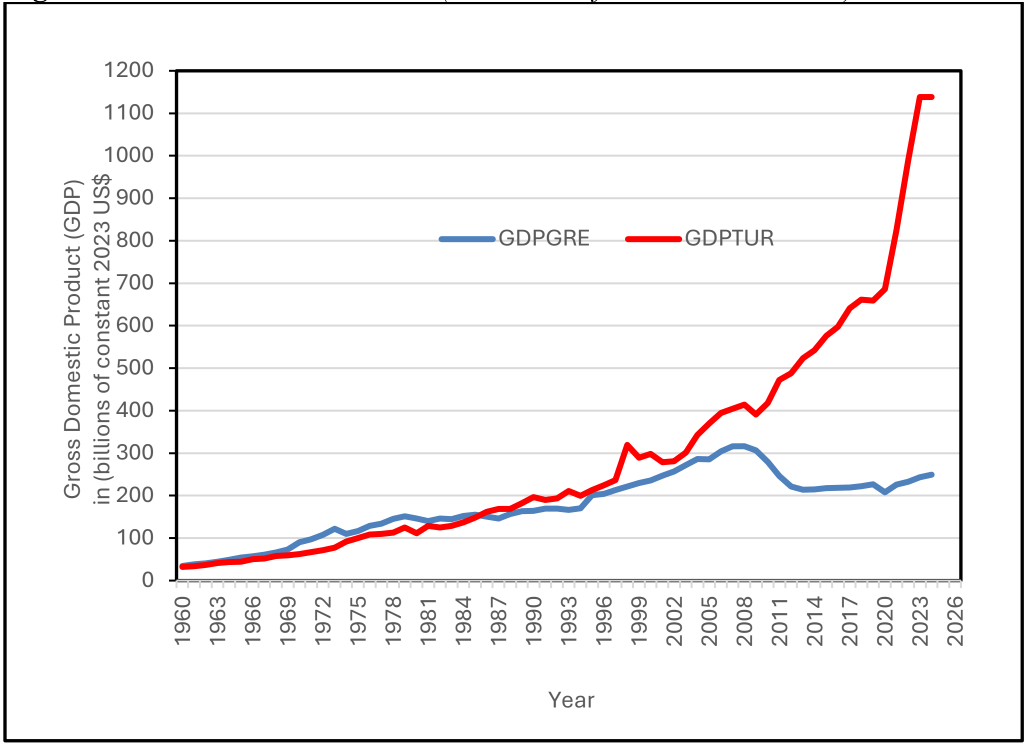
The preceding section has shown that the balance of power between Greece and Türkiye has been changing in favor of the Turkish side. Most probably there was no policy shift but the determining factors have changed. The Greek economic crisis of the 2009 affected military spending both in total and as a percentage of GDP. On the other hand, the Turkish GDP has been rising throughout the 21st century.[13] Figure 3 shows the real GDP of both Greece and Türkiye.

Figure 1 above shows that over the first 25 years of the 21st century (2000–2024), Türkiye has consistently spent much more on total military expenditures than Greece, despite a declining percentage of GDP devoted to defense. The substantial increase in Türkiye's GDP, illustrated in Figure 3, explains this unprecedented rise in total military spending. This has created a significant power imbalance. How Greece can restore its balance of power with Türkiye is a critical question. One approach is to increase its total GDP, a trend that has been evident since 2020. However, in the medium term (the next five years), substantial increases in military spending will be necessary.[14]

[13]I examined Turkish economic, population, and political developments in the 2020s in Papanikos (2021). Francese et al. (2016) analyzed population immigration issues, comparing Italy and Turkey, and highlighted the social and economic implications for Mediterranean cities. Ozdemir and Dokmeci (2016) investigated Turkey's inter-provincial migration patterns and their impact on regional development corridors.

[14]I would not recommend this course of action. My position rests on the argument that strengthening democracy in Türkiye, deepening trade relations between the two countries, and supporting Türkiye's accession to the European Union and, ultimately, the eurozone, serve both national and regional interests. As this paper has argued, it is in Greece's strategic interest to consistently endorse Türkiye's participation in international and European fora. A genuine balance of power, however, can only be achieved in the long term if both countries substantially reduce, and ideally eliminate, their military expenditures.

Figure 3. *Greek and Turkish GDP (in billions of constant 2023 US$)*



Source: The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex)

A systematic approach to assessing defense parity is to apply a five-year moving average rule, whereby Greece's military expenditures are benchmarked against Türkiye's average defense outlays over the preceding five-year period. For 2020–2024, Türkiye's military spending averaged approximately 18 billion constant U.S. dollars per year. Under the assumption that Greece maintains expenditures at this benchmark level during 2025–2029, Table 4 reports the implied Greek defense burden, expressed as military expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

The balance of power can be assessed in two distinct ways. First, on an annual basis, Greece would need to align its defense expenditures with those of Türkiye. Second, it would need to offset the cumulative shortfalls accumulated over previous years. Table 3 reports descriptive statistics for the 25-year period under review. Over this period, Türkiye allocated 304 billion constant 2023 U.S. dollars to military expenditures, while Greece allocated 182 billion, producing a cumulative differential of 122 billion dollars. On average, Greece expended 7.26 billion annually, compared to Türkiye's 12.15 billion. Greece's annual defense outlays ranged from a minimum of 5.08 billion to a maximum of 10.02 billion, whereas Türkiye's ranged from 8.82 to 21.89 billion constant 2023 U.S. dollars.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of Total Military Spending in Greece and Türkiye (Billions of Constant 2023 US$)*

Statistic	Greek	Türkiye
Mean	7.26	12.15
Maximum	10.02	21.89
Minimum	5.08	8.82
Standard Deviation	1.51	3.76
Sum	182	304
Observations (2000-2024)	25	25

The question is whether this level of military spending is politically and economically sustainable. The European environment is very conducive to help Greece increase its military spending. Even though the main European powers care very much about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the threat this may impose on Europe, Greece can take advantage of this situation and promote its own agenda of increasing its military spending in order to restore the balance of power with Türkiye.

Table 4. *Greece's Military Spending, 2025–2029 (in constant 2023 US$ bn)*

Year	Growth of GDP (IMF forecast)	Greek GDP	Military Spending	Military Spending (% of GDP)
2024	0.023 (actual)	249 (actual)	7.78 (actual)	0.031
2025	0.02	254	18	0.071
2026	0.018	259	18	0.070
2027	0.013	262	18	0.069
2028	0.015	266	18	0.068
2029	0.014	270	18	0.067

Source: IMF and the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex)

One common misconception in Greece regarding Türkiye concerns its relationship with Europe. According to balance-of-power theory and the challenges posed by an emerging regional power, Greece would benefit from actively supporting Türkiye's institutional integration into the European Union. Excluding Türkiye from key EU initiatives, such as the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) program—which seeks to strengthen security and defense cooperation among member states—runs counter to Greek strategic interests.

If the balance-of-power theory holds any validity and can therefore guide policy-making, it is in Greece's strategic interest to support the consolidation of democracy in Türkiye, deepen trade and investment ties, and—most importantly—promote institutional integration by facilitating Türkiye's accession to the European Union and, potentially, the Eurozone. In line with this logic, it is also in Greece's interest to permit Türkiye's participation in the SAFE program. Rhetoric aside, if these three fundamentals are met, Türkiye will pose less of a hard threat to Greece.

An alternative approach risks alienating Türkiye, which could, over the medium to long term, drift toward greater authoritarianism and pursue more expansionist and militarized policies. Such a trajectory would be directly counter to Greece's strategic interests. The following section examines this potential scenario in detail.

Assessing the Future Balance of Power Between Greece and Türkiye

Türkiye's interest is rising in the Eastern Mediterranean. The concept of "Mavi Vatan" echoes Italy's "Mare Nostrum" of the 1930s. Italian nationalists and Mussolini's regime (1922–1943) used "Mare Nostrum" to evoke Roman grandeur and justify expansionist ambitions, aiming to dominate the Mediterranean militarily, politically, and economically. Similarly, Turkish nationalists and Erdoğan's government (2003–2025) promote "Blue Homeland" (Mavi Vatan) to invoke Ottoman legacy and justify strategic ambitions, reflecting Türkiye's goal to assert influence across the region.

Türkiye is rising in hard power, while Greece is comparatively declining, making conflict between them conceivable, as suggested by the "Thucydides Trap." But who were the winners and losers in historical conflicts? The rising city-state of Athens ultimately lost the Peloponnesian War. Similarly, rising Italy in the 1920s and 1930s failed in its ambitions, struggling to defeat Greece in 1940 and relying on assistance from Nazi Germany to occupy the country. Ultimately, Greece emerged victorious with the support of strong allies—primarily the United States—and, as a result, Italy ceded the Dodecanese Islands to Greece. Even at the global level, the rising Soviet Union could not sustain its military, economic, and political antagonism and eventually collapsed without a war. It seems that prospects are often bleak for rising states.

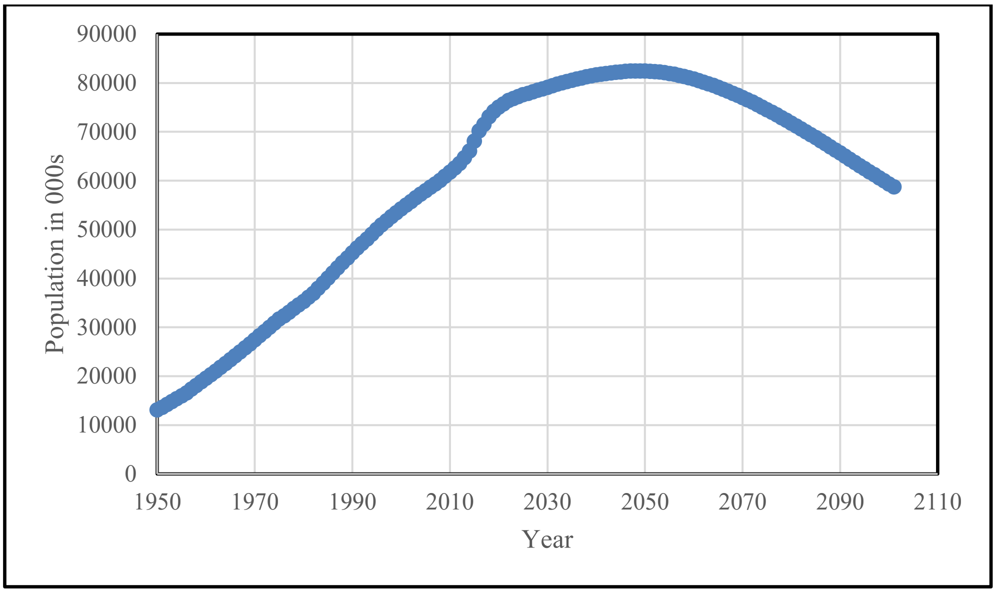
Could history repeat itself given Türkiye's rising ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean? The outcome largely depends on alliances (soft power) and balance of power (hard power). Greece and Cyprus already maintain a relatively strong alliance, primarily with the United States, and could strengthen ties with Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Greece benefits from the soft support of the European Union, enhancing its strategic position in the region.

Greece faces three principal challenges in terms of its relative hard power vis-à-vis Türkiye. First, as previously noted, Türkiye has surpassed Greece in military expenditures for the first time in decades. Second, and closely related, Türkiye's GDP has expanded significantly in the 21st century, whereas Greece's economy experienced a profound contraction during the "Great Recession."[15] Third, and arguably most consequential in the long term, Greece's population is declining, while Türkiye's continues to grow.

Figure 4 illustrates the divergence in total population between the two countries. In 1950, Türkiye's population exceeded that of Greece by approximately 13 million. Today, the gap has widened to nearly 80 million. This disparity is further compounded by demographic structure: Türkiye's population is relatively young, whereas Greece's is disproportionately aging.

[15]In a series of papers (Papanikos, 2014, 2022b, 2024, 2025c), I have examined the impact of the Great Recession on the Greek economy.

Figure 4. *Population Differences between Greece and Türkiye: Actual and Projected, 1950-2101*



Source: United Nations World Population Prospects 2024

One of the goals of the Greek state, as with any state, is to preserve the physical existence of the Greek people. Practically, this means that the population should not decline to the point where its very survival is threatened—something that could be described as a self-inflicted "genocide." I have analyzed this grim prospect for Greece in Papanikos (2025b). As far as the physical existence of the Greeks is concerned, demographics is the most critical challenge, and the odds are against Greece. All Türkiye has to do is wait! I am confident that many people in Türkiye would not support such an outcome. However, the relationship between these two historic peoples, characterized by longstanding cultural interactions and shared experiences, lies beyond the scope of this paper, even though it highlights many important dimensions of Greek–Turkish relations.

Conclusions

The balance of power has solid theoretical foundations leading to specific testable hypotheses. The analysis of the balance of power focuses on three key indicators of hard power commonly emphasized in balance of power theory and related measures of national capability: population, GDP, and total military expenditure. These variables are closely interrelated. For a given level of economic development, a larger population tends to support a larger GDP, while a larger GDP expands a state's capacity to allocate resources to military spending. Together, these indicators capture the material foundations of state power and are frequently employed in comparative power assessments, such as the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC).[16]

[16]Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey (1972) developed the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) to measure national power. The World Population Review (2025) provides updated CINC scores and

This paper tests the balance of power theory using the historical experience of Greece and Türkiye as a case study. The analysis shows that the two countries tend to mirror each other in military spending: Greece follows Türkiye in total expenditure, while Türkiye follows Greece in spending relative to GDP. In recent decades—particularly after the Great Recession of the late 2010s—Greece has experienced a significant decline in its balance of power, driven by substantial GDP losses alongside Türkiye's economic gains. This decline is compounded by Greece's shrinking population, in contrast to Türkiye's continuing demographic growth. In the medium term, Greece could narrow the gap in military spending with Türkiye by more than doubling its military expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

While this study acknowledges Türkiye's strategic considerations, it does not examine the extent to which its balance-of-power calculations extend beyond Greece. Türkiye's involvement in multiple regional conflicts likely compels higher military expenditures than would be predicted if Greece were its sole strategic concern. This broader context represents a significant determinant of military capability, yet it falls outside the scope of the present analysis and warrants further investigation in future research.

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rankings by country. According to the latter, Greece's CINC score is 0.003, whereas Türkiye's is 0.015, five times greater.

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