

## ANATOLIAN SECURITY AND NEO-OTTOMANISM: TURKEY'S INTERVENTION IN SYRIA

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**O**n the morning of August 24, 2016, units of the Turkish armed forces, along with allied groups such as the Free Syrian Army, crossed the border into northern Syria. Their target was a region still dominated by the presence of the weakened and declining Islamic State, yet their ultimate purpose was to block the increase of Kurdish power in the region. Just over a month after an armed coup attempt and exactly five centuries after the battle of Marj Dabiq, which once brought about Ottoman hegemony over Syria and Egypt, the military operation was to represent the beginning of Turkey's direct involvement southward and, arguably, a stepping stone toward dominance in northern Syria. Turkey's increased presence in Syria and its attempt to expand its reach throughout the Middle East and the wider Muslim world can be considered a forward defense of its Anatolian heartland. After all, it is the geography of Anatolia that enables Turkey to project its power into the Marmara straits,

the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, while simultaneously placing the state in proximity to the Caucasus and even within striking distance of the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, Anatolia is also vulnerable to attack from many sides, despite complex relations with historical enemies such as Russia and Greece, leading to the existence of elements of the security community.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the priority of defending the Anatolian heartland contributes — along with Turkey's position at the crossroads between West and East — to a sustained insecurity complex.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Turkey's clear move toward interventionism is in accordance with its unstated but clearly identifiable neo-Ottoman policies, pursued since the rise and consolidation of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Neo-Ottomanism has been consistently explored in recent literature as a way for the AKP to solidify its dominance of Turkish politics, and for Turkey to reassert itself in regions that had once been part of the Ottoman