



Collusion or Collision?

Turkey-Russia Relations Under Erdogan and Putin

Foreword by Ambassador Eric S. Edelman

By Aykan Erdemir, Sinan Ciddi,
and John Hardie

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Foreword

U.S. relations with Turkey and Russia have soured over the last two decades. Once a staunch ally anchoring NATO’s southern flank, Turkey has increasingly drifted from the West. With Russia, post-Cold War hopes for strategic partnership between Moscow and the West have given way to renewed strategic competition and confrontation.

Meanwhile, despite a long history of fraught relations dating back to the 16th century, Turkey and Russia have moved closer. This report serves as an indispensable guide to the relationship between Ankara and Moscow.

To be sure, their differences are many, and mutual suspicion still runs deep. Yet the authors carefully document how the regimes of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin have managed to compartmentalize their relationship, mixing competition with substantial — if transactional — cooperation across a range of areas. Many in Washington continue to see Turkey as a bulwark against Russia, yet this report capably demonstrates that such notions are fanciful, at least for as long as Erdogan remains in charge.

Economic ties, particularly in the energy sector, drove Russian-Turkish rapprochement following the Soviet Union’s collapse. These ties remain a key pillar of their relationship, helping to buffer against growing Russian-Turkish geopolitical competition across multiple regions.

But there are also broader and deeper forces at play. Erdogan and Putin both reject the post-Cold War liberal international order and view Turkish-Russian cooperation as a means of advancing their revisionist geopolitical agendas. Cultivating ties with Moscow helps Ankara achieve independence from the West. For the Kremlin, Turkey’s drift from the West supports Moscow’s longstanding efforts to undermine NATO, as seen with Ankara’s purchase of the Russian-made S-400 surface-to-air missile system.

Turkey and Russia’s alignment also reflects domestic factors. Neither strongman chastises the other for his democratic shortcomings or kleptocracy. In both countries, large swathes of the elite reject liberalism

and associated visions that root their country’s national identity and strategic vocation within the West. Indeed, Erdogan’s alliance with Turkey’s “Eurasianist” faction, which eschews the West and prioritizes relations with Russia and other non-Western powers, has helped fuel Ankara’s alignment with Moscow. For Putin, Russia’s “Eurasianist” thinkers have provided useful political cover for his authoritarian and kleptocratic regime.

In Washington, both political parties have come to recognize that America and its allies face growing threats from authoritarian powers that seek to undermine the interests and values of free societies. This report is among the best works that show how such autocratic regimes are able to cooperate effectively despite their unresolved differences.

For the United States and its allies, successfully navigating the Turkey-Russia relationship will require an accurate picture of today’s Turkey. Thankfully, the analysis here reflects a deep understanding of Turkish politics and the subtle ways in which ideology, strategy, and economic interests blend together to shape foreign policy.

As the authors note, Ankara’s drift from the West reflects a fundamental shift in Turkish foreign policy: Although Erdogan does not seek to exit NATO, he seeks to balance between East and West, making Erdogan’s Turkey unlikely to reprise its former role as a stalwart transatlantic ally. The foreign policies of both Moscow and Ankara have deep domestic roots, and both Washington and its allies will need to develop a coordinated strategy to deal with the consequences of the Turkish-Russian entente. This monograph offers a nuanced set of policy recommendations to inform that effort. They deserve careful consideration by policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic.



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Introduction

When Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 bomber over the Turkish-Syrian border in November 2015, it was the first downing of a Russian military aircraft by a NATO member since 1952.¹ Russian President Vladimir Putin decried the downing as a “stab in the back delivered by terrorists’ accomplices,”² while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insisted Ankara’s actions were “fully in line with Turkey’s rules of engagement.” Erdogan proceeded to demand that Russia “respect the right of Turkey to defend its borders.”³

Yet by August 2016 — less than a month after an abortive coup d’état by a faction within the Turkish military — the two leaders would meet in St. Petersburg to usher in a new era of rapprochement.⁴ A year later, an increasingly anti-Western Erdogan stunned Turkey’s NATO allies by announcing his plans to purchase Russia’s S-400 surface-to-air missile system.⁵

Russian and Turkish interests still collide — sometimes violently — from the Middle East and North Africa to the Black Sea, from the Caucasus to Caspian energy supplies to Europe. Mutual suspicion runs deep, informed by centuries of war and mistrust. Russian-Turkish competition has intensified in recent years amid increased adventurism by both Moscow and Ankara. Nevertheless, the two powers have achieved close, if transactional, cooperation in the economic,

diplomatic, and even security spheres. Both Putin and Erdogan have learned to manage their differences.

Economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector, constitutes both the main historical driver of Turkish-Russian relations as well as a buffer against geopolitical tensions. In January 2020, Russia and Turkey inaugurated the TurkStream natural gas pipeline. Earlier this year, Putin and Erdogan began construction on the third unit of Turkey’s Russian-built \$20 billion Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project.

Shared antipathy toward the West is another driver of the Russian-Turkish relationship. For Erdogan, ties with Russia facilitate independence from the West. For Putin, Turkey’s willingness to break with Washington and other NATO allies fits well with Moscow’s campaign to erode U.S. influence and undermine the transatlantic alliance.⁶ Ankara received two S-400 batteries in 2019 and conducted a firing test in 2020, becoming the first and only NATO member to earn U.S. sanctions for buying Russian arms. Earlier this year, Russia reiterated its readiness to sell advanced fighter jets to Turkey following Ankara’s ejection from the U.S.-led Joint Strike Fighter program.⁷ Moscow and Ankara also cooperate in various non-Western international organizations.

Putin and Erdogan have a close working relationship; since 2016, they have spoken by phone more times

1. Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “The last time a Russian jet was shot down by a NATO jet was in 1952,” *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2015. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/11/24/the-last-time-a-russian-jet-was-shot-down-by-a-nato-jet-was-in-1952/>)

2. Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Meeting with King Abdullah II of Jordan,” November 24, 2015. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50775>)

3. “Turkey-Russia row: A brief history of presidential war of words,” *BBC* (UK), December 1, 2015. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34971902>)

4. Aykan Erdemir and Boris Zilberman, “The Turkey-Russia reset: Erdogan needed a friend after the failed coup, so he headed to Russia,” *Politico*, August 10, 2016. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/the-turkey-russia-reset/>)

5. Carlotta Gall and Andrew Higgins, “Turkey Signs Russian Missile Deal, Pivoting From NATO,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 2017. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/europe/turkey-russia-missile-deal.html>)

6. Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), page 123. (<https://carnegieendowment.org/pdf/book/post-imperium.pdf>)

7. “Russia ready for talks with Turkey on Su-35, Su-57 fighters,” *TASS* (Russia), March 12, 2021. (<https://tass.com/defense/1265467>)

than with any other world leader.⁸ Neither criticizes the other's autocratic behavior, while both face frequent opprobrium from the West. Both are populist, nationalistic strongmen who champion conservative values and contrast themselves with a decadent West. Russia and Turkey's various geopolitical disputes have continually tested this relationship, requiring the two leaders to take "manual" control, as the Russians say, to hammer out a deal. "No matter how tough President Erdogan's stance may look, I know that ... finding a common language with him is possible," Putin said in October 2020, even as Russian-Turkish tensions mounted over Ankara's involvement in last year's Armenia-Azerbaijan war. Putin then praised Erdogan for sticking with TurkStream and the S-400 purchase despite Western pressure, contrasting Erdogan's reliability with Europe's inability "to show enough basic independence or sovereignty to implement" Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline. "Working with such a partner is not only pleasant but also safe."⁹

However, while Putin and Erdogan's outsized roles enhance predictability and flexibility in bilateral negotiations, they may also inhibit a deeper and more durable partnership. Some institutional ties do exist, including frequent contacts at the intergovernmental, military-to-military, special services, inter-parliamentary, corporate, people-to-people, and expert levels. The relative popularity of pro-Russia propaganda outlets in Turkey provides Moscow another lever to influence Russian-Turkish relations. Ultimately, though, the trajectory of Russian-Turkish relations still hinges on direct negotiations between the two strongmen, particularly during crises.¹⁰

In Washington, some still believe Ankara remains a bulwark against Russian expansionism on NATO's southeastern flank.¹¹ While areas of fruitful cooperation with Turkey do still exist, this report demonstrates that under Erdogan, Turkey's drift from the West and tilt toward Russia reflect a fundamental transformation of Ankara's foreign and security policy. Just as Moscow and Ankara will not soon become stalwart allies, Erdogan's Turkey is equally unlikely to be a steadfast member of the Western alliance. Rather, Ankara likely will aim to leverage the two camps against one another.

Washington and its transatlantic allies therefore must take urgent and coordinated action to clarify their strategy toward Turkey. The West should pursue cooperation with Turkey where interests align, such as countering Russia in the Black Sea region and promoting alternatives to Russian energy supplies. But the West should also seek to contain challenges from Turkey by imposing firm consequences for further aligning with Russia or otherwise undermining NATO, while providing incentives if Ankara does the right thing.

Given that Erdogan is unlikely to fundamentally change course, the West should also mitigate against risks such as the loss of access to Turkish military bases and further Turkish destabilization in the Eastern Mediterranean. Finally, Washington and its allies should lay the groundwork to bring Turkey back into the Western fold in a post-Erdogan era, by engaging with the Turkish people and supporting democratic institutions in Turkey.

8. Isabelle Kurshudyan, "Russia's Putin and Turkey's Erdogan head for talks with major Syria rift between them," *The Washington Post*, March 4, 2020. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russias-putin-and-turkeys-erdogan-head-for-talks-with-major-syria-rift-between-them/2020/03/03/15c112bc-5d66-11ea-ac50-18701e14e06d_story.html); Wen Foo and Han Huang, "Talking heads," *Reuters*, July 16, 2018. (<https://graphics.reuters.com/USA-RUSSIA/010071702F8/index.html>); Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Erdogan, Recep Tayyip," accessed November 17, 2021. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/122/events>)

9. Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club," October 22, 2020. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64261>)

10. Hamdi Firat Buyuk, "Leaders' Role May Leave Turkey-Russia Relations Fragile," *Balkan Insight* (Bosnia and Herzegovina), March 5, 2020. (<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/05/leaders-role-makes-leaves-turkey-russia-relations-fragile>)

11. Michael Doran, "America Is Obstructing Turkey's Geostrategic Destiny," *The Caravan*, December 8, 2020. (<https://www.hoover.org/research/america-obstructing-turkeys-geostrategic-destiny>)

Part I: Turkey's Drift From the Western World

Centuries of Rivalry

Turkey and Russia have a centuries-old relationship defined mostly by strategic competition and war. Between the 16th and early 20th centuries, the Ottoman Empire lost territory spanning from Crimea to Circassia after fighting 12 major wars against Russian armies, almost all of which Russia instigated and won. This legacy of mutual enmity and distrust always lingers. Russia remains the only neighboring country Turkey truly fears.

Periods of cooperation between Russia and Turkey were typically short-lived and geared toward countering a common foe. In the aftermath of World War I, the ascendant Turkish nationalists and Russia's communist government shared perceived enemies in the West. The two powers signed treaties settling their territorial disputes. The Bolsheviks were the first to formally recognize the new administration in Ankara and provided aid that the Kemalists used to consolidate power. This relative harmony evaporated in the 1930s and 1940s, however, as Joseph Stalin pursued greater control over Turkey and particularly the Turkish Straits.¹²

From World War II until Stalin's death in 1953, Ankara lived in constant fear of Soviet invasion, leading Turkey to join NATO in 1952. In return for significant U.S. military investments in Turkey, Ankara hosted a variety of U.S. military and intelligence assets, including Jupiter nuclear-armed medium-range ballistic missiles, B61 nuclear gravity bombs, and nuclear artillery.¹³ Moscow continued the tsarist-era practice of using the Kurds to weaken and gain leverage over Turkey, including by supporting the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a militant Kurdish group established in the 1970s.¹⁴

Despite Turkey's NATO membership, diplomatic crises with Washington throughout the 1960s and 1970s led Turkish leaders to question the arrangement.¹⁵ The U.S. withdrawal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey to resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis worried Ankara.¹⁶ In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson warned that America might not defend Turkey from a potential Soviet attack if Ankara invaded Cyprus.¹⁷ When Turkey did intervene in 1974, the United States imposed a crippling arms embargo, which Washington lifted in 1978 to arrest Turkey's tilt toward Moscow. Thereafter, Ankara chose to remain in the Western alliance.¹⁸

12. See: Anthony R. De Luca, "Soviet-American Politics and the Turkish Straits," *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 92, Number 3, Fall 1977, pages 503–524. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2148505>); U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, Current Intelligence Study Number 11, "Soviet Denunciation of Neutrality Pact With Turkey," April 13, 1945. (https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000709437.pdf)

13. "Turkey-U.S. Relations: Timeline and Brief Historical Context," *Congressional Research Service*, May 7, 2021. (<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/IF10487.pdf>); "Appendix B' Deployments by Country, 1951–1977," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Volume 55, Number 6, 1999, page 67. (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00963402.1999.11460395>)

14. Anna Borschevskaya, "The Kurdish Role in Russia's Middle East Power Play," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 29, 2020. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kurdish-role-russias-middle-east-power-play>); Gonul Tol, "Why Is Turkey Silent on Russia's Cooperation with the Syrian Kurds?" *War on the Rocks*, December 19, 2017. (<https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/why-is-turkey-silent-on-russias-cooperation-with-the-syrian-kurds>)

15. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Toward Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pages 1–55.

16. Suleyman Seydi, "Turkish-American Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1957–63," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 46, Number 3, May 2010, pages 433–455. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20720681>)

17. "Johnson Warns Inonu On Cyprus; Invites Him to U.S. for Talks—Turkey Said to Give Up Plan for a Landing," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1964. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1964/06/06/archives/johnson-warns-inonu-on-cyprus-invites-him-to-us-for-talksturkey.html>)

18. John M. Goshko, "Hill Lifts Embargo On Arms to Turkey," *The Washington Post*, August 2, 1978. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/08/02/hill-lifts-embargo-on-arms-to-turkey/edaf7167-2ad7-4623-b979-1457fe3812d9>); Craig R. Whitney, "Soviet Union and Turkey Sign Nonaggression, Trade and Cultural Pacts," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1978. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1978/06/24/archives/soviet-union-and-turkey-sign-nonaggression-trade-and-cultural-pacts.html>)

From the End of the Cold War to the Arab Spring

Despite expectations that Turkey would draw closer to the West, the breakdown of Ankara's bid for EU membership, as well as U.S.-Turkish tensions over the two wars in Iraq, spurred a new turn to Moscow. Shared resentment toward the West has helped fuel Russian-Turkish rapprochement, forming what some analysts have termed an "Axis of the Excluded."¹⁹

The First Gulf War strained U.S.-Turkish relations. Baghdad's loss of control over northern Iraq allowed the outlawed PKK, which had fought Ankara since the 1980s, to train militants and stage operations against Turkey. Ankara also felt frustrated with Washington's support for the Iraqi Kurds and perceived insensitivity to Turkish interests. These concerns helped drive Ankara's failure to let the U.S. military use Turkish bases and airspace during the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. That rift undermined U.S.-Turkish trust.²⁰ Ankara's opposition to the U.S. invasion also provided a point of consensus with Moscow, which applauded Turkey's break with the United States.²¹

The gradual breakdown of Turkey's EU accession process exacerbated Turkish dissatisfaction with the West. So did increasing EU criticism of Turkey's

democratic deficiencies, particularly relating to Ankara's treatment of the Kurds. Turkey resented the European Union's perceived double-standard in excluding Turkey while including the former Warsaw Pact states, whose democratic credentials Ankara saw as no better than its own.²²

In 2004, pushed by Turkey's rival Greece, Brussels granted membership to the Republic of Cyprus even after Greek Cypriots rejected a UN-sponsored effort to reconcile Nicosia with the island's self-declared Turkish Cypriot state. This not only provoked an anti-EU nationalist backlash in Turkey, but also gave Nicosia a veto over Turkish accession. Accession talks launched in 2005 quickly stalled as Berlin and Paris began suggesting a "privileged partnership" with Turkey rather than full membership.²³

With Turkey's EU membership process all but dead, most Turks today see EU accession as unrealistic or even undesirable.²⁴ Although Erdogan was more interested in exploiting the accession process to undermine Turkey's secular establishment and consolidate his own power, he has leveraged the deadlock to foment anti-Western sentiment. In a 2017 survey, 68 percent of Turkish respondents said their country's relationship with the West was "breaking," while almost 72 percent

19. Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?" *Survival*, Volume 48, Number 1, Spring 2006, pages 81–92. (https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2006_survival.pdf)

20. Gonul Tol and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey's Russian Roulette," *The MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, Eds. Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (Milano, Italy: ISPI and Atlantic Council, 2019), page 111. (<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MENA-Region-Great-Power-Competition-Report-Web-2.pdf>)

21. See, for example: Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Responses to Questions from Russian Journalists," December 6, 2004. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22732>)

22. Gonul Tol and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey's Russian Roulette," *The MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, Eds. Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (Milano, Italy: ISPI and Atlantic Council, 2019), pages 111–112. (<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MENA-Region-Great-Power-Competition-Report-Web-2.pdf>)

23. Gonul Tol and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey's Russian Roulette," *The MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, Eds. Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (Milano, Italy: ISPI and Atlantic Council, 2019), page 114. (<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MENA-Region-Great-Power-Competition-Report-Web-2.pdf>)

24. Max Hoffman, "A Snapshot of Turkish Public Opinion Toward the European Union," *Center for American Progress*, September 27, 2018. (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2018/09/27/458537/snapshot-turkish-public-opinion-toward-european-union>); "Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey 2020," *TurkuazLab*, December 2020. (<https://www.turkuazlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Dimensions-of-Polarization-in-Turkey-2020.pdf>)

believed Turkey should forge “a political, economic, and security alliance with Russia.”²⁵

This anti-Western trend helped fuel the rise of Turkish Eurasianism, a contradictory blend of Kemalism, Turkish nationalism, socialism, and radical secularism.²⁶ Although Turkey’s Eurasianist camp comprises a variety of strains,²⁷ there are three core elements: an anti-imperialist aversion to the West and globalization; a conspiratorial belief that Western powers threaten Turkey’s unity and borders; and the notion that Turkey’s future lies with the Eastern bloc, especially as the West’s relative global influence declines.²⁸ Despite traditionally constituting a marginal force in Turkish politics, the Eurasianist camp has gained sway in Turkish domestic and foreign policy, helping drive Ankara’s pivot toward Russia.

In 2002, the then-secretary-general of Turkey’s National Security Committee, General Tuncer Kilinc, argued Turkey should abandon the European Union in favor of Russia and Iran.²⁹ Although few observers at

the time paid serious heed, like-minded officers gained a more prominent position within the Turkish military following the failed coup d’état of July 2016. An ensuing purge eliminated many pro-Western officers, creating a vacuum quickly filled by Eurasianists.³⁰ Purges in universities, bureaucracy, and judiciary have similarly enabled the Eurasianists to consolidate power and shape state policies.³¹

Turkey’s souring relations with the West helped fuel rapprochement with Russia. Turkey and Russia expanded economic ties, with energy as their cornerstone, even though Ankara also championed the Western-backed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, an alternative to Russian export routes.³² Turkey became the first NATO member to import Russian arms.³³ From 1992 to 1996, Moscow provided Turkey with transport helicopters and armored personnel carriers,³⁴ among other armaments. The two concluded an agreement in 1994 on military-technical and defense-industrial cooperation.³⁵ In 1998, they signed a memorandum of understanding on boosting military

25. Marc Champion, “Conspiracy or Not, Turkey’s Ties to West Are at Risk,” *Bloomberg*, December 4, 2017. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-05/conspiracy-or-not-turkey-s-ties-to-west-are-at-risk>)

26. Emre Erşen, “Avrasyacılık Bağlamında Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri [Turkish-Russian Relations within the Context to Eurasianism],” *Perspektif* (Turkey), March 13, 2020. (<https://www.perspektif.online/tr/jeopolitik/avrasyacilik-baglaminda-turkiye-rusya-iliskileri.html>)

27. Metin Gurcan, “The rise of the Eurasianist vision in Turkey,” *Al-Monitor*, May 17, 2017. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/05/turkey-rise-of-euroasianist-vision.html>)

28. Mustafa Gurbuz, “Beyond the Trump-Erdogan Meeting: The Rise of Eurasianists and Turkey’s Syria Policy,” *Arab Center Washington DC*, May 23, 2017. (http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/beyond-the-trump-erdogan-meeting-the-rise-of-eurasianists-and-turkeys-syria-policy)

29. Suat Kiniklioglu, “Spurred by the West, Turkey looks eastward,” *International Herald Tribune*, September 7, 2006. (Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/07/opinion/07iht-edsuat.2728588.html>)

30. Gonul Tol and Omer Taspinar, “Erdogan’s Turn to the Kemalists,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 27, 2016. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2016-10-27/erdogans-turn-kemalists>); Mustafa Gurbuz, “Beyond the Trump-Erdogan Meeting: The Rise of Eurasianists and Turkey’s Syria Policy,” *Arab Center Washington DC*, May 23, 2017. (http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/beyond-the-trump-erdogan-meeting-the-rise-of-eurasianists-and-turkeys-syria-policy)

31. Mustafa Gurbuz, “Beyond the Trump-Erdogan Meeting: The Rise of Eurasianists and Turkey’s Syria Policy,” *Arab Center Washington DC*, May 23, 2017. (http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/beyond-the-trump-erdogan-meeting-the-rise-of-eurasianists-and-turkeys-syria-policy)

32. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), page 147.

33. Andrew R. Koch, “Turkey, Faced With Budget Problems, Looks to Moscow for Arms,” *Arms Control Today*, Volume 24, Number 5, June 1994, page 30. (Accessed via JSTOR)

34. SIPRI Conventional Arms Transfer Database, accessed July 19, 2021.

35. Gulsah Gures, *Security Dimension of Turkey’s Relations With Russia: 2000-2010* (Doctoral dissertation), Page 27. (<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.633.7294&rep=rep1&type=pdf>)

cooperation.³⁶ Ankara invited Russia into Turkish-initiated economic and security institutions focused on the Black Sea region.³⁷

To be sure, Russia and Turkey's rivalry and mutual suspicion persisted. Ankara's pan-Turkic aspirations and (largely unsuccessful) efforts to exploit Russia's post-Soviet retreat in the Caucasus and Central Asia worried Moscow.³⁸ In response to Turkey's covert support for the Chechen rebels during Russia's humiliating First Chechen War, Moscow increased ties with the PKK. Ankara also backed Azerbaijan against Armenia during their war in the early 1990s, while Moscow leaned toward Yerevan. The two powers also differed over the Bosnia and Kosovo wars. Russian plans to provide S-300s to Cyprus triggered a crisis ultimately defused by a U.S.-brokered compromise.³⁹

Nevertheless, Russian-Turkish relations continued to deepen, thanks to mutual efforts to mitigate conflict, coupled with Ankara's comparatively limited influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia and a focus on domestic woes in both countries. Moscow and Ankara eventually found common ground on a range of divisive issues. Most notably, Ankara agreed not to sell arms to the Chechens or allow volunteers to fight in Chechnya, while Moscow promised not to allow any Kurdish

activities in Russia directed at Turkey.⁴⁰ Although Moscow continued to complain that Turkey harbored Chechens, Turkey did clamp down on Chechen émigré networks. In 1999, during Russia's more successful Second Chechen War, then-Prime Minister Putin signed a joint counterterrorism declaration with his Turkish counterpart, who told Turkish media that Chechnya was Russia's internal affair. Moscow, for its part, scaled back support for the PKK.⁴¹

“Following the turbulence of the 1990s, Russo-Turkish relations blossomed in the 2000s thanks both to burgeoning economic ties and to each country's deteriorating relations with the West.”

Following the turbulence of the 1990s, Russian-Turkish relations blossomed in the 2000s thanks both to burgeoning economic ties and to each country's deteriorating relations with the West.⁴² Bilateral trade boomed. Russia became Turkey's top trading partner, while Turkey became a key market for Russian gas exports. In 2001, they signed a Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Eurasia⁴³ and established a bilateral commission on military-technical cooperation.⁴⁴ The Blue Stream natural gas pipeline came online in 2003, establishing Russia's first direct route to Turkey.⁴⁵

36. Turkish Council of Ministers, “Regarding the Approval of the Memorandum of Understanding, Signed Between Republic of Turkey Presidency of the General Staff and the Presidency of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces,” 98/11315, July 4, 1998. (<http://ua.mfa.gov.tr/files.ashx?76871>)

37. Gulsah Gures, *Security Dimension of Turkey's Relations With Russia: 2000-2010* (Doctoral dissertation), pages 100–102. (<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.633.7294&rep=rep1&ctype=pdf>)

38. Igor Torbakov, “Turkey-Russia: Competition and Cooperation,” *Eurasianet*, December 27, 2002. (<https://eurasianet.org/turkey-russia-competition-and-cooperation>)

39. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), pages 145–157; Robert Olson, “Turkish and Russian foreign policies, 1991-1997: the Kurdish and Chechnya questions,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Volume 18, Number 2, October 1998. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13602009808716407>)

40. Ibid.

41. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), page 153.

42. Suat Kiniklioglu and Valeriy Morkva; “An anatomy of Turkish-Russian Relations,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Volume 7, Number 4, 2007, page 548. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14683850701726013>)

43. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Turkey's Political Relations With Russian Federation,” accessed November 17, 2021. (https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa)

44. Rosoboronexport, “Cooperation with Turkey,” accessed November 17, 2021. (<http://roe.ru/export/turtsiya>)

45. “Russia and Turkey agree on South Stream pipeline project,” *Deutsche Welle (Germany)*, October 6, 2009. (<https://www.dw.com/en/russia-and-turkey-agree-on-south-stream-pipeline-project/a-4548193>)

Putin visited Turkey in 2004, the first bilateral visit by a Russian leader in over 30 years.⁴⁶ The two powers signed six agreements, covering energy, finance, and security, and pledged to boost relations comprehensively, including through counterterrorism (anti-separatist) cooperation.⁴⁷ Erdogan reciprocated with visits to Moscow in 2005 and 2010.⁴⁸ The two leaders signed a deal for South Stream (TurkStream's predecessor) in 2009.⁴⁹ A 2010 visit by Putin's presidential placeholder, Dmitry Medvedev, yielded agreements on visa-free tourism, the \$20 billion Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, and the establishment of a High-Level Cooperation Council, among other things.⁵⁰ Russia sold Turkey anti-tank missile systems from 2008 to 2010, and Russian and Turkish companies jointly developed the PMADS-IGLA short-range air defense system.⁵¹

Russia, Turkey, and the War in Syria

U.S.-Turkey ties once again deteriorated following the 2011 Arab uprisings. Above all, Ankara severely overestimated Washington's commitment to overthrowing the regime of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.⁵² Toppling Assad suited Erdogan's Islamist agenda, with the goal of installing a regime aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵³

Turkey's Syria policy pitted it against Assad's Russian and Iranian backers. Ankara's support for Islamists during the Arab Spring caused concern in Moscow, which feared the uprisings would erode Russian influence and empower extremists, potentially spilling over into Central Asia and even Russia's own restive Muslim regions.⁵⁴ More broadly, the Kremlin saw the Arab Spring as part of a longstanding

46. Russian President Boris Yeltsin had visited Turkey in the 1990s, but for multilateral engagements, not a bilateral trip. "Soviet Delegation Arrives For Visit to Turkish Cities," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1965. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1965/01/05/archives/soviet-delegation-arrives-for-visit-to-turkish-cities.html>)

47. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), pages 157–159; Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "List of documents signed and adopted during the official visit to Turkey (5–6 December 2004)," December 5, 2004. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3932>); Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Joint Declaration Between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on Deepening Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership," Ankara, December 6, 2004. (<http://kremlin.ru/supplement/3933>)

48. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Beginning of the Meeting with Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan," July 17, 2005. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23092>); Brian Whitmore, "Moscow Visit By Turkish PM Underscores New Strategic Alliance," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 12, 2010. (https://www.rferl.org/a/Moscow_Visit_By_Turkish_PM_Underscores_New_Strategic_Alliance/1927504.html)

49. "Russia and Turkey agree on South Stream pipeline project," *Deutsche Welle (Germany)*, October 6, 2009. (<https://www.dw.com/en/russia-and-turkey-agree-on-south-stream-pipeline-project/a-4548193>)

50. For a full list of the agreements signed, see: Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Список документов, подписанных по итогам переговоров Президента России Д.Медведева с Премьер-министром Турецкой Республики Р.Т.Эрдоганом [List of documents signed following the talks between President of Russia D. Medvedev and Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey R. T. Erdogan]," May 12, 2010. (<http://kremlin.ru/supplement/554>); Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Список документов, подписанных по итогам переговоров Президента России Д.Медведева с Президентом Турецкой Республики А.Гюлем [List of documents signed following the talks between the President of Russia D. Medvedev and the President of the Republic of Turkey A. Gul]," May 12, 2010. (<http://kremlin.ru/supplement/553>)

51. Alexander Korolkov, "Before the divorce: 10 key moments of Russian-Turkish military cooperation," *Russia Beyond* (Russia), December 17, 2015. (https://www.rbth.com/defence/2015/12/17/before-the-divorce-10-key-moments-of-russian-turkish-military-cooperation_552079); "Aselsan: Turkish Defence Giant in Global top 100 list," *Defence Turkey*, Issue 17. (<https://www.defenceturkey.com/tr/icerik/aselsan-turkish-defence-giant-in-global-top-100-list-384>)

52. Michael Reynolds, "Turkey and Russia: A Remarkable Rapprochement," *War on the Rocks*, October 24, 2019. (<https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/turkey-and-russia-a-remarkable-rapprochement>)

53. Michael Jansen, "Turkey Deserves the Blame for What Happened in Syria," *Irish Times* (Ireland), December 6, 2019. (<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/turkey-deserves-the-blame-for-what-happened-in-syria-1.4105830>)

54. Dmitri Trenin, *What Is Russia Up to in the Middle East?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), pages 40–43; Angela Stent, *Putin's World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest* (NYC: Hachette Book Group, 2019), page 267.

Western campaign to foment regime change, fueling Kremlin suspicions that a “Russian spring” might be next.⁵⁵ Russian and Turkish interests clashed most violently in Syria. Moscow sought to prevent “another Libya,” where Russia had acquiesced to a limited NATO intervention in 2011 — only for it to lead to the overthrow and killing of dictator Muammar Gaddafi.⁵⁶

“The Kremlin saw the Arab Spring as part of a longstanding Western campaign to foment regime change, fueling Kremlin suspicions that a ‘Russian spring’ might be next.”

In September 2015, Russia shocked the West by launching an air campaign to rescue the Assad regime from collapse. Though Moscow and Ankara had thus far managed to compartmentalize their differences over Syria, Russian-Turkish relations grew increasingly tense following Russia’s intervention, particularly as Russia intensified its air campaign against Ankara-backed Turkmen rebels.⁵⁷ Tensions

peaked on November 24, 2015, when Turkish forces shot down a Russian Su-24 bomber. One of the Russian pilots and another Russian servicemember sent to rescue them were then killed by Ankara-backed Turkmen rebels, marking Russia’s first combat casualties of the war.⁵⁸

Couching the shoot-down in personal terms, Putin demanded an apology for the “stab in the back delivered by terrorists’ accomplices.” He accused Turkey of aiding the Islamic State through illicit hydrocarbon purchases,⁵⁹ later charging that the shoot-down was rooted in Ankara’s “domestic policy of quite conscious Islamicisation.”⁶⁰ Moscow broke off military contacts with Turkey and deployed S-400 batteries and other military assets to Syria, effectively closing Syrian airspace to Turkey.⁶¹ Russia intensified its air campaign against Turkey-backed Syrian rebel groups, reportedly even striking a Turkish aid convoy.⁶² A multi-language Russian propaganda campaign amplified criticism of Turkey.⁶³ Surveys conducted the following May by Russia’s leading independent polling agency showed Turkey as

55. Ibid. See also: Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The Red Web: The Kremlin’s War on the Internet* (NYC: Hachette Book Group, 2015), pages 123–147.

56. Mitat Celikpala, “Russia’s Policies in the Middle East and the Pendulum of Turkish Russian Relations,” *The Jamestown Foundation*, October 5, 2017. (<https://jamestown.org/program/russias-policies-middle-east-pendulum-turkish-russian-relations>)

57. Asli Aydintasbas, “With Friends Like These: Turkey, Russia, and the End of an Unlikely Alliance,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2015, page 8. (https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/WITH_FRIENDS_LIKE_THESE_-_ECFR178.pdf)

58. Neil MacFarquhar and Steven Erlanger, “NATO-Russia Tensions Rise After Turkey Downs Jet,” *The New York Times*, November 24, 2015. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/25/world/europe/turkey-syria-russia-military-plane.html>)

59. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Meeting with King Abdullah II of Jordan,” November 24, 2015. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50775>)

60. Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Answers to journalists’ questions following the crash of a Russian military plane in Syria,” November 25, 2015. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50777>)

61. “Russia deploys cutting-edge S-400 air defense system to Syrian base after Su-24 downing,” *RT* (Russia), November 26, 2015. (<https://www.rt.com/news/323596-s400-russia-syria-airbase-turkey/>); “Russia deploys missile cruiser off Syria coast, ordered to destroy any target posing danger,” *RT* (Russia), November 24, 2015. (<https://www.rt.com/news/323329-russia-suspend-military-turkey/>)

62. “Russia bombards Syrian rebels near site of downed Russian jet,” *Reuters*, November 25, 2015. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-latakia/russia-bombards-syrian-rebels-near-site-of-downed-russian-jet-idUSKBN0TE1FN20151125>); “Turkey, Russia Continue War of Words,” *Voice of America*, November 27, 2015. (<https://www.voanews.com/europe/turkey-russia-continue-war-words>). Russia also reinforced its Erebuni military base in Armenia. “Russian military helicopters stationed near Turkey,” *Deutsche Welle* (Germany), December 8, 2015. (<https://www.dw.com/en/russian-military-helicopters-stationed-near-turkey/a-18902803>)

63. Katherine Costello, “Russia’s Use of Media and Information Operations in Turkey,” *RAND Corporation*, 2018. (<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE278.html>)

Russia's third-biggest enemy, behind only America and Ukraine, up dramatically from 2015.⁶⁴

Until the shutdown, the two sides had managed to insulate economics from their geopolitical disagreements. But afterward, Moscow suspended the TurkStream and Akkuyu projects and imposed harsh sanctions against Turkey,⁶⁵ while Russia's Federal Security Service harassed Turkish banks and businesspeople in Russia.⁶⁶ Ankara, for its part, blocked dozens of Russian ships from transiting the Turkish Straits after accusing Moscow of detaining Turkish vessels at Russian ports.⁶⁷

In his December 2015 address to Russia's Federal Assembly, Putin declared that Russia's retaliation would go beyond sanctions, vowing to make Ankara rue its "heinous war crime."⁶⁸ Days later, a Russian soldier drew Turkish outrage when he brandished a shoulder-mounted anti-aircraft launcher while

transiting the Bosphorus Strait.⁶⁹ Russian warships harassed Turkish civilian vessels the following week.⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, Turkey suffered cyberattacks suspected to be the work of Russian hackers.⁷¹ Moscow also increased political and military support for the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Forces (YPG),⁷² which Ankara views as an affiliate of the outlawed PKK.

In downing the Su-24, Erdogan had sought to demonstrate not only that Turkey was a major power in the region, but also that it could invoke NATO's support if Russia retaliated. Immediately after the incident, a panicked Erdogan called an emergency meeting of the alliance. To his surprise and dismay, however, Washington and other Western capitals issued a tepid, equivocal response, reflecting their reluctance to risk conflict with Moscow.⁷³ Likewise, Washington and Berlin rejected Ankara's request to cancel a planned withdrawal of Patriot surface-to-air

64. Victor Vladimirov and Taras Burnos, "Poll: Russians See US, Ukraine, Turkey as Top 3 Enemies," *Voice of America*, June 3, 2016. (<https://www.voanews.com/europe/poll-russians-see-us-ukraine-turkey-top-3-enemies>)

65. "Russia Suspends Talks With Turkey On TurkStream Pipeline," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 3, 2015. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-turkey-turkstream-pipeline/27405454.html>); Idil Bilgic-Alpaslan, Bojan Markovic, Peter Tabak, and Emir Zildzovic, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "Economic implications of Russia's sanctions against Turkey," December 7, 2015. (<https://www.ebrd.com/news/2015/economic-implications-of-russias-sanctions-against-turkey.html>)

66. "FSB Raids Turkish Bank Branches in Russia," *The Moscow Times* (Russia), December 18, 2015. (<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/12/18/fsb-raids-turkish-bank-branches-in-russia-a51284>)

67. "Turkey withholds 27 Russian ships for failing to meet sailing criteria," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), December 16, 2015. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2015/12/16/turkey-withholds-27-russian-ships-for-failing-to-meet-sailing-criteria>)

68. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," December 3, 2015. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50864>)

69. "Turkish FM slams Russia's missile 'provocation' in Bosphorus," *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), December 6, 2015. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-fm-slams-russias-missile-provocation-in-bosphorus-92121>)

70. Katya Golubkova, "Russia warns Turkey over Aegean warship incident," December 13, 2015. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-russia-turkey/russia-warns-turkey-over-aegean-warship-incident-idUSKBN0TW0EU20151213>); Tony Wesolowsky, "Strait Talk: Turkey-Russia Tensions Spill Over To Key Waterway," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 15, 2015. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/strait-talk-turkey-russia-tensions-spill-over-to-key-waterway/27429973.html>)

71. Can Sezer and Eric Auchard, "Turkish Internet servers under sustained cyberattack: internet body," *Reuters*, December 23, 2015. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-internet-cybercrime/turkish-internet-servers-under-sustained-cyberattack-internet-body-idUSKBN0U60Y820151223>); Adam Meyers, "Cyber Skirmish: Russia v. Turkey," *CrowdStrike*, April 13, 2016. (<https://www.crowdstrike.com/blog/cyber-skirmish-russia-v-turkey>)

72. Andrew J. Tabler and Soner Cagaptay, "The PKK Could Spark Turkish-Russian Military Escalation," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, May 25, 2016. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/pkk-could-spark-turkish-russian-military-escalation>)

73. Julian Borger, "Nato and UN seek calm over Turkish downing of Russian jet," *The Guardian* (UK), November 24, 2015. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/24/nato-and-un-seek-calm-over-turkish-downing-of-russian-jet>)

missile systems from the Syrian-Turkish border, exacerbating Turkish distrust of NATO.⁷⁴

Washington's backing of the YPG as the primary Syrian ground force against the Islamic State also alarmed Erdogan, who argued America had chosen to partner with one terrorist organization to defeat another.⁷⁵ While Washington prioritized defeating the Islamic State, Ankara's priority was overthrowing Assad.

Seeing the West as unreliable, Erdogan concluded he could not afford to alienate Russia. In June 2016, seeking to break his diplomatic isolation and secure Moscow's blessing for operations against the YPG, which Ankara had come to see as a higher priority than toppling Assad, Erdogan sent Putin an ambiguously worded letter expressing regret over the Su-24 incident and stressing his desire to improve relations.⁷⁶ The letter followed months of public and private Turkish diplomatic efforts to ease tensions, largely rebuffed by Moscow.⁷⁷ Likely seeing Erdogan's overture as

an opportunity to negotiate from strength, Putin accepted Erdogan's letter as an apology and agreed to restore relations.⁷⁸

A Turkish military faction's attempted coup d'état in July 2016 cemented Erdogan's turn Eastward. Following the failed putsch, the Turkish leader complained about delayed and lukewarm Western pledges of support.⁷⁹ He was also infuriated by Washington's refusal to extradite his former ally-turned-archnemesis, Fethullah Gulen, a Pennsylvania-based Turkish cleric who many Turks believe orchestrated the coup.⁸⁰ Western criticism of Erdogan's subsequent domestic crackdown fueled further tensions.

Putin seized the opportunity to bolster ties with Turkey and sow division within the Western alliance. He was among the first world leaders to call Erdogan and condemn the coup;⁸¹ unnamed Turkish sources reportedly said Putin even offered the assistance of nearby Russian military forces.⁸² Two weeks later, Erdogan traveled to St. Petersburg for his first post-coup

74. Burak Ege Bekdil, "US Begins Removing Patriot Missiles from Turkey," *Defense News*, October 11, 2015. (<https://www.defensenews.com/home/2015/10/11/us-begins-removing-patriot-missiles-from-turkey>); Burak Ege Bekdil, "Germany Pulls Patriot Systems From Turkey," *Defense News*, December 23, 2015. (<https://www.defensenews.com/home/2015/12/23/germany-pulls-patriot-systems-from-turkey>)

75. Amanda Sloat, "The US played down Turkey's concerns about Syrian Kurdish forces. That couldn't last," *Brookings Institution*, October 9, 2019. (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/10/09/the-us-played-down-turkeys-concerns-about-syrian-kurdish-forces-that-couldnt-last>)

76. Charles Recknagel and Merhat Sharipzhan, "Erdogan's Letter Smooths Way For Turkish-Russian Fence-Mending," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 28, 2016. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/erdogans-letter-smooths-turkish-russian-fence-mending/27826953.html>); Moira Goff-Taylor, "Why Turkey Needs Russia," *The Wilson Center*, September 2017. (https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/why_turkey_needs_russia_-_goff-taylor.pdf)

77. Asli Aydintasbas, "With Friends Like These: Turkey, Russia, and the End of an Unlikely Alliance," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, June 23, 2016, page 10. (https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/WITH_FRIENDS_LIKE_THESE_-_ECFR178.pdf)

78. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Vladimir Putin received a letter from President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan," June 27, 2016. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52282>)

79. Maxwell Cavas and Hannah Johnsrud, "U.S. Statements on Turkey's Attempted Coup: A Timeline," *Project on Middle East Democracy*, August 8, 2016. (<https://pomed.org/u-s-statements-on-turkeys-attempted-coup-a-timeline>)

80. "The Process of Extraditing Fetullah Gulen," *Bipartisan Policy Center*, March 2019. (<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BPC-Gulen-Extradition.pdf>)

81. Putin's alacrity in calling Erdogan echoed the support that the Russian leader provided to his Turkish counterpart following Turkey's 2014 Gezi protests. At the time, Putin was the first head of state to visit Erdogan's controversial new presidential palace, which Western leaders refused to visit for another year. See: Asli Aydintasbas, "With Friends Like These: Turkey, Russia, and the End of an Unlikely Alliance," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, July 2016, page 7. (https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/WITH_FRIENDS_LIKE_THESE_-_ECFR178.pdf)

82. Vassilis Nedos, "The Russian assistance to Turkey during the attempted coup," *Kathimerini* (Greece), July 22, 2019. (<http://www.ekathimerini.com/242846/article/ekathimerini/news/the-russian-assistance-to-turkey-during-the-attempted-coup>). In addition, Russian media, including state news agency TASS, cited unconfirmed Iranian and Arab media reports claiming Russian intelligence had warned Turkey of the impending coup attempt hours before it unfolded. See: "Russia warned Turkey of imminent army coup, says Iran's FNA," TASS (Russia), July 20, 2016. (<https://tass.com/world/889638>)



Erdogan and Putin meet in St. Petersburg, Russia, on August 9, 2016. (Photo by Kayhan Ozer/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

foreign visit, during which he and Putin agreed to normalize relations. Erdogan expressed gratitude for Putin’s “psychological support.”⁸³

Russian media fanned the flames of Turkish anti-Western sentiments while encouraging Russian-Turkish reconciliation, running conspiratorial articles alleging U.S. involvement in the coup.⁸⁴ The two sides moved quickly to restore their partnership, agreeing to work together in Syria,⁸⁵ resurrect the TurkStream and Akkuyu projects, expand trade and investment,⁸⁶ and cooperate in the defense industry.⁸⁷ Even when a Turkish gunman assassinated the Russian ambassador in December 2016, Putin kept Russian-Turkish ties on track by deflecting blame away from Ankara.⁸⁸

Part II: Enduring Geopolitical Competition With Russia

Despite Russia and Turkey’s rapprochement, their interests and ambitions diverge or clash in many arenas, from Syria, Libya, and the Eastern Mediterranean to the Balkans, Black Sea, Caucasus, and Central Asia. Turkey’s desire to remain in NATO, though useful for Moscow as a divisive force within the alliance, also limits the long-term potential for Russian-Turkish relations.

Nevertheless, Putin and Erdogan have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to navigate disagreements and crises and negotiate pragmatic understandings, often at the West’s expense.⁸⁹ The worse Ankara’s tensions with Washington and Brussels, the stronger Moscow’s leverage to coerce or induce Turkey to advance Russian interests.⁹⁰

At the same time, Turkey’s increasing geopolitical adventurism has led to greater competition with Russia in recent years. This trend looks likely to continue, potentially offering opportunities for Washington and its Western allies to exploit the additional strain on Russian-Turkish relations.

83. Neil MacFarquhar, “Russia and Turkey Vow to Repair Ties as West Watches Nervously,” *The New York Times*, August 9, 2016. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/10/world/europe/putin-erdogan-russia-turkey.html>)

84. Katherine Costello, “Russia’s Use of Media and Information Operations in Turkey,” *RAND Corporation*, 2018. (<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE278.html>)

85. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Meeting with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan,” August 9, 2016. (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52671>); Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “News conference following talks with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan,” August 9, 2016. (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52673>)

86. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Meeting with representatives of the business circles of Russia and Turkey,” August 9, 2016. (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52675>); Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Meeting with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan,” October 10, 2016. (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53065>)

87. “Russia Says Military Cooperation With Turkey Resuming,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 7, 2016. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-turkey-military-cooperation/28102105.html>)

88. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Meeting with Sergei Lavrov, Sergei Naryshkin and Alexander Bortnikov,” December 19, 2016. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53573>); Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference,” December 23, 2016. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53573>)

89. See, for example: Firat Kozok, Ilya Arkhipov, and Onur Ant, “Erdogan Rekindles Russian Ties as Putin Eyes Turkey Investment,” *Bloomberg*, August 8, 2016. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-08-08/erdogan-meets-putin-as-turkish-coup-attempt-spurs-reconciliation>)

90. Mark Simakovsky and Edward Fishman, “Trump Can’t Stop Putin From Poaching U.S. Allies,” *Foreign Policy*, July 31, 2019. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/31/trump-is-letting-putin-poach-u-s-allies-s400-turkey-russia-trump-nato-allies>)

Syria

Syria remains a pivotal theater in Russian-Turkish relations. Despite continuing disagreements, Moscow and Ankara have cooperated to expand their diplomatic and military footprints at the West's expense. They have established an alternative to the Western-led peace process and struck deals over thorny issues, such as the fate of northeastern Syria and Idlib province. As prominent pro-Kremlin analyst Fyodor Lukyanov explains, Russia and Turkey's "partnership" in Syria is based not on common goals or trust, but on an "understanding that without interaction, neither party can achieve anything on its own."⁹¹

Critically, Erdogan's initial plans to replace the Assad regime with a Muslim Brotherhood-led government under Ankara's tutelage shifted to preventing the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish statelet on Turkey's southern border.⁹² Moscow supported this effort by acquiescing to Turkish military operations against the YPG in 2016 and in 2018,⁹³ for which

Ankara needed Russian permission to use Syrian airspace. In return, Ankara leveraged its influence with Syria's opposition to help broker a pair of December 2016 deals to clear rebels from Aleppo and establish a nationwide cease-fire.⁹⁴ Peace talks backed by Russia, Turkey, and Iran began the next month in Astana (now called Nur-Sultan), sidelining Washington.⁹⁵ The talks yielded four so-called "de-escalation zones" across Syria that ultimately facilitated the return of regime control to rebel-held areas.⁹⁶

America's inconstant Syria policy has empowered Russia, increasing Moscow's importance for Turkey. This proved particularly true in October 2019, when then-President Donald Trump withdrew U.S. troops from northeastern Syria ahead of a Turkish military operation against the YPG. The withdrawal forced the Kurds to accept a Russian-brokered deal that returned regime control to several key Kurdish towns.⁹⁷ Russian forces took over abandoned U.S. military bases⁹⁸ and began patrolling the line of contact between Syrian and Turkish forces.⁹⁹

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91. Fyodor Lukyanov, "Stress Test Passed: Russia and Turkey Continue to Work in Syria," *Russia in Global Affairs*, March 6, 2020. (<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/stress-test-russia-turkey>)
92. Aykan Erdemir, "What Does Turkey Hope to Gain in Syria?" *International Peace Institute*, January 30, 2019. (<https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/01/what-does-turkey-hope-to-gain-in-syria>)
93. Paul Salem, "Operation Olive Branch," *Middle East Institute*, February 22, 2018. (<https://middleeastinst.libsyn.com/operation-olive-branch>)
94. Kareem Shaheen, "Aleppo: Russia-Turkey ceasefire deal offers hope of survival for residents," *The Guardian* (UK), December 13, 2016. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/13/deal-reached-to-evacuate-rebels-and-civilians-from-aleppo>); Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Meeting with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov," December 29, 2016. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53627>)
95. Henry Meyer, "Russia Seeks Syria Peace With Iran, Turkey as U.S. Sidelined," *Bloomberg*, January 22, 2017. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-22/russia-seeks-syria-peace-with-turkey-iran-as-u-s-sidelined?sref=3OIZCXOE>)
96. Nathan Hodge and Margaret Cooker, "Russia, Turkey and Iran Sign Syria 'De-Escalation Zone' Deal," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 4, 2017. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-turkey-and-iran-sign-syria-de-escalation-zone-deal-1493910483>); Hashem Osseiran, "How De-Escalation in Syria Became a War Management Strategy," *The New Humanitarian*, February 6, 2018. (<https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/syria/articles/2018/02/06/how-de-escalation-zones-in-syria-became-a-war-management-strategy>)
97. Erin Cunningham, Sarah Dadouch, Asser Khattab, Dan Lamothe, "Syrian troops enter key towns in northeast under deal with Kurds," *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2019. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syrian-troops-enter-towns-in-northeast-as-erdogan-warns-of-wider-offensive/2019/10/14/3fe2c420-ee06-11e9-bb7e-d2026ee0c199_story.html); Russian Federation Ministry of Defence, "Briefing by Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria," October 14, 2019. (http://syria.mil.ru/peacemaking_en/info/briefings/more.htm?id=12256864@egNews)
98. Alex Johnson and Emmanuelle Saliba, "Video shows Russian-speaking man at abandoned U.S. base in Syria," *NBC News*, October 15, 2019. (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/video-shows-russian-speaking-man-abandoned-u-s-base-syria-n1066796>); "Russia lands forces at former U.S. air base in northern Syria," *Reuters*, November 15, 2019. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-russia/russia-lands-forces-at-former-u-s-air-base-in-northern-syria-idUSKBN1XP0XN>)
99. Maxim A. Suckhov, "Putin goes for broke to negotiate Turkey cease-fire," *Al-Monitor*, October 15, 2019. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/10/russia-turkey-syria-manbij-deal.html>)

Moscow, however, worried the Turkish incursion could disrupt Russia's peace process in Syria, allow a resurgence of the Islamic State, and lead to a permanent Turkish presence in Syria.¹⁰⁰ Moscow's warnings to Ankara, initially muted, intensified as Turkey's operation against the YPG continued, culminating in a trip by Erdogan to Sochi later that month. Intense negotiations yielded an agreement that protected each side's core interests, enforced by joint Russian-Turkish patrols. Ankara agreed to freeze its advances and not to permanently occupy captured territory. Turkey also committed to support the Astana process and Constitutional Committee and signaled potential openness to a Russian-facilitated reconciliation with Damascus. Moscow, meanwhile, pledged to remove YPG forces from the Turkish-Syrian border and facilitate the return of Syrian refugees from Turkey.¹⁰¹

While still officially opposed to Assad, Ankara has come to tacitly accept his rule. Russia, for its part, is still keen to facilitate dialogue between Turkey and the Assad regime. Moscow has encouraged Turkey and Syria to resolve their disputes over border and Kurdish issues by reviving the 1998 Adana Agreement, under which Damascus and Ankara resolved bilateral tensions by cracking down on the PKK.¹⁰² In January 2020, Russia facilitated a Moscow meeting between

the Syrian and Turkish intelligence chiefs, their first since the Syrian war began.¹⁰³

Still, the situation along the Syrian-Turkish border remains unstable. Idlib, in particular, is a flashpoint. Moscow wants eventually to return the Turkey-backed Islamist stronghold to regime control. But Ankara fears additional refugee flows into Turkey, which already hosts over 3.6 million displaced Syrians. Under a September 2018 deal Putin and Erdogan struck in Sochi, Turkey temporarily averted a Russia-backed regime offensive against Idlib. In return, Ankara promised to establish and jointly enforce a demilitarized buffer zone, clear the area of "radical" rebel fighters and heavy weaponry, and open two strategic highways.¹⁰⁴

Following Turkey's perceived failure to implement the agreement, a renewed regime offensive against Idlib began in May 2019, backed by Russian air support. By January 2020, regime advances had sent almost a million refugees fleeing toward Turkey's border, while threatening Turkish military observers in the area. Ankara deployed thousands of troops to prevent the fall of Idlib.¹⁰⁵ Fearing a conflict with Russia, Ankara called for NATO support and requested a U.S. Patriot deployment. Washington declined to provide more than rhetorical support.¹⁰⁶

100. Maxim A. Suchkov, "Russia has 3 messages for Turkey over operation in Syria," *Al-Monitor*, October 8, 2019. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/10/russia-turkey-operation-syria-us-kurds.html>)

101. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Memorandum of Understanding Between Turkey and the Russian Federation," October 22, 2019. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5452>); Maxim A. Suchkov, "Putin, Erdogan nail down Syria deal," *Al-Monitor*, October 22, 2019. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/10/russia-turkey-syria-deal.html>)

102. Fehim Tastekin, "Will Adana accord take Erdogan to Damascus?" *Al-Monitor*, October 28, 2019. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/10/turkey-syria-russia-sdg-can-adana-erdogan-to-damascus.html>)

103. "Turkish, Syrian top spies meet in first official contact in years," *Reuters*, January 13, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-syria-security-turkey/turkish-syrian-top-spies-meet-in-first-official-contact-in-years-idUSKBN1ZC2BJ>)

104. Joyce Karam, "Full text of Turkey-Russia memorandum on Idlib revealed," *The National* (UAE), September 19, 2018. (<https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/full-text-of-turkey-russia-memorandum-on-idlib-revealed-1.771953>). The M5 highway, which links Syria's four largest cities, is vital for the military control and economic recovery of Syria. The M4 highway connects Aleppo to the pro-Assad Alawite stronghold of Latakia, home to Russia's Khmeimim air base, which has come under continual attack from militants based in Idlib.

105. Jennifer Cafarella, "The Crisis in Idlib," *Testimony Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism*, March 11, 2020. (<https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Cafarella%20HFAC%20Idlib%20Testimony%2020200311.pdf>)

106. "U.S. envoy Jeffrey to discuss Idlib, ISIS in Ankara," *Ahval* (Turkey), February 11, 2020. (<https://ahvalnews.com/U.S.-turkey/U.S.-envoy-jeffrey-discuss-idlib-isis-ankara>); Lara Seligman and Nahal Toosi, "Pentagon, State Department envoy clash over sending Patriot missiles to Turkey," *Politico*, February 28, 2020. (<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/28/turkey-patriot-missiles-pentagon-118256>)

The crisis climaxed when Russian-Syrian airstrikes killed dozens of Turkish soldiers. Ankara requested an emergency NATO meeting,¹⁰⁷ while Russia deployed two Kalibr-armed frigates and several amphibious assault ships to the region.¹⁰⁸ Choosing to publicly blame the strikes on the Assad regime rather than Russia, Ankara launched a massive counteroffensive that decimated pro-regime forces.¹⁰⁹ Russia stepped aside for Turkey's face-saving counteroffensive, likely reflecting both a recognition of Turkey's local military advantage and Putin's reluctance to risk broader Russian-Turkish relations. After Russia-backed pro-regime forces reversed Turkey's territorial gains, Putin and Erdogan again took "manual" control with face-to-face talks in Moscow on March 5, 2020. Tough negotiations produced an additional protocol to the 2018 Sochi deal, stipulating a cease-fire, a "security corridor" around the strategic M4 highway, and joint Russian-Turkish patrols.¹¹⁰

While that deal averted a larger crisis, the Idlib problem persists. Both sides continue to accuse the other of not implementing their agreements on Idlib, and Assad is eager to retake the province. Turkey, however, has deployed reinforcements to prevent further regime advances,¹¹¹ including south of the still-closed M4 highway,¹¹² whose opening would likely be the objective of a renewed Russian-Syrian offensive.¹¹³ A September 2021 Erdogan-Putin meeting in Sochi, held amid intensifying Russian and Assad regime strikes in and around Idlib,¹¹⁴ produced no apparent breakthroughs. Russian-Syrian attacks have continued as part of an apparent effort to pressure Ankara.¹¹⁵ The Idlib problem will thus continue to test the Russian-Turkish relationship, while giving Moscow leverage through the threat of renewed refugee flows into Turkey.

Meanwhile, Ankara is beating the drums of war in northern and northeastern Syria. Turkey complains

107. Metin Gurcan, "Deciphering Turkey's darkest night in Syria," *Al-Monitor*, February 28, 2020. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/02/turkey-syria-russia-deciphering-attack-on-turkish-troops.html>); North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Statement by the Secretary General after Article 4 consultations," February 28, 2020. (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_173939.htm)

108. Bethan McKernan, "Dozens of Turkish soldiers killed in strike in Idlib in Syria," *The Guardian* (UK), February 28, 2020. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/27/dozens-of-turkish-soldiers-killed-in-strike-in-idlib-in-syria-reports-say>)

109. Jennifer Cafarella, John Dunford, Michael Land, and Blane Wallace, "Turkey Commits to Idlib," *Institute for the Study of War*, March 18, 2020. (<http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/turkey-commits-idlib>)

110. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Press statements following Russian-Turkish Talks," March 5, 2020. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62948>); Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Additional Protocol to the Memorandum on Stabilization of the Situation in the Idlib De-Escalation Area," March 6, 2020. (https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/regprla/-/asset_publisher/YCxLFJnKuD1W/content/id/4072593)

111. Andrew Greco, "Turkey Reinforces Positions in Greater Idlib to Pressure Russia Into Negotiations," *Institute for the Study of War*, October 7, 2020. (<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/turkey-reinforces-positions-greater-idlib-pressure-russia-negotiations>); "Turkish forces pump new reinforcement towards de-escalation zone," *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, October 28, 2021. (<https://www.syriaahr.com/en/226649>)

112. "Turkey deploys troops to Syria's Idlib for potential ground op." *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), September 26, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/war-on-terror/turkey-deploys-troops-to-syrias-idlib-for-potential-ground-op>)

113. Khaled al-Khateb, "Syrian government eyes control of key highway in northwest," *Al-Monitor*, September 26, 2021. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/syrian-government-eyes-control-key-highway-northwest>)

114. @RALee85, "Russia has conducted almost daily air strikes in rebel-held areas of Idlib/Aleppo/Latakia over the past month and 1/2 and now has a # of Kalibr-equipped ships and submarines off the coast. Certainly possible we could see an escalation in the fighting." *Twitter*, September 19, 2021. (<https://twitter.com/ralee85/status/1439662468842889221>); Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Russia escalates strikes in northwest Syria, Turkey sends reinforcements ahead of summit," *Reuters*, September 26, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/russia-escalates-strikes-northwest-syria-turkey-sends-reinforcements-ahead-2021-09-26>)

115. "Russian intervention in Syria 73 months on | Over 45 airstrikes in 'de-escalation zone'...growing tension...routine patrols in NE Syria," *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, October 30, 2021. (<https://www.syriaahr.com/en/226792>); "SOHR: Russia Raids Camps on Syrian-Turkish Border," *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, October 31, 2021. (<https://www.syriaahr.com/en/226907>)

that Russia has failed to clear out YPG fighters, whom Ankara frequently accuses of attacking Turkey and Turkish-controlled areas in Syria. After a pair of alleged Kurdish attacks in mid-October, Erdogan declared he has “no patience left.”¹¹⁶ Turkish officials later explicitly threatened another offensive against Kurdish strongholds in northern and northeastern Syria.¹¹⁷ Ankara has since poured reinforcements into Turkish-controlled parts of Syria, mobilized its Syrian proxy fighters, and stepped up artillery and drone attacks against YPG positions.¹¹⁸

In response, Russia and the Assad regime have bolstered their military posture in northern¹¹⁹ and

northeastern Syria¹²⁰ and conducted continual military exercises there.¹²¹ Meanwhile, Russian diplomats reportedly are working to contain the escalation.¹²² Some reports claim Ankara hopes to secure Moscow’s blessing for the offensive by trading territory near the M4 highway in Idlib,¹²³ though the prospects for such a deal remain unclear.¹²⁴ In an interview published on November 9, the commander of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said Moscow had assured them that it “had told the Turks that [Russia] would not accept an attack.”¹²⁵ The Russian and Turkish defense ministers discussed Syria via phone on November 15 but offered no details on their conversation.¹²⁶

116. Aykan Erdemir and David Adesnik, “Turkey Threatens New Military Offensive in Northern Syria,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, October 18, 2021. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/10/18/turkey-threatens-new-offensive-northern-syria>)

117. Orhan Coskun, “Turkey plans military action against Syrian Kurdish YPG if diplomacy fails,” *Reuters*, October 15, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-plans-military-action-against-syrian-kurdish-ypg-if-diplomacy-fails-2021-10-15/>); Selcan Hacaoglu, “Turkey Reinforces Syria Troops for Possible Attack on U.S. Ally,” *Bloomberg*, October 27, 2021. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-27/turkey-reinforces-syria-troops-for-possible-attack-on-u-s-ally?sref=3OIZCXOE>)

118. Khaled al-Khateb, “Turkish army coordinates with Syrian proxy forces ahead of possible military action,” *Al-Monitor*, November 1, 2021. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/turkish-army-coordinates-syrian-proxy-forces-ahead-possible-military-action>); Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “Syrian rebels mobilise for possible Turkish attack on Kurdish fighters,” *Reuters*, November 4, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/syrian-rebels-mobilise-possible-turkish-attack-kurdish-fighters-2021-11-04/>)

119. See, for example: “Guarded by Russian helicopters | Regime military massive reinforcement arrives on frontlines with Turkish-backed factions in Aleppo and al-Raqqah,” *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, October 31, 2021. (<https://www.syriahr.com/en/226879/>); “To strength their presence on M4 road | Russian forces establish a military base in Aleppo eastern countryside,” *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, November 2, 2021. (<https://www.syriahr.com/en/227187/>)

120. See, for example: “US Holds onto ‘Deconfliction Channel’ with Russia in Northeastern Syria,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (UK), November 3, 2021. (<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3282926/us-holds-%E2%80%98deconfliction-channel%E2%80%99-russia-northeastern-syria>); “Russia Makes New Arrangements in Northeast Syria,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (UK), November 8, 2021. (<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3291941/russia-makes-new-arrangements-northeast-syria>)

121. See, for example: @anna_news, *Telegram*, October 31, 2021. (https://t.me/anna_news/16972); Russian military manoeuvres in NE Syria | Helicopters participate in new military exercises in Ras al-Ain,” *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, November 2, 2021. (<https://www.syriahr.com/en/227173/>)

122. “Russian Mediation to Ease Tensions in Northeastern Syria,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (UK), November 7, 2021. (<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3290526/russian-mediation-ease-tensions-northeastern-syria>)

123. Selcan Hacaoglu, “Turkey Reinforces Syria Troops for Possible Attack on U.S. Ally,” *Bloomberg*, October 27, 2021. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-27/turkey-reinforces-syria-troops-for-possible-attack-on-u-s-ally?sref=3OIZCXOE>)

124. Metin Gurcan, “Russia hasn’t cleared Turkish attack on strategic Syrian town,” *Al-Monitor*, October 18, 2021. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/russia-hasnt-cleared-turkish-attack-strategic-syrian-town>); @AleksKhlebnikov, “5. #Turkey won’t attack areas w/#Russia|n mil presence & RU won’t allow to threaten security of M4 highway & Aleppo 6. This is why areas around #Manbij, Tel Rifaat, Ain Issa & Tell Tamr unlikely to be TU targets,” *Twitter*, November 3, 2021. (<https://twitter.com/AleksKhlebnikov/status/1455888114149363719>)

125. Amberin Zaman, “Syrian Kurdish commander says Russia opposes further Turkish land grabs,” *Al-Monitor*, November 9, 2021. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/syria-kurdish-commander-assured-washington-turkey-wont-invade-again>)

126. “Russian, Turkish defense ministers discuss Syria — Turkish Defense Ministry,” *TASS* (Russia), November 15, 2021. (<https://tass.com/defense/1361615>)

Libya

Erdogan and Putin have extended their pattern of competition and transactional cooperation to Libya. Despite having divergent — though not irreconcilable — interests, Moscow and Ankara facilitated a recent peace agreement in Libya that has cooled tensions. But if the deal falls apart, as Libya's previous agreements have, Russian-Turkish competition could heat up again.

For Turkey, which seeks to restore its Ottoman-era influence across the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya is a battleground for competition not only with Russia but also with the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, which bitterly oppose Ankara's support for political Islam. Ankara also seeks to preserve a maritime delimitation agreement with Libya's erstwhile UN-recognized government, the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), designed to bolster Turkey's

efforts to expand its maritime borders.¹²⁷ Both Turkey and Russia also hope to secure lucrative energy and construction contracts in a restabilized Libya, having lost billions of dollars' worth of deals following the 2011 NATO-backed toppling of Muammar Gaddafi. For Russia, Libya also offers inroads for regional influence, potential port access in the Eastern Mediterranean, and diplomatic leverage in Europe thanks to Libya's role in migrant and hydrocarbon flows.

Working with Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, Moscow provided diplomatic, political,¹²⁸ financial,¹²⁹ military, and military-technical support to Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA),¹³⁰ the main adversary of the GNA. Haftar's forces controlled most of Libya, including its major energy assets. Yet backing Haftar was always a tactical bet for Russia, which also cultivated ties with the GNA¹³¹ and other power brokers,¹³² including Qaddafi's son Saif al-Qaddafi¹³³ and the speaker of Libya's Tobruk-based

127. Aykan Erdemir, Varsha Koduvayur, and Philip Kowalski, "Turkish Proxy Gains in Libya are No Cure for Ankara's Growing Isolation," *The National Interest*, May 26, 2020. (<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/turkish-proxy-gains-libya-are-no-cure-ankara%E2%80%99s-growing-isolation-157751>); Aykan Erdemir and Brenna Knippen, "Turkey-Libya Maritime Border Deal Escalates Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 10, 2019. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2019/12/10/turkey-libya-maritime-border-deal-escalates-tensions-in-the-eastern-mediterranean>)

128. Michael Weiss and Pierre Vaux, "Russia's Wagner Mercenaries Have Moved to Libya. Good Luck With That." *The Daily Beast*, September 28, 2019. (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/russias-wagner-mercenaries-have-moved-into-libya-good-luck-with-that>); Shelby Grossman, Khadeja Ramali, and Renee DiResta, "Blurring the lines of media authenticity: Prigozhin-linked group funding Libyan broadcast media," *Stanford Cyber Policy Center Internet Observatory*, March 20, 2020. (<https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/libya-prigozhin>)

129. "Russia denies U.S. claim that Libyan banknotes seized in Malta are counterfeit," *Reuters*, May 30, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-libya-usa-banknotes/russia-denies-u-s-claim-that-libyan-banknotes-seized-in-malta-are-counterfeit-idUSKBN2360NA>); Patrick Wintour, "Battle of the banknotes as rival currencies are set to be issued in Libya," *The Guardian* (UK), May 20, 2016. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/20/battle-of-the-banknotes-rival-currencies-libya>)

130. "Новый плацдарм: что известно о переброске российских военных в Ливию [New foothold: what is known about the transfer of the Russian military to Libya]," *RBC* (Russia), October 9, 2018. (<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/09/10/2018/5bbc8efa9a7947544a676112>); Jo Becker and Eric Schmitt, "As Trump Wavers on Libya, an ISIS Haven, Russia Presses On," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2018. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/world/africa/trump-libya-policy-russia.html>)

131. See, for example: James Marson, "After Military Push in Syria, Russia Plays Both Sides in Libya," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 2018. (https://www.wsj.com/articles/after-military-push-in-syria-russia-plays-both-sides-in-libya-1528372802?mod=article_inline); Kirill Semenov, "Sarraj visit to Sochi exposes rival Russian factions on Libya policy," *Al-Monitor*, October 26, 2019. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/10/russia-libya-sarraj-hifter-tripoli-pmcs.html>)

132. Pierre Vaux, "On the situation in Libya," *The Interpreter*, September 12, 2019. (<https://www.interpretermag.com/on-the-situation-in-libya>)

133. Samer al-Atrush, "How a Russian Plan to Restore Qaddafi's Regime Backfired," *Bloomberg*, March 20, 2020. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-03-20/how-a-russian-plan-to-restore-qaddafi-s-libyan-regime-backfired?sref=3OIZCXOE>); Henry Meyer, Samer al-Atrush, and Stepan Kravchenko, "Russia Has a Plan for Libya – Another Qaddafi," *Bloomberg*, December 19, 2018. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-12-20/russia-has-a-plan-for-libya-another-qaddafi?sref=3OIZCXOE>)

House of Representatives.¹³⁴ This multi-vector strategy, coupled with Russia's lower stakes in Libya relative to Turkey, has afforded Moscow a greater degree of flexibility.

In April 2019, Haftar launched a campaign to overthrow the Tripoli-based GNA. Seeing an opportunity to increase its influence,¹³⁵ Russia deployed Wagner Group contractors who numbered as many as 1,400 by late 2019, providing what UN monitors called "an effective force multiplier for" Haftar.¹³⁶ Turkey, meanwhile, supplied arms to shore up the GNA and allied militias.¹³⁷ When LNA forces began a decisive battle to take Tripoli in December 2019, Erdogan doubled down, sending Turkish military advisors, armed drones, heavy weapons, and thousands of Turkey's Syrian proxy

forces.¹³⁸ Russia responded by deploying additional Wagner as well as Syrian contractors.¹³⁹

Ankara, wary of slipping into a proxy war with Moscow, reportedly also reached out to Moscow "to avoid a confrontation."¹⁴⁰ While inaugurating the TurkStream pipeline in January 2020, Putin and Erdogan released a joint statement calling for a cease-fire and political settlement in Libya.¹⁴¹ Days later, the warring parties, under Russian and Turkish pressure, forged a shaky truce before peace talks began in Moscow and Berlin,¹⁴² where Turkey and Russia pushed for a lasting cease-fire, but to no avail.¹⁴³

In May 2020, following a Putin-Erdogan phone call in which they called for a truce and renewed peace

134. See, for example: Kirill Semenov, "Is Russia pulling support from Libyan strongman Hifter?" *Al-Monitor*, May 12, 2020. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/05/russia-pull-support-hifter-libya-gna-army-aguila-saleh-issa.html>)

135. David D. Kirkpatrick, "The White House Blessed a War in Libya, but Russia Won It," *The New York Times*, April 14, 2020. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/world/middleeast/libya-russia-john-bolton.html>)

136. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General, "East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations," February 11, 2020, page 35. (https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/q1fy2020_leadig_ea_nw_africa_cto.pdf); UN Security Council, "Final report of the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1973 (2011)," March 8, 2021, page 32. (<https://undocs.org/S/2021/229>)

137. Chase Winter, "Turkey poised to send troops to Libya, ratcheting up tensions in E. Mediterranean," *Deutsche Welle* (Germany), December 26, 2019. (<https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-poised-to-send-troops-to-libya-ratcheting-up-tensions-in-e-mediterranean/a-51802553>)

138. Ismael Naar, "Libya's Haftar orders forces to advance toward 'decisive battle' for Tripoli," *Al-Arabiya* (UAE), December 12, 2019. (<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2019/12/12/Haftar-orders-Libyan-National-Army-forces-to-advance-toward-Tripoli>); Bethan McKernan and Hussein Akoush, "Exclusive: 2,000 Syrian fighters deployed to Libya to support government," *The Guardian* (UK), January 15, 2020. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/15/exclusive-2000-syrian-troops-deployed-to-libya-to-support-regime>)

139. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General, "East Africa Counterterrorism Operation, North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation," July 16, 2020, page 40. (<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jul/17/2002459044/-1/-1/1/LEAD%20IG%20EAST%20AFRICA%20AND%20NORTH%20AND%20WEST%20AFRICA%20COUNTERTERRORISM%20OPERATIONS.PDF>)

140. David Gauthier-Villars, "After Syria, Turkey Seeks to Partner With Russia in Libya," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 21, 2019. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/after-syria-turkey-seeks-to-partner-with-russia-in-libya-11576936920>)

141. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Joint Statement by the Presidents of the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation," January 8, 2020. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5470>)

142. Abdulkader Assad, "Army official: Russian Wagner Group mercenaries have started pulling out of Tripoli frontlines," *The Libya Observer* (Libya), January 12, 2020. (<https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/army-official-russian-wagner-group-mercenaries-have-started-pulling-out-tripoli-frontlines>); Declan Walsh, "Libyan Rivals Announce a Truce in the Battle for Tripoli," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2020. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/12/world/middleeast/libya-cease-fire.html>)

143. Samer al-Atrush, Ilya Arkhipov, and Selcan Hacaoglu, "How Vladimir Putin Got Played by a Furious Libyan General," *Bloomberg*, January 14, 2020. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-01-14/how-putin-was-thrown-off-course-by-a-furious-libyan-general>); "Libya peace talks in Moscow fall short of ceasefire deal," *Al-Arabiya* (UAE), January 14, 2020. (<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2020/01/14/Libya-peace-talks-in-Moscow-fall-short-of-ceasefire-deal.html>). Russia and Turkey reportedly would have jointly enforced the cease-fire, and the deal would preserve Turkey's maritime delimitation agreement. An unnamed Turkish official said the deal would have allowed Russia and Turkey to cooperate on energy exploration.

talks,¹⁴⁴ Russia abandoned Haftar’s failing offensive, and Ankara and Tripoli allowed Wagner and Russian-backed Syrian forces to redeploy safely.¹⁴⁵ With the LNA on the run, Turkish-backed forces began retaking territory, marching toward strategically important Sirte and Al-Jufra Airbase. To prevent their fall, which would undercut Moscow’s diplomatic leverage, Russia deployed over a dozen unmarked Mig-29s and Su-24s (likely Wagner-flown)¹⁴⁶ along with additional Wagner and Syrian contractors,¹⁴⁷ forcing a stalemate.¹⁴⁸ With Russian and Turkish support,¹⁴⁹ an October 2020 cease-fire led to a February 2021 agreement to establish an interim executive authority before elections in December 2021.

Yet although the cease-fire agreement called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces within three months, Russia and Turkey continued to fly contractors into Libya even after the cease-fire.¹⁵⁰ Ankara demands that any withdrawal deal must exclude Turkish military advisors,¹⁵¹ while Moscow insists it must cover all foreign forces and not alter Libya’s current military balance.¹⁵²

In mid-September, following talks aimed at normalizing relations with Egypt, Turkey reportedly withdrew an unspecified number of Syrian contractors from Watya airbase southwest of Tripoli.¹⁵³ In return, Ankara reportedly asked Cairo to help ensure Wagner forces also leave Libya.¹⁵⁴ Later that month, Wagner

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144. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Telephone conversation with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan,” May 18, 2020. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63363>)
145. Jalel Harchaoui, “The Pendulum: How Russia Sways Its Way to More Influence in Libya,” *War on the Rocks*, January 7, 2021. (<https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/the-pendulum-how-russia-sways-its-way-to-more-influence-in-libya>); Samer Al-Atrush, “Hundreds of Russian, Syrian Mercenaries Quit Libya’s Front Lines,” *Bloomberg*, May 24, 2020. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-25/hundreds-of-russian-syrian-mercenaries-quit-libya-s-front-lines?sref=3OIZCXOE>)
146. U.S. Africa Command, Press Release, “Russia deploys military fighter aircraft to Libya,” May 26, 2020. (<https://www.aficom.mil/pressrelease/32887/russia-deploys-military-fighter-aircraft-to-l>); Brian W. Everstine, “Use of Contracted Russian Fighter Jets in Libya Could Increase Civilian Casualties,” *Air Force Magazine*, June 18, 2020. (<https://www.airforcemag.com/use-of-contracted-russian-fighter-jets-in-libya-could-increase-civilian-casualties>)
147. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General, “East Africa Counterterrorism Operation, North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation,” August 28, 2020, pages 36–38. (https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/ea-nwa_q3_june2020_final.pdf); “Exclusive: Russian hiring of Syrians to fight in Libya accelerated in May,” *Reuters*, June 7, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-syria-russia-exclusive/exclusive-russian-hiring-of-syrians-to-fight-in-libya-accelerated-in-may-idUSKBN23E06H>)
148. Wagner forces also secured key oil facilities. See: Benoit Faucon and Jared Malsin, “Russian Oil Grab in Libya Fuels U.S. Kremlin Tensions in Mideast,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 26, 2020. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-oil-grab-in-libya-fuels-u-s-kremlin-tensions-in-mideast-11595772000>)
149. “Turkish, Russian officials nearing deal on Libya ceasefire, political process: minister,” *Reuters*, September 16, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-turkey-russia/turkish-russian-officials-nearing-deal-on-libya-ceasefire-political-process-minister-idUSKBN2673FD>); “Fleshing Out the Libya Ceasefire Agreement,” *International Crisis Group*, November 4, 2020. (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/b80-fleshing-out-libya-ceasefire-agreement>)
150. Greg Miller, Missy Ryan, Sudarsan Raghavan, Souad Mekhennet, “At the mercy of foreign powers,” *The Washington Post*, February 25, 2021. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2021/libya-civil-war-russia-turkey-fighter-planes>)
151. U.S. Department of State, “Briefing with Senior State Department Officials,” June 23, 2021. (<https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-senior-state-department-officials>)
152. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s news conference to sum up the high-level meetings week at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 25, 2021,” September 26, 2021. (https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4867149)
153. “Источник: Турция после договоренностей с Египтом выводит наемников с авиабазы в Ливии [Source: Turkey, after an agreement with Egypt, withdraws mercenaries from an airbase in Libya],” *TASS* (Russia), September 14, 2021. (<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/12383641>)
154. Hamza Hendawi, “Turkey to extradite militants to Egypt as relations warm, sources say,” *The National* (UAE), September 15, 2021. (<https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/egypt/2021/09/15/turkey-to-extradite-militants-to-egypt-as-relations-warm>)

operatives reportedly began redeploying from the Jufra and Ghardabiya airbases toward eastern Libya.¹⁵⁵

On October 8, Libya's Joint Military Commission announced an action plan for a UN-monitored "withdrawal of all mercenaries, foreign fighters and foreign forces ... in a phased, balanced and synchronized manner," but offered no further details or timeline.¹⁵⁶ A commission member said the plan consists of two stages: The first, hopefully begun before the elections, would involve the gradual removal of Wagner, Sudanese, and Syrian fighters on the front lines, while the second would involve Russian, Turkish, Gulf Arab, and European military forces.¹⁵⁷ The commission is now seeking domestic and international buy-in.¹⁵⁸ Ankara, however,

wants to retain its military presence in Libya,¹⁵⁹ and Turkey's Syrian proxy force there reportedly remains largely intact.¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Libya's fragile peace looks increasingly precarious as the country heads toward presidential elections on December 24.¹⁶¹ Fundamental issues such as the unification of Libya's armed forces and the regional allocation of the national budget remain unresolved. Haftar is running despite protests by his opponents, including Ankara,¹⁶² thanks to a controversial new law rammed through Libya's eastern-based parliament in September.¹⁶³ Moscow, for its part, argues Libya's political settlement should incorporate "all forces of Libyan society," including Haftar and Saif al-Qaddafi, another presidential

155. "Wagner Reportedly Withdraws From Jufra and al-Ghardabiya Air Bases," *Libya Security Monitor*, September 26, 2021. (<https://libyasecuritymonitor.com/wagner-reportedly-withdraws-from-jufra-and-al-ghardabiya-air-bases>)

156. Libyan 5+5 Joint Military Commission, Press Statement, "13th round of the 5+5 JMC talks," October 8, 2021. (https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/jmcs_statement_geneva_meeting_6-8_oct_2021_20211008_english.pdf)

157. "JMC member: Action Plan will take place in two stages," *The Libya Observer* (Libya), October 10, 2021. (<https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/jmc-member-action-plan-will-take-place-two-stages>). Later, Libyan media reported that the plan would involve four phases: 1) mutual withdrawal to predetermined points in two cities to establish goodwill; 2) introduction of international observers; 3) an accounting of all foreign forces and mercenaries; and 4) withdrawal in successive stages. See: Sami Zaptia, "The 5+5 Joint Military Committee four-stage Action Plan for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Libya leaked: Libya's 218TV," *Libya Herald* (Libya), October 13, 2021. (<https://www.libyaherald.com/2021/10/13/the-55-joint-military-committee-four-stage-action-plan-for-the-withdrawal-of-foreign-forces-from-libya-leaked-libyas-218tv>)

158. Libyan 5+5 Joint Military Commission, Press Statement, "13th round of the 5+5 JMC talks," October 8, 2021. (https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/jmcs_statement_geneva_meeting_6-8_oct_2021_20211008_english.pdf); "Libya's 5+5 JMC to meet with Turkish, Russian officials," *The Libya Observer* (Libya), November 4, 2021. (<https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/libyas-55-jmc-meet-turkish-russian-officials>)

159. "Egypt wants Turkey 'to freeze not cancel' military agreement with Libya," *The Libya Observer* (Libya), October 5, 2021. (<https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/egypt-wants-turkey-freeze-not-cancel-military-agreement-libya>); "Turkish military in Libya to train army, Ankara says," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), November 14, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkish-military-in-libya-to-train-army-ankara-says>)

160. Fehim Tastekin, "Turkey sends mixed signals over Syrian mercenaries in Libya," *Al-Monitor*, October 23, 2021. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/turkey-sends-mixed-signals-over-syrian-mercenaries-libya>)

161. Angus Mcdowall, "Libya's proposed election is a moment of danger in push for peace," *Reuters*, September 24, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/libyas-proposed-election-is-moment-danger-push-peace-2021-09-24>)

162. See, for example: "Libya's Dbeibah says election law flawed," *Reuters*, November 15, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/libyas-dbeibah-says-election-law-flawed-2021-11-15>); Ferhat Polat, "In fractured Libya, is stability finally on the horizon?" *TRT World* (Turkey), July 8, 2021. (<https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/in-fractured-libya-is-stability-finally-on-the-horizon-48196>)

163. "Controversy over voting law overshadows Libya election," *France24* (France), September 16, 2021. (<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210916-controversy-over-voting-law-overshadows-libya-election>)

candidate.¹⁶⁴ Haftar’s opponents are allegedly angling to postpone the presidential election,¹⁶⁵ fearing a loss of power,¹⁶⁶ and the Turkey-friendly interim prime minister will likely run despite his caretaker role.¹⁶⁷ Even if the elections are held, the losers likely will not accept defeat. Libya’s cease-fire and peace process could soon collapse, potentially reigniting military competition between Turkey, Russia, and other external actors.

South Caucasus

The Russian-brokered conclusion to the fall 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict again demonstrated Erdogan and Putin’s ability to cut deals to strengthen their respective influence while sidelining the West. Yet Ankara’s larger role in the conflict also signaled a growing assertiveness in a region Moscow sees as within its sphere of influence. While the conflict’s conclusion may have strengthened Russia’s hand, the episode could augur increased Turkish assertiveness and Russian-Turkish competition in the Caucasus.

The Soviet collapse led Turkey to seek to expand its influence in the Caucasus, including through closer relations with Georgia as well as Azerbaijan, a country

with which Turkey shares strong ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties.¹⁶⁸ Ankara’s ambitions perturbed Moscow, which is a treaty ally of Armenia but also seeks to maintain close ties to Baku and fears interference in Russia’s near abroad.

“The Soviet collapse led Turkey to seek to expand its influence in the Caucasus, including through closer relations with Georgia as well as Azerbaijan, a country with which Turkey shares strong ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties.”

Mindful of such concerns, Ankara proceeded cautiously, declining to intervene in the first Armenia-Azerbaijan war in the early 1990s. By the 2000s, Russian-Turkish competition in the Caucasus had subsided significantly.¹⁶⁹ Despite being one of Tbilisi’s top sources of arms and a vocal proponent of Georgian NATO membership, Erdogan was muted during the 2008 Russian-Georgian War. Subsequent Armenia-Azerbaijan clashes occasionally raised Russian-Turkish tensions, but Ankara never actively intervened in the conflict, with Turkish officials telling Baku that war would be a “nightmare.”¹⁷⁰

164. Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference with Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu following talks, Antalya, June 30, 2021,” June 30, 2021. (https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4804977); Henry Meyer and Mirette Magdy, “Putin’s Qaddafi Comeback Gambit Sows New Conflict With the West,” *Bloomberg*, August 12, 2021. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-12/russian-u-s-relations-under-more-strain-as-putin-plots-qaddafi-comeback?sref=3OIZCXOE>)

165. Patrick Wintour, “Libya moves closer to holding high-risk presidential elections,” *The Guardian* (UK), October 24, 2021. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/24/libya-moves-closer-to-holding-high-risk-presidential-elections>); “Dabaiba pressures Mangoush and Manfi into accepting election postponement,” *Africa Intelligence* (France), September 30, 2021. (https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa_diplomacy/2021/09/30/dabaiba-pressures-mangoush-and-manfi-into-accepting-election-postponement,109695237-gra)

166. “Tripoli ‘stabilisation’ summit paves the way for postponing elections,” *Africa Intelligence* (France), October 6, 2021. (https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa_diplomacy/2021/10/06/tripoli--stabilisation--summit-paves-the-way-for-postponing-elections,109696586-eve)

167. “Reports: Libyan PM preparing for presidential bid,” *The Libya Observer* (Libya), November 2, 2021. (<https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/reports-libyan-pm-preparing-presidential-bid>); “Libya’s Dbeibah says election law flawed,” *Reuters*, November 15, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/libyas-dbeibah-says-election-law-flawed-2021-11-15>)

168. Emin Avundukluoglu, “Turkey to continue supporting Baku ‘with all means,’” *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey), October 1, 2020. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-to-continue-supporting-baku-with-all-means/1992169>)

169. Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar, “Russia and Turkey in the Caucasus: Moving Together to Preserve the Status Quo?” *Institut Francais de Relations Internationales*, January 2006. (<https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/hilltaspinaranglais.pdf>)

170. “Armenia and Azerbaijan: Preventing War,” *International Crisis Group*, February 8, 2011, page 15. (<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b60-armenia-and-azerbaijan-preventing-war.pdf>)

Turkey's avoidance of direct military involvement shifted dramatically by 2020, however. Beginning in September 2020, the three-decades-long frozen conflict turned hot, leading to a bloody six-week war.¹⁷¹ In late July 2020, Turkey deployed several F-16s to Azerbaijan for joint exercises, then left them there, presumably to deter Armenia during the impending Azerbaijani offensive, which Ankara encouraged and supported.¹⁷² Turkish exports of drones and other materiel to Azerbaijan had spiked six-fold in 2020, most of it in the month before fighting began.¹⁷³ Azerbaijan employed Turkish drones to deadly effect, routing the Russian-equipped Armenians. Erdogan also supplied over 2,500 Syrian contractors as well as — according to Yerevan — Turkish military advisors,¹⁷⁴ drawing protests from Moscow. As Azerbaijani forces rolled ahead, Ankara and Baku pushed for a greater Turkish role in the OSCE Minsk Group, the conflict's negotiation mechanism, chaired by Russia, France, and the United States but dominated by Moscow. The Kremlin resisted Ankara and Baku's effort.¹⁷⁵

By November 9, with Azerbaijani forces on the verge of taking Stepanakert, the de facto capital of the self-proclaimed Armenian Republic of Artsakh in Nagorno-Karabakh, Putin brokered a last-minute cease-fire,¹⁷⁶ in part through behind-the-scenes negotiations with Erdogan.¹⁷⁷ Under the deal, which notably excludes Turkey as a formal party, Azerbaijan regained control over a third of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the surrounding territories. Fulfilling a decades-old goal, Russia deployed nearly 2,000 peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin Corridor. Ankara and Baku secured a commitment for transport links — to be overseen by Russia — between Azerbaijan's newly reclaimed territory and its Nakhchivan enclave,¹⁷⁸ which borders Turkey. These links can help Turkey strengthen economic ties with both Azerbaijan and Turkic-speaking Central Asia.¹⁷⁹ Ankara managed to secure involvement in a joint monitoring center,¹⁸⁰ but Moscow rejected a Turkish peacekeeping role.¹⁸¹ As a result, while Turkey further boosted its influence with Azerbaijan, Putin outmaneuvered Erdogan to solidify Russia's role as the conflict's key arbiter, increasing Russia's leverage with both Baku and Yerevan.

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171. Andrew Kramer, "Armenia and Azerbaijan: What Sparked War and Will Peace Prevail?" *The New York Times*, January 29, 2021. (<https://www.nytimes.com/article/armenian-azerbaijan-conflict.html>); "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer," *International Crisis Group*, February 12, 2021. (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>)
172. Mason Clark and Ezgi Yazici, "Erdogan Seeks to Upend Kremlin-backed Status Quo in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Institute for the Study of War*, October 12, 2020. (<http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/erdogan-seeks-upend-kremlin-backed-status-quo-nagorno-karabakh>)
173. Ece Toksabay, "Turkish arms sales to Azerbaijan surged before Nagorno-Karabakh fighting," *Reuters*, October 14, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-azerbaijan-turkey-arms/turkish-arms-sales-to-azerbaijan-surged-before-nagorno-karabakh-fighting-idUSKBN26Z237>)
174. "Death toll of mercenaries in Azerbaijan is higher than that in Libya, while Syrian fighters given varying payments," *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* (UK), December 3, 2020. (<https://www.syria.hr.com/en/194516>); "Armenian PM says Turkish high-ranking army officers are in Azerbaijan," *TASS* (Russia), September 29, 2020. (<https://tass.com/world/1206609>)
175. See, for example: "Azerbaijan wants Turkey to co-chair Minsk Group," *TRT World* (Turkey), October 12, 2020. (<https://www.trtworld.com/asia/azerbaijan-wants-turkey-to-co-chair-minsk-group-40516>)
176. Anton Troianovski and Carlotta Gall, "In Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Deal, Putin Applied a Deft New Touch," *The New York Times*, December 1, 2020. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/01/world/europe/nagorno-karabakh-putin-armenia-azerbaijan.html>)
177. Ragip Soylu, "Azerbaijan, Armenia 'near ceasefire deal' on Nagorno-Karabakh," *Middle East Eye* (UK), November 8, 2020. (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/nagorno-karabakh-ceasefire-deal-azerbaijan-armenia>)
178. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation," November 10, 2020. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>)
179. Emil Avdaliani, "Turkey's Return to Central Asia," *Royal United Services Institute*, April 1, 2021. (<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/turkeys-return-central-asia>)
180. "Russia and Turkey open monitoring centre for Nagorno-Karabakh," *Reuters*, January 30, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-armenia-azerbaijan-monitoring-centre/russia-and-turkey-open-monitoring-centre-for-nagorno-karabakh-idUSKBN29Z0FL>)
181. "No Turkish peacekeepers to be sent to Nagorno-Karabakh," *TASS* (Russia), November 12, 2020. (<https://tass.com/politics/1222931>)

Still, Turkey's assertive approach constituted a clear challenge to Russia,¹⁸² portending greater Russian-Turkish competition in the South Caucasus.¹⁸³ In June 2021, after signing a declaration affirming the Turkey-Azerbaijan alliance, Erdogan said he does not rule out a Turkish military base in Azerbaijan. The Kremlin quickly shot back that it pays "special attention" to the potential "deployment of [NATO] military infrastructure ... near our borders" and is prepared "to ensure our security and interests."¹⁸⁴ In September, Turkey announced the appointment of senior military officers to a number of Azerbaijan-related positions, including a previously undisclosed unit called the "Azerbaijan Operational Group," reportedly intended to signal readiness to send a Turkish military contingent to Azerbaijan if the need arises.¹⁸⁵ Subsequent Turkish-Azerbaijani military exercises in the Caspian Sea,

near the Russian-monitored Lachin Corridor, and in Nakhchivan also caused concern in Moscow.¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Armenian-Azerbaijani tensions remain high,¹⁸⁷ Nagorno-Karabakh's final status remains unresolved, and Baku has grown increasingly frustrated with Moscow and the Russian peacekeepers.¹⁸⁸ Azerbaijani analysts predict these Russian-Azerbaijani tensions may escalate by 2025, when Baku could veto an extension of the Russian peacekeeping mandate¹⁸⁹ — potentially offering Turkey an opportunity to maneuver for greater influence.

Paradoxically, Ankara's increased influence may lead to closer Russian-Turkish interaction.¹⁹⁰ Turkey needs Russian cooperation to realize the regional economic and transport connections envisioned in the November 2020 cease-fire deal and a January

182. Mark Galeotti, "Russian Ceasefire Deal in Nagorno-Karabakh Marks Slow, Painful End of Empire in the South Caucasus," *The Moscow Times* (Russia), November 10, 2020. (<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/11/10/russian-ceasefire-deal-marks-slow-painful-end-of-empire-in-the-south-caucasus-a72001>); Dmitry Plotnikov, "Russian Expert Plotnikov: Russia No Longer Is The Only Player In The Trans Caucasus, Turkey's Influence Is Comparable," *Middle East Media Research Institute*, July 6, 2021. (<https://www.memri.org/reports/russian-expert-plotnikov-russia-no-longer-only-player-trans-caucasus-turkeys-influence>)

183. U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Five-Year Regional Outlooks: Russia and Eurasia," March 2021. (<https://www.dni.gov/index.php/gt2040-5-year-regional-outlooks/russia>)

184. "Russia monitoring talk of Turkish military base in Azerbaijan, says Kremlin," *Reuters*, June 18, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-monitoring-talk-turkish-military-base-azerbaijan-says-kremlin-2021-06-18>)

185. "What does 'Azerbaijan Group' in the Turkish General Staff mean?" *Turan* (Azerbaijan), September 10, 2021. (https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2021/9/free/politics_news/en/7602.htm/001)

186. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Moscow, October 6, 2021," October 6, 2021. (https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/4881252); Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, September 16, 2021," September 16, 2021. (https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/-/asset_publisher/D2wHaWMCU6Od/content/id/4860249)

187. See, for example: "Russia tells Armenia and Azerbaijan to de-escalate after deadly border clash," *Reuters*, November 16, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/armenia-asks-russia-help-defend-it-against-azerbaijan-amid-reported-border-clash-2021-11-16>)

188. Vasif Huseynov, "Azerbaijan Increasingly Critical of Russia's Peacekeeping Mission in Karabakh," *Jamestown Foundation*, September 22, 2021. (<https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-increasingly-critical-of-russias-peacekeeping-mission-in-karabakh>); Murad Muradov and Taras Kuzio, "The Iskander Saga Deepens Azerbaijani Mistrust of Russia," *Royal United Services Institute*, May 10, 2021. (<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/iskander-saga-deepens-azerbaijani-mistrust-russia>)

189. Heydar Isayev, "Azerbaijan-Russia relations sour over Karabakh disagreements," *Eurasianet*, September 8, 2021. (<https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-russia-relations-sour-over-karabakh-disagreements>)

190. For example, Moscow has expressed support for the "3+3" format (comprising the three Caucasus states plus Russia, Turkey, and Iran) proposed by Ankara and Baku, though Tbilisi has unsurprisingly been cold to the idea. See: "Russian, Turkish diplomats discuss launch of 3+3 talks on Southern Caucasus," *TASS* (Russia), November 15, 2021. (<https://tass.com/world/1361611>)

2021 follow-on agreement.¹⁹¹ Russia also has an interest in establishing these links.¹⁹² Likewise, as Russian analysts have advocated, the Kremlin may calculate that closer engagement with Turkey can help avoid further Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, manage Russian-Turkish competition in the region,¹⁹³ and neutralize the threat of NATO influence in the South Caucasus.¹⁹⁴

Black Sea Region

Russia's presence in the Black Sea is vital for defense of its southwestern flank and for power projection into the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Mediterranean. Historically, the Black Sea and its littoral regions were ground zero in Russian-Turkish competition. Today, the region is a key locus of Russian-Western competition and a rare bright spot in Turkish-Western relations, with opportunities for further cooperation.

Russia and Turkey have long sought to limit outside influence in the region. The 1936 Montreux Convention gives Ankara control over the Turkish Straits and

restricts the passage of warships, limiting the presence of non-littoral NATO vessels in the Black Sea. Moscow supports the convention as a check on NATO's Black Sea presence but has at times violated the convention's letter or spirit to facilitate submarine deployments to the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹⁵

Following the Soviet collapse, Ankara, enjoying newfound naval superiority in the region, sought to promote its influence through regional security and economic frameworks.¹⁹⁶ In 2001, Russia accepted Ankara's invitation to join the Black Sea Naval Force and its Operation *Black Sea Harmony*, which exclude the United States. (Ankara refused to participate in a similar NATO operation.) When Washington applied for observer status in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in 2005, Ankara abstained, and Moscow opposed it.¹⁹⁷

Following Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, Erdogan sought to avoid confrontation with Moscow,¹⁹⁸ including by denying two U.S. Navy hospital ships passage through the Turkish Straits.¹⁹⁹ Ankara modified its strategy after Russia's annexation

191. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Заявление Президента Азербайджанской Республики, Премьер-министра Республики Армения и Президента Российской Федерации [Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation],” January 11, 2021. (<http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5606>)

192. Thomas de Waal, “In the South Caucasus, Can New Trade Routes Help Overcome a History of Conflict?” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 8, 2021. (<https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/11/08/in-south-caucasus-can-new-trade-routes-help-overcome-history-of-conflict-pub-85729>)

193. Ruslan Pukhov, “Буря на Кавказе [Storm in the Caucasus],” *Kommersant* (Russia), September 27, 2021. (<https://www.kommersant.ru/amp/5006137>)

194. “Russian Military Expert Artamanov: Russia Must Partner With Turkey To Regulate The Situation In The Caucasus And Keep NATO Out,” *Middle East Media Research Institute*, June 22, 2021. (<https://www.memri.org/reports/russian-military-expert-artamanov-russia-must-partner-turkey-regulate-situation-caucasus-and>)

195. Paul Goble, “Moscow Wants to Have It Both Ways on Montreux Convention,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 16, Issue 57, April 23, 2019. (<https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-wants-to-have-it-both-ways-on-montreux-convention>); H.I. Sutton, “Russian Submarine Transits Bosphorus In Move That Raises Questions Under International Treaty,” *Forbes*, June 23, 2020. (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/06/23/image-shows-russian-submarine-appearing-to-break-international-treaty/?sh=42f47a6357b8>)

196. Dimitar Bechev, “Turkey and Black Sea Security: Ten Years After the War in Georgia,” *Atlantic Council*, August 8, 2018. (<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/turkey-and-black-sea-security-ten-years-after-the-war-in-georgia>)

197. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), page 160.

198. Selim Koru, “Turkey's Black Sea Policy: Navigating between Russia and the West,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, July 18, 2017. (<https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/07/turkeys-black-sea-policy-navigating-russia-west>)

199. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), pages 161–162; Thomas Seibert, “US request puts Turkey in a bind,” *The National* (UAE), August 20, 2008. (<https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/the-americas/us-request-puts-turkey-in-a-bind-1.588848>). Turkey subsequently permitted three smaller U.S. ships to transit the straits.

of Crimea and military build-up in the Black Sea,²⁰⁰ which shifted the balance of power in Russia's favor.²⁰¹ Warning that the Black Sea had "nearly become a Russian lake," Erdogan sought a greater NATO presence.²⁰² That push softened following the Russian-Turkish reconciliation in 2016 but did not disappear.²⁰³ In 2016, Turkey agreed to establish a NATO "tailored Forward Presence" in the Black Sea despite vocal Russian opposition.²⁰⁴



The Turkish minesweeper Akcaý enters the harbor of the Russian port of Novorossiysk on March 6, 2019, for combined naval exercises in the Black Sea. (Photo by STR/AFP via Getty Images)

Ankara has since resisted a further expansion of NATO's Black Sea presence, careful to balance between Russia and the West. Turkey conducted Black Sea naval exercises with Russia in 2017 and 2019,²⁰⁵ a tangible demonstration of Ankara's continuing balancing act. This year, Ankara has assured Moscow that Erdogan's controversial Canal Istanbul project, which Moscow feared could allow NATO to circumvent the Montreux Convention, will not lead to an increased NATO presence in the Black Sea.²⁰⁶

Erdogan has similarly walked a fine line vis-à-vis Ukraine. Ankara made little noise at the time of the annexation, fearful of angering Moscow,²⁰⁷ and opposes the Ukraine-related Western sanctions against Russia.²⁰⁸ Turkey undermined Ukraine's strategic and economic interests by supporting Russia's TurkStream pipeline, which bypasses Ukraine. Still, Turkey refuses to recognize the Crimea annexation and criticizes Russia's mistreatment of the peninsula's Turkic-speaking Tatar

200. Patrick Tucker, "EXCLUSIVE: US Intelligence Officials and Satellite Photos Detail Russian Military Buildup on Crimea," *Defense One*, June 12, 2019. (<https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2019/06/exclusive-satellite-photos-detail-russian-military-buildup-crimea/157642>)

201. Joshua Kucera, "Russia Claims 'Mastery' over Turkey in Black Sea," *Eurasianet*, September 25, 2016. (<https://eurasianet.org/russia-claims-mastery-over-turkey-black-sea>); Michael Petersen, "The Naval Power Shift in the Black Sea," *War on the Rocks*, January 9, 2019. (<https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/the-naval-power-shift-in-the-black-sea>)

202. Joshua Kucera, "Erdogan, In Plea To NATO, Says Black Sea Has Become 'Russian Lake,'" *Eurasianet*, May 12, 2016. (<https://eurasianet.org/erdogan-plea-nato-says-black-sea-has-become-russian-lake>)

203. Fehim Tastekin, "New Turkey-Russia hotline still subject to static," *Al-Monitor*, September 19, 2016. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/09/turkey-russia-military-dialogue-red-phone.html>)

204. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," July 9, 2016. (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm)

205. Dave Majumdar, "Why are Russia and Turkey Holding Joint Naval Exercises in the Black Sea?" *The National Interest*, April 5, 2017. (<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-are-russia-turkey-holding-joint-naval-exercises-the-20041>); "Turkey, Russia hold joint naval drill in Black Sea," *TRT World* (Turkey), March 9, 2019. (<https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/turkey-russia-hold-joint-naval-drill-in-black-sea-24801>)

206. "Russia Says Reassured By Turkey About Controversial Canal," *Agence France-Presse*, June 30, 2021. (<https://www.barrons.com/news/russia-says-reassured-by-turkey-about-controversial-canal-01625069707>); Yoruk Isik, "Canal Istanbul: Don't believe the hype," *Middle East Institute*, June 25, 2021. (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/canal-istanbul-dont-believe-hype>)

207. Asli Aydintasbas, "With Friends Like These: Turkey, Russia, and the End of an Unlikely Alliance," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2015, page 7. (https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/WITH_FRIENDS_LIKE_THESE_-_ECFR178.pdf); Peter Kenyon, "Turkey Lacks Strong Position In Russia-Ukraine Crisis," *NPR*, March 14, 2014. (<https://www.npr.org/2014/03/14/289994144/turkey-lacks-strong-position-in-russia-ukraine-crisis>)

208. "Turkey says it is against EU sanctions on Russia," *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), August 11, 2017. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-says-it-is-against-eu-sanctions-on-russia---116601>)

population.²⁰⁹ Turkey and Ukraine are negotiating a free-trade agreement²¹⁰ and discussing Ukrainian observer status in the Turkic Council.²¹¹

Most importantly, the two countries have increased their military-technical and naval cooperation,²¹² drawing Moscow's ire.²¹³ Turkey and Ukraine seek to further expand defense ties, signing military and military-technical cooperation agreements in October 2020.²¹⁴ During an April 2021 visit by Erdogan to Ukraine, he and his Ukrainian counterpart touted plans to share technology to co-produce drones and naval corvettes.²¹⁵

This earned a sharp rebuke from Moscow,²¹⁶ which expressed further dismay over Ukraine's deployment of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones to Donbas.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, Turkey delivered a TB2 batch to the Ukrainian navy in July,²¹⁸ following a previous delivery to the Ukrainian army. Kyiv plans to purchase 24 more TB2s in 2021–2022.²¹⁹ On September 29, the same day Erdogan and Putin met in Sochi, Kyiv and Turkish drone maker Baykar signed a memorandum for joint training and maintenance centers for Turkish drones,²²⁰ prompting another Kremlin protest.²²¹ They reportedly

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- 209.** See, for example: “Turkey Backs Crimea’s Return to Ukraine – FM,” *The Moscow Times* (Russia), December 3, 2020. (<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/03/turkey-backs-crimeas-return-to-ukraine-fm-a72224>). “Turkey decries conviction of Crimean Tatars by Russian court,” *TRT World* (Turkey), September 19, 2020. (<https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/turkey-decries-conviction-of-crimean-tatars-by-russian-court-39885>). The Crimean Khanate was a longtime Ottoman vassal before it was absorbed by the Russian Empire in the 18th century.
- 210.** “Ambassador: Conclusion of free trade agreement to double Ukraine-Turkey trade,” *Ukrinform* (Ukraine), February 26, 2021. (<https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-economy/3198359-ambassador-conclusion-of-free-trade-agreement-to-double-ukraineturkey-trade.html>)
- 211.** “Ukraine applied for observer status in the Turkic Council,” *Turan* (Azerbaijan), October 8, 2021. (https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2021/10/free/politics_news/en/8424.htm/001)
- 212.** See: Ukraine Office of the President, “Спільна Декларація за результатами П'ятого засідання Стратегічної ради високого рівня між Україною і Турецькою Республікою [Joint Declaration on the Results of the Fifth Meeting of the High-Level Strategic Council between Ukraine and the Republic of Turkey],” March 9, 2016. (Archived version available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160310131451/http://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-deklaraciya-za-rezultatami-pyatogo-zasidannya-strateg-36831>); Metin Gurcan, “Turkey-Ukraine defense industry ties are booming,” *Al-Monitor*, May 1, 2017. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/05/turkey-ukraine-cooperation-defense-booming.html>)
- 213.** See, for example: “Russia warns Turkey over ties with Ukraine,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-warns-turkey-over-ties-with-ukraine-2021-05-24>)
- 214.** Ukraine Office of the President, Press Release, “Ukraine and Turkey have a common point of view on cooperation in the field of security and defense - the President,” October 16, 2020. (<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-j-turechchina-mayut-spilnu-tochku-zoru-shodo-spiivpr-64669>). See also: Ukraine Office of the President, “Joint statement following the meeting between President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan,” October 16, 2020. (<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/spilna-zayava-za-rezultatami-zustrichi-prezidenta-ukrayini-v-64661>)
- 215.** “Turkey’s Erdogan voices support for Ukraine amid crisis,” *Deutsche Welle* (Germany), April 10, 2021. (<https://www.dw.com/en/turkeys-erdogan-voices-support-for-ukraine-amid-crisis/a-57157898>). See also: Ukraine Ministry of Defense, *Facebook*, December 14, 2020. (<https://www.facebook.com/MinistryofDefence.UA/posts/3704634149599063>)
- 216.** “Press review: Russia warns Erdogan not to embolden Kiev and restricts flights to Turkey,” *TASS* (Russia), April 13, 2021. (<https://tass.com/pressreview/1277091>)
- 217.** “‘Hardly anything to rejoice about’: Moscow dismayed over Turkish drones in Donbas,” *TASS* (Russia), April 13, 2021. (<https://tass.com/politics/1277251>)
- 218.** Ukraine Ministry of Defense, *Facebook*, July 15, 2021. (<https://www.facebook.com/MinistryofDefence.UA/posts/4300022716726867>)
- 219.** “Ukraine to buy 24 more Turkish Bayraktar TB2 UCAVs,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), September 12, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/ukraine-to-buy-24-more-turkish-bayraktar-tb2-ucavs>)
- 220.** “Ukraine signs memorandum on training and maintenance centres for Turkish drones,” *Reuters*, September 29, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-signs-memorandum-training-maintenance-centres-turkish-drones-2021-09-29>)
- 221.** “Kremlin calls talks between Putin and Erdogan useful and timely,” *TASS* (Russia), September 30, 2021. (<https://tass.ru/politika/12543763>)

are also considering drone production in Ukraine.²²² A month later, Ukraine conducted its first TB2 strike against Russia-led forces in Donbas,²²³ leading the Kremlin to warn that Turkey's drone deliveries risk destabilizing the situation in eastern Ukraine.²²⁴

Part III: A New Partnership?

Military-Technical Cooperation: Turkey's Quest for the S-400

Erdogan's anti-Western convictions have strained relations with NATO, leading him to pursue security cooperation with Russia and, to a lesser extent, with China. Washington's main point of contention with Ankara concerns Erdogan's decision to buy Russia's S-400 surface-to-air missile (SAM) system. For Moscow, that move offered an opportunity to strengthen Russian-Turkish relations while undermining NATO unity and military interoperability, demonstrating Russia's ability to defy the West,²²⁵ and boosting Russia's defense industry and potentially Russian intelligence collection.²²⁶

Since Ankara first asked NATO to deploy Patriot batteries on Turkish soil during the First Gulf War, Turkey has placed a premium on securing its airspace. Believing that NATO did not fully appreciate Turkey's vulnerability, Ankara resolved to acquire an air defense system of its own.²²⁷ For several years, Turkey haggled with Washington over acquiring the Patriot system. Ankara has cited several reasons for walking away, including U.S. refusals to meet Turkish demands on co-production and technology sharing and even an outright U.S. refusal to sell the system. U.S. officials believe Ankara has consistently looked for excuses not to follow through — even rejecting favorable U.S. terms on pricing and co-production — as part of Turkey's attempts to assert strategic autonomy from NATO.²²⁸

In 2013, Ankara demonstrated readiness to break with the West by announcing its intention to buy the Chinese-made HQ-9 from a U.S.-sanctioned company.²²⁹ Congress responded by barring Turkey from using American funds to purchase the HQ-9, citing the Chinese manufacturer's missile sales to Iran.²³⁰ Turkey abandoned the deal two years later.

222. Illia Ponomarenko, "Turkish-supplied drones enter the battlefield against Russia," *Kyiv Post* (Ukraine), October 31, 2021. (<https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/turkish-supplied-drones-enter-the-battlefield-against-russia.html>)

223. "Ukraine Uses Turkish Drone Against Russia-Backed Separatists For First Time," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 27, 2021. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-turkish-drone-separatists/31532268.html>)

224. "Kremlin says Turkish drones risk destabilising situation in east Ukraine," *Reuters*, October 27, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/kremlin-says-turkish-drones-risk-destabilising-situation-east-ukraine-2021-10-27>)

225. Stephan Kravchenko and Ilya Arkhipov, "Turkey Crisis Tests Putin's Powers in Global Game With U.S.," *Bloomberg*, August 14, 2018. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-14/turkey-crisis-tests-putin-s-power-to-tilt-global-game-with-u-s>); Maksim Suchkov, "Intel: How Russia Is Pushing A Weapons Sale That Has Roiled US-Turkey Relations," *Russia in Global Affairs*, March 14, 2019. (<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/intel-how-russia-is-pushing-a-weapons-sale-that-has-roiled-us-turkey-relations>)

226. Alexandra Dzhorzhevich, "What's at stake for Russia with S-400 deliveries to Turkey?" *Al-Monitor*, July 24, 2019. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/russia-turkey-s400-deliveries-missile-system.html>)

227. Jim Townsend and Rachel Ellehuus, "The Tale Of Turkey And The Patriots," *War On The Rocks*, July 22, 2019. (<https://warontherocks.com/2019/07/the-tale-of-turkey-and-the-patriots>)

228. Selcan Hacaoğlu and Firat Kozok, "Turkey Rejects Latest U.S. Offer to Sell Patriot Missiles," *Bloomberg*, March 1, 2019. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-01/turkey-said-to-reject-latest-u-s-offer-to-sell-patriot-missiles?sref=3OIZCXOE>)

229. Aykan Erdemir, Bradley Bowman, and Jonathan Schanzer, "Turkey's Pursuit of American F-35s and Russian S-400s," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 10, 2019. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/visuals/2019/04/10/turkeys-pursuit-of-american-f-35s-russian-s-400s>)

230. "Congress to block Turkey using US funds to buy missile system from blacklisted Chinese firm," *Agence France-Presse*, December 14, 2013. (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/10517547/Congress-to-block-Turkey-using-US-funds-to-buy-missile-system-from-blacklisted-Chinese-firm.html>)

During the 2016 coup attempt, rogue pilots used U.S.-made F-16s to target both the Turkish parliament building and Erdogan's private plane.²³¹ This personal threat on his life may have prompted Erdogan to pursue the S-400 as a hedge against future coups involving F-16s.²³² He likely also saw the S-400 as a means of currying favor with Russia and demonstrating independence from the West. In July 2017, Erdogan announced Turkey would procure the system.²³³ After signing the contract and making an advance payment, Turkey in December 2017 announced a \$2.5 billion agreement to purchase up to four batteries from Russia, with over half the financing provided by a Russian loan.²³⁴

Vigorous U.S. efforts to reverse Erdogan's decision, including sanctions warnings and a renewed offer of Patriot missiles, went nowhere. Ankara withdrew from the Patriot negotiations in March 2019, citing

a lack of agreement regarding loans and technology sharing.²³⁵ Turkey began receiving S-400 deliveries that July, with Ankara saying it would fully deploy the system in April 2020.²³⁶ Calling the purchase "the most important deal in modern [Turkish] history," Erdogan said 100 Turkish specialists were in Russia training to operate the system, and that this number might be "increased tenfold."²³⁷ Turkish media personalities and analysts hailed the delivery as Turkey's "liberation from the West."²³⁸

Concerned that co-location of the S-400 and the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter could allow Russia to develop countermeasures against the F-35, Washington expelled Turkey from the Joint Strike Fighter program,²³⁹ costing Turkey's economy an estimated \$9 billion.²⁴⁰ The Pentagon completed the expulsion in September²⁴¹ and expects to remove Turkish manufacturers from the F-35 supply chain by 2022.²⁴² Despite U.S. sanctions

231. Tom Karako, "Coup-proofing? Making Sense of Turkey's S-400 Decision," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, July 15, 2019. (<https://www.csis.org/analysis/coup-proofing-making-sense-turkeys-s-400-decision>)

232. Boris Zilberman, "The S-400: Erdogan's Fail-safe," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, November 3, 2017. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/policy-briefs/2017/11/03/the-s-400-erdogans-fail-safe>)

233. "Timeline: Turkey's path to buying Russian air defense systems – and possible U.S. sanctions," *Reuters*, July 22, 2019. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-turkey-security-usa-timeline/timeline-turkeys-path-to-buying-russian-air-defense-systems-and-possible-u-s-sanctions-idUSKCN1UH1RB>)

234. Tuvan Gumrukcu and Ece Toksabay, "Turkey, Russia sign deal on supply of S-400 missiles," *Reuters*, December 29, 2017. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-turkey-missiles/turkey-russia-sign-deal-on-supply-of-s-400-missiles-idUSKBN1EN0T5>)

235. Selcan Hacaoğlu and Firat Kozok, "Turkey Rejects Latest U.S. Offer to Sell Patriot Missiles," *Bloomberg*, March 1, 2019. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-01/turkey-said-to-reject-latest-u-s-offer-to-sell-patriot-missiles>)

236. Sarah Dadouch, "Turkey's Erdogan says Russian S-400s will be fully developed by April 2020," *Reuters*, July 15, 2019. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security/turkeys-erdogan-says-russian-s-400s-will-be-fully-deployed-by-april-2020-idUSKCN1UA25X>);

"Turkey says delivery of second S-400 battery complete," *Reuters*, September 15, 2019. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-defense-russia/turkey-says-delivery-of-second-s-400-battery-complete-idUSKBN1W00AQ>)

237. Maxim Suchkov, "Russia eyes big picture with S-400 sale to Turkey," *Al-Monitor*, July 15, 2019. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/russia-turkey-s400-us-technology.html>)

238. Gonul Tol and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey's Russian Roulette," *The MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, Eds. Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (Milano, Italy: ISPI and Atlantic Council, 2019), page 107. (<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MENA-Region-Great-Power-Competition-Report-Web-2.pdf>)

239. Aykan Erdemir, Bradley Bowman, and Jonathan Schanzer, "Turkey's Pursuit of American F-35s and Russian S-400s," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 10, 2019. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/visuals/2019/04/10/turkeys-pursuit-of-american-f-35s-russian-s-400s>)

240. Aaron Mehta, "Turkey officially kicked out of F-35 program, costing US half a billion dollars," *Defense News*, July 17, 2019. (<https://www.defensenews.com/air/2019/07/17/turkey-officially-kicked-out-of-f-35-program>)

241. U.S. Department of Defense, Press Release, "2021 U.S.-Turkey F-35 Dispute Resolution Meeting," October 27, 2021. (<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2824734/2021-us-turkey-f-35-dispute-resolution-meeting>)

242. Anthony Capaccio, "F-35 Part Shortage Grows as GAO Flags Risk of Turkey's Exit," *Bloomberg*, May 12, 2020. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-12/f-35-parts-shortage-grows-as-gao-flags-risk-of-turkey-expulsion>)

threats, Turkey publicly tested the S-400 against U.S.-made F-16s in November 2019.²⁴³ In October 2020, Ankara conducted a live-fire S-400 test following unconfirmed reports that Turkey had used the system's radar to track a Greek F-16.²⁴⁴ Washington banned U.S. export licenses for Turkey's defense procurement agency in December 2020.²⁴⁵

“Turkey’s purchases of Russian weapon systems may go beyond its initial two S-400 batteries. In January 2021, Erdogan confirmed that talks with Russia on procurement of a second S-400 batch would continue. Moscow has indicated openness to limited co-production.”

Despite Erdogan's break with Washington, Russia reportedly rejected Turkey's request for technology transfer and joint production, at least for the first two batteries. Moscow also refused to allow Turkey access to the S-400's electronic codes and internal data and insisted on installing the system's friend-or-foe identification system itself, meaning Turkey's S-400s likely will register all non-Turkish aircraft as “unknown.”²⁴⁶ Ultimately, Erdogan prioritized

personal over national interests, depriving Turkey of the F-35 and subjecting the struggling Turkish economy to the risk of U.S. sanctions.

As the Biden administration gave Ankara the cold shoulder in early 2021, Turkey's defense minister hinted that Turkey was open to a compromise if Washington reevaluates its support for the YPG. “We can find a solution for the S-400s in our negotiations with the U.S. but we expect them to see the facts about the YPG,” he said.²⁴⁷

Turkey's purchases of Russian weapon systems may go beyond its initial two S-400 batteries. In January 2021, Erdogan confirmed that talks with Russia on procurement of a second S-400 batch would continue.²⁴⁸ Moscow has indicated openness to limited co-production.²⁴⁹ In August, the head of Russia's Rosoboronexport said that an additional S-400 contract “is expected ... this year,”²⁵⁰ and that Moscow and Ankara were discussing potential Turkish purchases of Russian Su-35s as well as anti-aircraft systems to protect Turkey's S-400s.²⁵¹ An unnamed Turkish security official, however, told the BBC that a deal for a second S-400 batch was not on the immediate agenda, speculating that Moscow was

243. David Choi, “Turkey is flying US-made F-16s to test a top Russian air defense system as Trump keeps getting sidelined by the US ally,” *Business Insider*, November 28, 2019. (<https://www.businessinsider.com/turkey-tests-f-16s-with-russian-air-defense-system-s400-2019-11>)

244. Bradley Bowman, “With S-400 Escalation, Turkey Tests NATO,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, October 6, 2020. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/10/16/with-s-400-escalation-turkey-tests-nato>)

245. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, Fact Sheet, “CAATSA Section 231 ‘Imposition of Sanctions on Turkish Presidency of Defense Industries,’” December 14, 2020. (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/caatsa-section-231-imposition-of-sanctions-on-turkish-presidency-of-defense-industries/index.html>)

246. Kerim Has, “Turkey, Russia, and the Looming S-400 Crisis,” *Middle East Institute*, July 10, 2019. (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-russia-and-looming-s-400-crisis>)

247. Diego Cupolo, “Turkish official hints at possible S-400 missile compromise with US,” *Al-Monitor*, February 9, 2021. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/02/turkey-defense-minister-hulusi-akar-s400-russia-kurds-syria.html>)

248. “Talks with Russia on 2nd batch of S-400s set to continue as planned, Erdoğan says,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), January 15, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/talks-with-russia-on-2nd-batch-of-s-400s-set-to-continue-as-planned-erdogan-says>)

249. “Russia: Turkey can produce components of S-400,” *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), April 11, 2019. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russia-turkey-can-produce-components-of-s-400-142590>); “Turkey had paid Russia in Full for S-400 Air Defence System,” *Defense World*, December 7, 2020. (https://www.defenseworld.net/news/28481/Turkey_had_paid_Russia_in_Full_for_S_400_Air_Defence_System#.YIbgU-j0k2w)

250. “Rosoboronexport expects another contract on S-400 shipment to Turkey to be inked this year,” *TASS* (Russia), August 25, 2021. (<https://tass.com/defense/1329881>)

251. “Russia ready to expand cooperation with Turkey for aircraft deliveries — Rosoboronexport,” *TASS* (Russia), August 18, 2021. (<https://tass.com/economy/1327409>)



A Russian Ilyushin Il-76, carrying the first batch of equipment of the S-400 missile defense system, arrives at Murted Air Base in Ankara, Turkey, on July 12, 2019. (Photo by Turkey's National Defense Ministry/Handout/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

“either declaring its intention or trying to” undermine Ankara’s outreach to the Biden administration.²⁵²

Erdogan later vowed that U.S. sanctions would not deter him from buying additional S-400s, but offered no specifics about the deal’s terms or timeline.²⁵³ Following his September meeting with Putin in Sochi, Erdogan said he and the Russian leader had discussed the S-400 as well as further defense cooperation, including on fighter jets, plane engine production, and building ships and submarines.²⁵⁴ He also said their teams would develop a roadmap for potential Russian-Turkish space cooperation, claiming Putin had offered to help Turkey build rocket launch facilities.²⁵⁵ As Russia-based Turkish analyst Kerim Has conjectured,

these statements may reflect Erdogan’s efforts to ensure his “personal survival” by buying Putin’s agreement to delay an offensive in Idlib.²⁵⁶

An October 7 *Defense News* article quoted an unnamed senior Turkish procurement official as saying that talks for the second S-400 batch “are progressing” but are still at the “strategic and political” level and “have not yet reached technicalities, financing and pricing.” The official added that Russian engine technology for Turkey’s indigenous fifth-generation stealth fighter, dubbed TF-X, would be the priority for technological cooperation, saying the next level of talks will be “exploratory.” The official also said Turkey “may soon start talks to acquire Russian fighters as a stopgap solution before” the TF-X is ready for mass production, which likely will take until at least the mid-2030s.²⁵⁷

Despite its S-400 purchase, Ankara remains heavily dependent on the United States and other NATO allies to support Turkey’s indigenous defense industry. While the industry has made strides in recent years,²⁵⁸ it continues to suffer from brain drain, political interference, the need for new markets and investment, dependence on foreign components, and depreciation of the local currency.²⁵⁹ While Erdogan may prefer to decouple the Turkish defense industry from the alliance, it will be possible only over the long term.

252. Samih Idiz, “Is Moscow using the S-400 against Turkey?” *Al-Monitor*, September 3, 2021. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/moscow-using-s-400-against-turkey>)

253. “Turkey vows to proceed with new round of S-400 air defenses,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), September 26, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/turkey-vows-to-proceed-with-new-round-of-s-400-air-defenses>)

254. “Turkey, Russia mull fighter jet, submarine partnership,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), September 30, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/turkey-russia-mull-fighter-jet-submarine-partnership>)

255. “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Başkanlık sistemiyle inşallah yolumuza devam edeceğiz [President Erdogan: I hope we will continue on our way with the presidential system],” *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey), September 30, 2021. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-baskanlik-sistemiyle-insallah-yolumuza-devam-edecegiz/2378983>)

256. “Soçi’de Erdoğan-Putin buluşması: ‘Faturası yüksek’ bir zirve mi yolda?” [Erdoğan-Putin meeting in Sochi: Is a ‘high-cost’ summit on the way?],” *Ahval* (Turkey), September 28, 2021. (<https://ahvalnews.com/tr/rusya-turkiye/socide-erdogan-putin-bulusmasi-faturasi-yukse-bir-zirve-mi-yolda>)

257. Burak Ege Bekdil, “Turkey eyes jets, engine and subs as it moves further into Russia’s orbit,” *Defense News*, October 7, 2021. (<https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/10/07/turkey-eyes-jets-engine-and-subs-as-it-moves-further-into-russias-orbit>)

258. “Turkey’s ever-growing indigenous arms industry,” *The New Arab* (UK), October 18, 2019. (<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/10/18/turkeys-ever-growing-indigenous-arms-industry>)

259. Ali Bakeer, “Challenges threaten the rise of Turkey’s defense industry,” *Middle East Institute*, May 14, 2019. (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/challenges-threaten-rise-turkeys-defense-industry>)

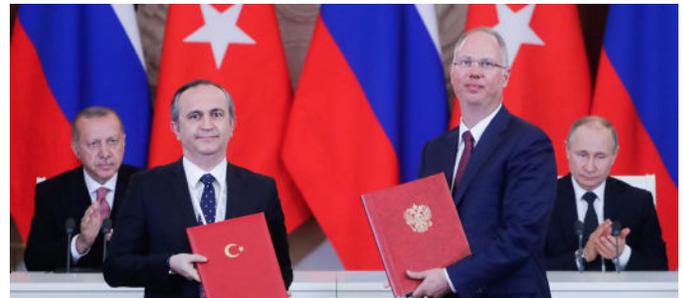
Indeed, the day after the Erdogan-Putin meeting, Ankara sent Washington a formal request for 40 new Block 70 F-16s and nearly 80 modernization kits for Turkey's existing F-16s.²⁶⁰ Procuring Russian warplanes would be impractical given the high costs of adapting to the Russian systems — a fact reportedly underscored in analyses by Turkey's Defense Ministry and state procurement agency.²⁶¹ As the head of that agency and Turkey's foreign minister recently indicated,²⁶² Ankara may hope to leverage a potential purchase of Russian Su-35s or even Su-57s to convince Washington to help Turkey sustain its aging F-16 fleet.²⁶³ That gambit is likely doomed: Congress has effectively banned any arms sales to Turkey until the S-400 issue is resolved. On the other hand, Turkey's S-400 purchases also made little practical sense. Erdogan may simply use the F-16 deal's likely failure to justify further defense-industrial cooperation with Russia.

Economic Cooperation

Following the Soviet collapse, Turkey and Russia built their uneasy rapprochement on burgeoning economic cooperation, including in the fields of tourism, trade, investment, construction, and energy. Deals subsequently brokered by Putin and Erdogan have added multibillion-dollar projects in the natural gas and nuclear fields. The leaders frequently tout their ambitious (albeit unrealistic) target of \$100 billion in bilateral trade by 2023.²⁶⁴ Economic interdependence and joint energy infrastructure projects provide powerful incentives for Moscow and Ankara to manage their geopolitical differences.

This interdependence is asymmetric, however. Russia enjoys greater leverage. This advantage stems not only from a trade imbalance in Russia's favor, but also from the nature of the goods and services involved. While Moscow can restrict Russian tourism in Turkey or the activity of Turkish construction companies in Russia with relative ease, Ankara cannot simply turn off gas imports from Russia. Moscow has exploited this asymmetry, including during the 2008 Georgia War²⁶⁵ and, most notably, the 2015 Su-24 crisis.

Dependence on Russia gives Ankara a powerful incentive to accommodate Moscow. As Erdogan said in September 2008, shortly after the Russo-Georgian War, "The United States is our ally. But Russia is our strategic neighbor. We buy two-thirds of the energy we need from Russia. That country is Turkey's number one partner in trade... Our allies must adopt an understanding approach."²⁶⁶



Zafer Sonmez, then-CEO of the Turkey Wealth Fund, and Russian Direct Investment Fund CEO Kirill Dmitriev (L-R front) sign joint documents at a ceremony attended by Erdogan and Putin (L-R back) following Russian-Turkish talks at the Kremlin on April 8, 2019. (Photo by Mikhail Metzelski/TASS via Getty Images)

260. Humeyra Pamuk and Mike Stone, "Turkey asks U.S. to buy 40 F-16 jets to upgrade Air Force -sources," *Reuters*, October 7, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-seeks-40-f-16-jets-upgrade-air-force-sources-2021-10-07>)

261. Ragip Soylu, "Turkey's Fighter Flirtation With Russia: Is it Serious?" *Breaking Defense*, October 27, 2021. (<https://breakingdefense.com/2021/10/turkeys-fighter-flirtation-with-russia-is-it-serious>)

262. "Turkey may buy Russian latest military aircraft, if US refuses to sell F-16 fighters," *TASS* (Russia), October 18, 2021. (<https://tass.com/defense/1350701>); "US should deliver F-35s we paid for: Turkish FM," *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), October 28, 2021. (<https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/us-should-deliver-f-35s-we-paid-for-turkish-fm-168945>)

263. Aaron Stein, "Not a Divorce But a Defense Decoupling: What's Next for the U.S.-Turkish Alliance," *War on the Rocks*, October 18, 2021. (<https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/not-a-divorce-but-a-defense-decoupling-whats-next-for-the-u-s-turkish-alliance>)

264. Seckin Kostem, "The Political Economy of Turkish-Russian Relations: Dynamics of Asymmetric Interdependence," *Perceptions*, Volume XXIII, Number 2, Summer 2018, pages 10–32. (<http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/sf10-32.pdf>)

265. Igor Torbakov, "The Georgia Crisis and Russia-Turkey Relations," *The Jamestown Foundation*, 2008. (<https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/GeorgiaCrisisTorbakov.pdf>)

266. Carol R. Saivetz, "Tangled Pipelines: Turkey's Role in Energy Export Plans," *Turkish Studies*, Volume 10, Number 1, 2009, page 107. (<https://www.tandfonline-com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/doi/full/10.1080/14683840802648703>)

Turkey's increased role as a transit country for Russian gas, coupled with Ankara's efforts to reduce dependence on Russian supplies, could level the playing field to some degree. Turkey's diversification efforts could also diminish the ability of economic ties to serve as ballast in Russian-Turkish relations, potentially making the relationship more brittle.

Tourism

Tourism accounts for almost 4 percent of Turkey's GDP and over half its services exports,²⁶⁷ which are crucial for Turkey's overall economic health. Turkey has become the favorite destination of Russian tourists, bolstered by a 2010 visa-free travel agreement.²⁶⁸ This dependence on Russian tourists offers Moscow a low-cost, high-impact tool for economic coercion.

“Turkey has become the favorite destination of Russian tourists, bolstered by a 2010 visa-free travel agreement. This dependence on Russian tourists offers Moscow a low-cost, high-impact tool for economic coercion.”

In 2014, 4.5 million Russian tourists visited Turkey, accounting for almost 13 percent of Turkey's total number of foreign visitors that year. Following the

November 2015 Su-24 shootdown, Moscow banned the sale of tourism packages and charter flights to Turkey and discouraged Russians from traveling there, causing Russian tourism in Turkey to plummet by 95 percent.²⁶⁹ Tourist flows quickly recovered after Moscow lifted its restrictions, rising to 4.7 million in 2017.²⁷⁰ By 2019, this figure had reached almost 7 million, accounting for 15.6 percent of all foreign visitors to Turkey, more than any other country.²⁷¹ Although COVID-19 caused tourism to drop, long-term prospects look good as Moscow and Ankara work to expand acceptance of Russian MIR cards and the Russian ruble in Turkey.²⁷²

Trade

Russian-Turkish bilateral trade peaked at \$37.9 billion in 2008, then fell because of that year's financial crisis. Also in 2008, Russia became Turkey's second-largest trade partner, behind only Germany. Turkey runs an overall trade deficit with Russia given that Russia is Turkey's top gas supplier. Russia remains a top destination for Turkish agricultural exports, especially citrus fruit and tomatoes. This trade received a boost from Russian countersanctions against EU agricultural exports, imposed in retaliation for the bloc's 2014 sanctions against Russia, which Turkey notably declined to join.²⁷³ Turkey consistently ranks among the largest importers of Russian wheat,

267. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “OECD Tourism Trends and Policies, 2020,” (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/f3b16239-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/f3b16239-en>)

268. Russian Federation Consulate General in Antalya, “О порядке въезда в Турцию с российскими паспортами [On the procedure for entering Turkey with Russian passports],” accessed November 17, 2021. (https://antalya.mid.ru/ru/consular-services/consulate/o_poryadke_vezda_v_turtsiyu_s_rossiyskimi_pasportami)

269. Constanze Letsch, “Turkey's tourism industry reels from a year to forget,” *The Guardian* (UK), October 5, 2016. (<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2016/oct/05/turkey-tourism-industry-reels-year-to-forget-istanbul-antalya>)

270. “32.4 mln foreigners visit Turkey in 2017: Tourism Ministry,” *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), January 31, 2018. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/32-4-mln-foreigners-visit-turkey-in-2017-tourism-ministry-126559>)

271. Burak Erdem Celik, “Celebrities from target tourism markets to visit Turkey in 2020,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), January 3, 2020. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/tourism/2020/01/03/celebrities-from-target-markets-to-visit-turkey-in-2020-as-part-of-promotional-activities>)

272. “Agreements on way for Russians to pay with rubles in Turkish cities,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), February 25, 2020. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/tourism/agreements-on-way-for-russians-to-pay-with-rubles-in-turkish-cities>); “Turkish state lender to enable use of Russian payment card,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), August 9, 2019. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/finance/2019/08/09/turkish-state-lender-to-enable-use-of-russian-payment-card>)

273. Nevzat Devranoglu and Ceyda Caglayan, “Turkish exporters see profit from Russian ban on Western foods,” *Reuters*, August 12, 2014. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-sanctions-turkey/turkish-exporters-see-profit-from-russian-ban-on-western-foods-idUSKBN0GC16D20140812>)

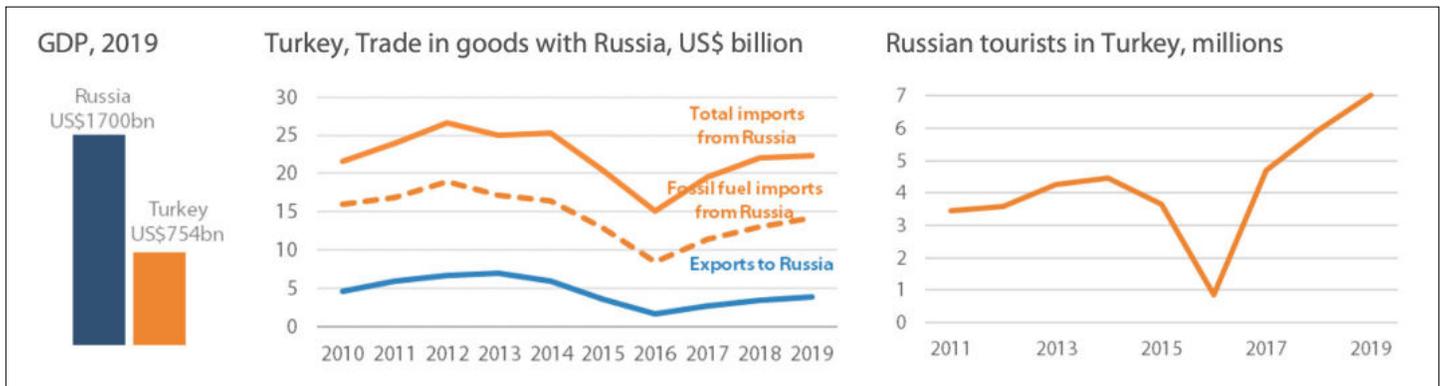
on which Turkey depends as the world’s top flour exporter and one of the world’s biggest consumers of bread.²⁷⁴

Russian sanctions against Turkey over the November 2015 Su-24 incident led to a sharp downturn in bilateral trade. Total two-way trade stood at \$31.2 billion in 2014 but plummeted to \$16.9 billion in 2016, with Turkish exports to Russia dropping almost 61 percent year-over-year during the first half of 2016.²⁷⁵ Even after restoring relations, Russia retained a quota on imports of Turkish tomatoes,

using it to support Russian producers but also as a bargaining chip with Ankara,²⁷⁶ including during the 2020 Idlib crisis.²⁷⁷

Russian-Turkish trade has recovered somewhat since Erdogan led a 2016 delegation to St. Petersburg to meet with Putin and the heads of various Russian ministries and major companies. Yet as of 2019, total two-way trade still amounted to only \$26.3 billion.²⁷⁸ The imbalance remains substantial: Russia sent \$22.45 billion worth of exports to Turkey, dwarfing Turkey’s \$3.85 billion in exports to Russia.²⁷⁹

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Data: World Bank, International Trade Centre, and Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Source: European Parliamentary Research Service, “Russia–Turkey relations,” February 2021.

274. Natasha Doff, “Putin and Erdogan Are Feuding and There’s Big Money at Stake,” *Bloomberg*, March 4, 2020. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-05/putin-and-erdogan-are-feuding-and-there-s-big-money-at-stake>)

275. “Deepening Russia-Turkey Relations Report,” *Russian International Affairs Council* (Russia), 2019. (<https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/Russia-Turkey-Report41-Eng.pdf>); “Erdogan, Putin talks expected to boost trade relations,” *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey), August 8, 2016. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/erdogan-putin-talks-expected-to-boost-trade-relations/624992>)

276. Isobel Finkel, Cagan Koc, and Henry Meyer, “Rotten Tomatoes: Turkish Farmers Suffer Putin’s Wrath Over Syria,” *Bloomberg*, April 11, 2017. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-04-11/rotten-tomatoes-turkish-farmers-suffer-putin-s-wrath-over-syria>)

277. Gonul Tol, “Turkey faces potential Russian blowback on Syria – and tomatoes are only the beginning,” *Middle East Institute*, February 13, 2020. (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-faces-potential-russian-blowback-syria-and-tomatoes-are-only-beginning>); “Russia proposes raising Turkish tomato import quota by 50,000 T - RIA,” *Reuters*, January 31, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-turkey-tomatoes/russia-proposes-raising-turkish-tomato-import-quota-by-50000-t-ria-idUSR4N29W020>)

278. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation,” accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey-and-the-russian-federation.en.mfa>)

279. Zulfikar Dogan, “Putin’s New Year gesture to Erdoğan: 50,000 tonnes of tomatoes,” *Ahval* (Turkey), January 25, 2021. (<https://ahvalnews.com/russia-turkey/putins-new-year-gesture-erdogan-50000-tonnes-tomatoes>)

Investment and Construction

Russia has become an important destination for Turkish foreign direct investment (FDI).²⁸⁰ According to the Russian co-chair of the Russian-Turkish trade and economic cooperation commission, more than 3,000 Turkish companies are active in Russia.²⁸¹ A number of leading Turkish firms and businesspeople with business interests in or with Russia have advocated stronger Turkish-Russian relations.²⁸² Some of those businesspeople hold positions on Turkey's influential Foreign Economic Relations Board, which has also supported closer ties with Moscow.²⁸³

According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Turkish contractors have completed almost \$76 billion worth of construction in Russia,²⁸⁴ which is the top foreign market for Turkish contractors.²⁸⁵ The construction sector has fueled Turkey's economic

growth and Erdogan's electoral success over the last decade and a half.²⁸⁶

Likewise, Russian firms have expanded their presence in Turkey over the last decade, concentrating on the energy, metallurgy, banking, and automotive sectors. For example, a plant opened by Russia's MMK in 2011 became Turkey's largest industrial enterprise. MMK also operates Turkey's biggest privately owned port. That same year, Turkey became the first non-Russian-speaking market entered by Yandex, Russia's most popular search engine.²⁸⁷ In 2012, Russia's state-owned Sberbank acquired Turkey's Deniz Bank for \$3.6 billion, marking Russia's largest overseas acquisition, although Sberbank later sold it due to Western sanctions.²⁸⁸ GAZ Group, Russia's largest commercial motor vehicles producer, has been producing vans in Turkey since 2014, while Russia's Lukoil has invested over \$1 billion there.²⁸⁹ In December 2017, Turkey

280. "Deepening Russia-Turkey Relations Report," *Russian International Affairs Council*, 2019. (<https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/Russia-Turkey-Report41-Eng.pdf>)

281. "Over 3,000 Turkish companies working now in Russia — official," *TASS* (Russia), July 30, 2021. (<https://tass.com/economy/1321193>)

282. See, for example: Aykan Erdemir and John Lechner, "How Russia Plans to Get Turkey on Its Side," *The National Interest*, August 8, 2018. (<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/how-russia-plans-get-turkey-its-side-28247>); "Turkish businessmen hopeful over Erdogan, Putin meeting," *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey), August 7, 2016. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkish-businessmen-hopeful-over-erdogan-putin-meeting/623469>); DEİK, Press Release, "TÜRKİYE İLE RUSYA 100 MİLYAR DOLARLIK TİCARET HACMİNE KENETLENDİ [Turkey and Russia have locked in to 100 Billion Dollar Trade Volume]," accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://www.deik.org.tr/basin-aciklamalari-turkiye-ile-rusya-100-milyar-dolarlik-ticaret-hacmine-kenetlendi>)

283. Emre Ersen, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A New Alternative for Turkish Foreign Policy?" *Middle East Institute*, October 18, 2013. (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/shanghai-cooperation-organization-new-alternative-turkish-foreign-policy>)

284. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation," accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-the-russian-federation.en.mfa>)

285. "Russia top market again for Turkey's overseas contracting services," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), February 6, 2019. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2019/02/06/russia-top-market-again-for-turkeys-overseas-contracting-services>); "Turkish contracting sectors' new projects abroad expected to top \$15B," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), January 19, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkish-contracting-sectors-new-projects-abroad-expected-to-top-15b>)

286. Dorian James, "Turkey's Construction Sector in Crisis," *Voice of America*, November 28, 2018. (<https://www.voanews.com/europe/turkeys-construction-sector-crisis>)

287. Yandex, Press Release, "Yandex Launches in Turkey," 2011. (https://yandex.com/company/press_center/press_releases/2011/2011-09-20)

288. "Russia's Sberbank closes deal to sell Turkey's Denizbank to Emirates NBD," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), July 31, 2019. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/finance/2019/07/31/russias-sberbank-closes-deal-to-sell-turkeys-denizbank-to-emirates-nbd>); "Deepening Russia-Turkey Relations Report," *Russian International Affairs Council*, 2019, page 20. (<https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/Russia-Turkey-Report41-Eng.pdf>)

289. "Deepening Russia-Turkey Relations Report," *Russian International Affairs Council*, 2019, page 20. (<https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/Russia-Turkey-Report41-Eng.pdf>)

launched a hydroelectric power plant built by Russia's PJSC Power Machines.²⁹⁰

Following the Su-24 incident, Moscow suspended work initiated earlier that year on Russian-Turkish joint investment and imposed restrictions on Turkish firms and workers in Russia, causing many Turkish companies to leave the Russian construction sector. Investment talks did not resume until August 2016, at which point the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Turkey's Ronisans Holding announced an agreement for up to \$400 million in joint investment projects.²⁹¹ Ronisans and an Italian partner later announced a €1.3 billion contract to build Russia's largest gas processing plant.²⁹² In 2019, RDIF and the Turkish Wealth Fund launched an up to €900 million joint investment fund.²⁹³

Russia and Turkey have each invested around \$10 billion in the other's economy, according to the Turkish Foreign Ministry. However, Russian investment is more important for Turkey than vice versa.²⁹⁴ Between 2007 and 2016, Russian investments accounted for almost 3 percent of total FDI inflow into Turkey, while Turkish investments accounted for only 0.3 percent of total FDI into Russia.²⁹⁵ As of January 2021, Turkish FDI

stocks in Russia amounted to \$2 billion, compared to \$6.4 billion in Russian FDI stocks in Turkey, according to official Russian data.²⁹⁶ Moreover, the \$20 billion Akkuyu nuclear power plant (discussed below), for which Russia is providing over half the financing, will dramatically increase the value of Russian FDI in Turkey, exacerbating the asymmetry in the Russian-Turkish economic relationship.²⁹⁷

Energy Cooperation

Energy represents the cornerstone of the Russian-Turkish economic relationship, providing the basis for their rapprochement since the waning years of the Cold War. Turkey's growing demand for and reliance on imports made the country a natural — and valuable — partner for Russia, a leading energy exporter.²⁹⁸

Natural Gas

The Blue Stream pipeline, inaugurated in 2003, established a direct supply route for 16 billion cubic meters (bcm) of Russian gas to Turkey per year.²⁹⁹ The pipeline's inauguration marked a key step forward in Russian-Turkish relations and helped Russia reduce transit through Ukraine and the Balkans

290. PJSC Power Machines, Press Release, "Kygy HPP Fitted Out With Power Machines Equipment Launched in Turkey," January 24, 2018. (<https://power-m.ru/en/press-center/news/kygy-hpp-fitted-out-with-power-machines-equipment-launched-in-turkey>)

291. Russian Direct Investment Fund, "Russian sovereign wealth fund looks to invest in Turkey," August 9, 2016. (https://rdif.ru/Eng_fullNews/1775); "Russian fund, Turkey's Ronisans agree \$400 mln joint investments," *Reuters*, August 9, 2016. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-turkey-investments-renaissance/russian-fund-turkeys-ronisans-agree-400-mln-joint-investments-idUSR4N1AF04A>)

292. Ronisans Holding, Press Release, "The Ronisans Signature on the Largest Natural Gas Processing Plant in Russia," May 2018. (<https://ronisans.com/en/rusyanin-en-buyuk-dogalgaz-isleme-tesisine-ronisans-imzasi-2>)

293. Russian Direct Investment Fund, Press Release, "Turkey, Russia create 900 million euro investment fund," April 9, 2019. (https://rdif.ru/Eng_fullNews/4024)

294. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation," accessed November 17, 2021. (<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-the-russian-federation.en.mfa>)

295. Seckin Kostem, "The Political Economy of Turkish-Russian Relations: Dynamics of Asymmetric Interdependence," *Perceptions*, Volume XXIII, Number 2, Summer 2018, pages 10–32. (<http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/sf10-32.pdf>)

296. Russian Federation Embassy in Turkey, "Торгово-экономические отношения [Trade and economic relations]," accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://turkey.mid.ru/ru/countries/bilateral-relations/trade-economic-cooperation>)

297. "Deepening Russia-Turkey Relations Report," *Russian International Affairs Council*, 2019. (<https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/Russia-Turkey-Report41-Eng.pdf>)

298. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation," accessed November 17, 2021. (<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa>)

299. "Blue Stream: Russian natural gas supplies to Turkey," *Gazprom*, accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://www.gazprom.com/projects/blue-stream>)

while preempting the proposed Trans-Caspian Pipeline, which would have supplied Turkey and the European Union from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.³⁰⁰

After Germany and Italy, Turkey was the third-largest purchaser of Russian natural gas in 2019,³⁰¹ accounting for almost 8 percent of Russia's total pipeline gas exports to countries outside the former Soviet Union.³⁰² Turkey, which currently produces almost no natural gas, remains reliant on imports from Russia, although this dependence has decreased significantly in recent years, thanks largely to increased Turkish purchases of Azerbaijani gas and imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG).³⁰³ Turkish gas imports from Russia fell by 47 percent from 2017 to 2019. Russia accounted for 33 percent of Turkey's gas supply in 2019, down from 52 percent in 2017 and 58 percent a decade ago.³⁰⁴ Russian gas exports to Turkey increased slightly in 2020 but soared by almost 140 percent in January–September 2021, according to Gazprom, as drought has led Turkey to boost gas imports to replace lower hydropower production.³⁰⁵

In January 2020, Putin, Erdogan, and their Bulgarian and Serbian counterparts inaugurated the TurkStream pipeline, intended to help Russia bypass transit through Ukraine and defend its market share in Turkey and Europe.³⁰⁶ The new pipeline is designed to supply 15.75 bcm directly to Turkey and another 15.75 bcm to Europe. TurkStream is the successor to South Stream, which would have brought Russian gas directly to the Balkans before EU regulations led Russia to abandon the project in 2014 amid heightened tensions over Ukraine.³⁰⁷ During a December 2014 visit to Turkey, Putin announced that Russia would instead build TurkStream.³⁰⁸ By routing gas through Turkey, whose customs union with the European Union does not include gas, TurkStream helps Russia circumvent EU rules designed to improve gas market competition and reduce dependence on Russia.

The November 2015 Su-24 incident led Moscow to suspend talks on TurkStream,³⁰⁹ which were already

300. Pyotr Stegny, “Two in the ‘Heartland,’” *Russia in Global Affairs*, March 19, 2015. (<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/two-in-the-heartland>); Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), pages 154–155.

301. Dina Khrennikova, “Italy Overtakes Turkey Among Top Russian Gas Buyers in 2019,” *Bloomberg*, February 16, 2020. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-16/italy-overtakes-turkey-among-top-russian-gas-buyers-in-2019>)

302. “Gazprom says gas exports outside ex-Soviet Union fell 1.3% in 2019,” *Reuters*, January 2, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-gas-ports/gazprom-says-gas-exports-outside-ex-soviet-union-fell-1-3-in-2019-idUSKBN1Z111A>); “Turkey cuts gas imports from Russia in 2019 by 35%,” *Reuters*, February 14, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/gazprom-turkey-idAFL8N2AE317>)

303. Ekaterina Kravtsova, “Russian exports to Turkey, southeast Europe squeezed by LNG, Azeri gas,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2019. (<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-lng-europe-russia-analysis/russian-exports-to-turkey-southeast-europe-squeezed-by-lng-azeri-gas-idUKKCN1VR0KI>); “Qatar, US LNG imports make up for Turkey's loss from Iran in 2020,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), February 26, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/qatar-us-lng-imports-make-up-for-turkeys-loss-from-iran-in-2020>)

304. Data sourced from Turkey's Energy Market Regulatory Authority, accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://www.epdk.gov.tr/Detay/Icerik/3-0-94/dogal-gazyillik-sektor-raporu>)

305. “FACTBOX-Russian gas pipeline exports to Europe,” *Reuters*, October 4, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-gas-europe/factbox-russian-gas-pipeline-exports-to-europe-idUSL8N2R01SV>)

306. John Hardie, “Russia Strengthens Hand in Europe, Ukraine with Inauguration of TurkStream Pipeline,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, January 17, 2020. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/01/17/russia-strengthens-hand-in-europe-ukraine-with-inauguration-of-turkstream-pipeline>)

307. “Россия решила остановить строительство ‘Южного потока’ [Russia decided to stop the construction of ‘South Stream’],” *Interfax* (Russia), December 1, 2014. (<https://www.interfax.ru/business/410431>)

308. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Joint News conference with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan,” December 1, 2014. (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47126>)

309. “Russia halts Turkey gas project talks amid Syria row,” *BBC* (UK), December 3, 2015. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34995472>)

stalling as Erdogan threatened to buy gas elsewhere following Russia's intervention in Syria.³¹⁰ In early December 2015, Russian state energy behemoth Gazprom, a key Kremlin foreign-policy tool, abruptly demanded a higher price from Turkey's private gas companies and later reduced export volumes.³¹¹ The two sides reached a settlement the following year. Though well short of a full-blown gas war, Gazprom likely intended the move as a shot across Turkey's economic bow.³¹²

Russia and Turkey revived TurkStream in October 2016 after normalizing bilateral relations. Russia agreed to provide Turkey with a price discount, while Turkey consented to TurkStream's second line.³¹³ Gazprom accelerated work on the project,³¹⁴ eventually completing construction in record time.³¹⁵

Nevertheless, the Su-24 incident marked a turning point for Turkey, which has since sought to diversify

its gas supply while positioning itself as a regional gas hub for supplies from the Caspian Basin, Central Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean.³¹⁶ Ongoing investments in import and storage infrastructure have enabled LNG deliveries to Turkey to more than double since 2013, accounting for more than 33 percent of Turkey's natural gas imports in 2020.³¹⁷ Following the TurkStream suspension, Turkey accelerated work on the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP),³¹⁸ the longest leg of the Western-backed \$40 billion Southern Gas Corridor, which began supplying Azerbaijani gas to Turkey in June 2018.³¹⁹ TANAP can currently supply 6 bcm to Turkey and another 10 bcm to Europe, but the pipeline's capacity could be expanded to 31 bcm with additional investment.³²⁰ Turkey also hopes to develop newly discovered Black Sea reserves.³²¹

Turkish gas importers had sought to use their increased market leverage to secure concessions from Gazprom as long-term gas contracts covering 8 bcm are set to

310. Andre Tartar and Caroline Alexander, "Turkey May Find Life Without Russian Gas Easier Said Than Done," *Bloomberg*, October 12, 2015. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-12/turkey-may-find-life-without-russian-gas-easier-said-than-done>)

311. Orhan Coskun, "UPDATE 2-Gazprom cancels gas discount for Turkey -industry sources," *Reuters*, January 29, 2016. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/gazprom-turkey-idUSL8N15D1CP>); Ben Aris, "Russia launches gas war against Turkey," *BNE Intellinews* (Germany), March 7, 2016. (<https://www.intellinews.com/russia-launches-gas-war-against-turkey-92283>)

312. Ben Aris, "Russia launches gas war against Turkey," *BNE Intellinews* (Germany), March 7, 2016. (<https://www.intellinews.com/russia-launches-gas-war-against-turkey-92283>)

313. Mikhail Krutikhin, "Turkish Stream: The Cost of Russia's Stubbornness," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 20, 2016. (<https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/64904>)

314. "Russian, Turkish officials discuss restoring economic, trade ties," *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), July 26, 2016. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russian-turkish-officials-discuss-restoring-economic-trade-ties-102119>)

315. Baris Saglam, "TurkStream's Kiyikoy terminal at 90% completion level," *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey), July 24, 2019. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/general/turkstreams-kiyikoy-terminal-at-90-completion-level/26154>)

316. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkey's Energy Profile and Strategy," accessed November 17, 2021. (<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa>); Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, "Natural Gas," accessed November 17, 2021. (Archived version available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200424065247/https://www.enerji.gov.tr/en-US/Pages/Natural-Gas>)

317. Data sourced from Turkey's Energy Market Regulatory Authority, accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://www.epdk.gov.tr/Detay/Icerik/3-0-94/dogal-gazyillik-sektor-raporu>)

318. "Russia halts Turkey gas project talks amid Syria row," *BBC* (UK), December 3, 2015. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34995472>)

319. "Turkey opens natural gas pipeline from Azerbaijan," *Reuters*, June 12, 2018. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/energy-turkey-tanap-idAFL8N1TE5BE>)

320. "Turkey and Azerbaijan mark completion of TANAP pipeline to take gas to Europe," *Reuters*, November 30, 2019. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-energy-tanap/turkey-and-azerbaijan-mark-completion-of-tanap-pipeline-to-take-gas-to-europe-idUSKBN1Y40CP>)

321. Firat Kozok and Selcan Hacaoglu, "Turkish Gas Find to Help Raise Output to 25% of EU Capacity," *Bloomberg*, September 27, 2021. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-27/turkish-gas-find-to-help-raise-output-to-25-of-eu-capacity?sref=3OIZCXOE>)

expire by the end of 2021.³²² However, higher domestic demand (up 29 percent from Turkey's post-2010 average) and record global gas prices have strengthened Gazprom's hand.³²³ In addition, a handful of private Turkish companies owe Gazprom around \$2 billion in unpaid debts for failing to take contracted volumes, providing Gazprom with further leverage over those firms.³²⁴ On November 4, Turkey's energy minister said the sides had largely reached a deal to renew Turkey's expiring contracts but with an increased amount from the beginning of 2022.³²⁵

Nuclear

Ankara has looked to the nuclear industry to meet Turkey's growing energy needs and reduce dependence on imports. Turkey granted the contract for the Akkuyu nuclear power plant (NPP), its first, to Russian state-owned Rosatom. In 2010, Rosatom signed an agreement to build, own, and operate (BOO) the \$20 billion Akkuyu NPP, with four Russian-designed reactors.³²⁶

Rosatom halted construction following the Su-24 incident, by which point the company had already invested \$3.5 billion. Rosatom did not terminate the contract, however, reportedly out of concern over the deal's heavy compensation clauses.³²⁷ Following Erdogan's apology, Rosatom returned to the project, which the Turkish leader agreed to grant billions of dollars' worth of tax breaks and other benefits.³²⁸ Construction of the first reactor formally resumed in December 2017.³²⁹ The last reactor is projected to come online in 2026.³³⁰ Once completed, the plant is expected to fulfill roughly 10 percent of Turkey's energy needs.³³¹ During September 2021 talks with Putin in Sochi, Erdogan proposed working with Russia to build two additional NPPs.³³²

In addition to deepening Turkey's reliance on Russian technology and energy, the project's terms allowed Rosatom to assist the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority, which has never supervised a project of this size, in writing Turkey's updated regulatory framework. This

322. Dominic Evans, "Turkey seeking better terms to renew gas supply contracts, energy official says," *Reuters*, September 15, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/turkey-gas-int/turkey-seeking-better-terms-to-renew-gas-supply-contracts-energy-official-says-idUSKBN2611K9>)

323. Azem Bartu Yildirim, "A Cold Winter: Turkey and the Global Natural Gas Shortage," *Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies*, October 6, 2021. (<https://edam.org.tr/en/a-cold-winter>)

324. David Gauthier-Villars, "As Turkey Shunned Russian Gas, Its Companies Amassed Debt," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 2020. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-turkey-shunned-russian-gas-its-companies-amassed-debt-11592216429>)

325. "Gas deal with Russia may be renewed with higher amount: Turkey," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), November 4, 2021. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/gas-deal-with-russia-may-be-renewed-with-higher-amount-turkey>)

326. Turkish Atomic Energy Authority, "Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant," accessed November 17, 2021. (Archived version available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190907200152/http://www.taek.gov.tr:80/en/institutional/akkuyu-nuclear-power-plant.html>)

327. Orhan Coskun, "UPDATE 1-Russia halts Turkey nuclear work, Ankara looks elsewhere," *Reuters*, December 9, 2015. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-turkey-russia-nuclear-idUSL8N13Y31G20151209>)

328. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, "News conference following talks with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan," August 9, 2016. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52673>); Zulfikar Dogan, "Putin gets big kiss-and-make-up gift from Erdogan," *Al-Monitor*, August 16, 2016. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/08/turkey-russia-nuclear-plant-special-status.html>)

329. "Governmental approval for Turkish construction plan," *World Nuclear News*, July 15, 2010. (Archived version available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160304053912/http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/newsarticle.aspx?id=28060>); "Akkuyu construction formally starts," *World Nuclear News*, December 12, 2017. (<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NN-Akkuyu-construction-formally-starts-12121701.html>)

330. "Nuclear Power in Turkey," *World Nuclear Association*, November 2020. (<https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-t-z/turkey.aspx>)

331. "Turkey may benefit from nuclear power in its bid for clean energy," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), July 6, 2019. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2019/07/06/turkey-may-benefit-from-nuclear-power-in-its-bid-for-clean-energy>)

332. Ferdi Turkten, "Turkey is committed to decisions agreed with Russia on Syria: President," *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey), September 9, 2021. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/turkey-is-committed-to-decisions-agreed-with-russia-on-syria-president/2379268>)

risks “regulatory capture,” whereby a regulator serves the interests of the regulated entity rather than those of the public. This dynamic can undermine safety, as shown in the Fukushima nuclear accident. Meanwhile, Akkuyu’s BOO model, which has never been used for reactor financing and construction, incentivizes Rosatom to cut corners.³³³

Turkey’s Pursuit of Alternative International Institutions

In recent years, Ankara has sought greater involvement in several non-Western international institutions in which Russia is a leading member. This trend reflects Ankara’s frustration with the EU accession process and general antipathy toward the West. It also reflects the rise of Turkey’s Eurasianist camp and Ankara’s desire for greater engagement with what it sees as increasingly important alternative power centers that can help Turkey balance reliance on the West.³³⁴

Moscow has encouraged talk of Turkey’s “Eurasian vocation”³³⁵ and has engaged Turkey through various Eurasian institutions, including the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization; the Eurasian Economic Union; the Istanbul-based Dialogue Eurasia Platform;³³⁶ and multiple annual inter-parliamentary conferences focused on regional connectivity and counterterrorism,³³⁷ one of which Turkey hosted in 2018.³³⁸

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a Eurasian organization designed to facilitate cooperation, primarily in the security sphere, between its member states: Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, which unanimously accepted Iran’s bid to join in September 2021.³³⁹ Moscow has supported greater Turkish-SCO cooperation but remains skeptical about full Turkish accession, viewing it as incompatible with Turkey’s NATO membership.³⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Ankara continues to seek stronger ties with the organization.

Turkey first applied for SCO membership in 2007, following the European Union’s suspension of Turkey’s accession negotiations.³⁴¹ Turkey became an SCO “dialogue partner” in 2013 and is pursuing the

333. Aaron Stein, “Turkey’s Nuclear Program,” *Atlantic Council*, December 2016. (https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Turkey_Nuclear_Program_web_1221.pdf)

334. Cavid Veliyev, “Prospects for Turkey Joining the Russia-Led Customs Union,” *The Jamestown Foundation*, November 8, 2013. (<https://jamestown.org/program/prospects-for-turkey-joining-the-russia-led-customs-union>)

335. Angela Stent, *Putin’s World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest* (NYC: Hachette Book Group, 2019), page 278.

336. “Turkish Speaker opens Dialogue Eurasia Platform office in Moscow,” *World Bulletin*, November 24, 2009. (<https://www.worldbulletin.net/archive/turkish-speaker-opens-dialogue-eurasia-platform-office-in-moscow-h50392.html>); “Eighth Meeting of Dialogue Eurasia Platform GA Kicks Off In Antalya,” *Azertec* (Azerbaijan), November 15, 2008. (https://azertag.az/en/xeber/EIGHTH_MEETING_OF_DIALOGUE_EURASIA_PLATFORM_GA_KICKS_OFF_IN_ANTALYA-578996)

337. Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, “Viacheslav Volodin: it is advantageous for the US to create tension points in Eurasia,” October 12, 2019. (<http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/46593>); Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, “Viacheslav Volodin met with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,” October 11, 2019. (<http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/46587>)

338. Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, “Speech of the Chairman of the State Duma at the plenary session of the Third Meeting of Speakers of Eurasian Countries’ Parliaments,” October 9, 2018. (<http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/28366>)

339. Shanghai Cooperation Organization, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” accessed November 17, 2021. (http://eng.sectsc.org/about_sco); Bradley Bowman, Ryan Brobst, and Zane Zovak, “Iran Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, September 22, 2021. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/09/22/iran-joining-shanghai-cooperation-organisation>)

340. Fyodor Lukyanov, “Turkey as NATO member can’t join SCO,” *Russian International Affairs Council*, March 16, 2015. (<https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/comments/turkey-as-nato-member-can-t-join-sco>); Yekaterina Chulkovskaya, “Will Turkey leave NATO?” *Al-Monitor*, January 9, 2017. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/russia-turkey-erdogan-putin-membership-shanghai-sco-eu.html>)

341. “Erdogan Serious About Turkey’s Bid For Shanghai 5 Membership,” *Al-Monitor*, January 31, 2013. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/01/shanghai-cooperation-organization-erdogan-turkey.html>)

next level of association, observer status.³⁴² In 2013, Erdogan even said he told Putin, “[T]ake us into [the SCO] and we will forget the EU.”³⁴³ Erdogan has since reiterated those sentiments,³⁴⁴ and in 2017 Turkey became the first non-SCO member to chair the SCO Energy Club, the organization’s forum for promoting energy cooperation among members and observers.³⁴⁵ In 2018, SCO election monitors certified the results of Turkey’s June 2018 parliamentary elections, providing Erdogan with international support amid a critical election monitoring report from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe³⁴⁶ and other Western criticism of Turkey’s democratic backslide.³⁴⁷

Eurasian Economic Union

Ankara has also expressed interest in boosting ties with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Putin’s signature regional integration project. In 2013, Kazakhstan’s president said Erdogan had expressed

interest in joining the EAEU Customs Union and proposed allowing Turkey to join.³⁴⁸ Erdogan later clarified that Ankara “support[s] the idea of concluding a free trade agreement with the Eurasian countries” rather than seeking full membership.³⁴⁹

“Ankara has also expressed interest in boosting ties with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Putin’s signature regional integration project.”

In December 2014, Putin said the parties were pursuing a Turkey-EAEU free-trade agreement (FTA),³⁵⁰ although talks halted following the November 2015 Su-24 incident. But following Erdogan’s apology and August 2016 visit to Russia, Turkey’s economy minister said FTA negotiations had resumed and would initially cover services and investments but could later include industrial and agricultural goods.³⁵¹

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342. “Turkey signs on to a joint destiny with Shanghai,” *Daily Sabah (Turkey)*, April 27, 2013. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2013/04/27/turkey-signs-on-to-a-joint-destiny-with-shanghai>); “Turkey seeks observer member status in SCO,” *Hurriyet Daily News (Turkey)*, February 1, 2013. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-seeks-observer-member-status-in-sco-40267>)
343. “Erdogan Serious About Turkey’s Bid For Shanghai 5 Membership,” *Al-Monitor*, January 31, 2013. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/01/shanghai-cooperation-organization-erdogan-turkey.html>)
344. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “News conference following a meeting of the High-Level Russian-Turkish Cooperation Council,” November 22, 2013. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19677>); “Fed up with EU, Erdogan says Turkey could join Shanghai bloc,” *Reuters*, November 20, 2016. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/U.S.-turkey-europe-erdogan-idUSKBN13F0CY>);
345. “Turkey to chair 2017 Energy Club of Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Daily Sabah (Turkey)*, November 23, 2016. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2016/11/23/turkey-to-chair-2017-energy-club-of-shanghai-cooperation-organization>)
346. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “Republic of Turkey Early Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 24 June 2018,” September 21, 2018. (https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/4/397046_0.pdf)
347. Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Press Statement, “STATEMENT by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation’s Observer Mission on monitoring the preparations for and holding of the special presidential and parliamentary elections in the Republic of Turkey on 24 June 2018,” June 25, 2018. (<http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20180625/454510.html>); Dorian Jones, “OSCE, EU Criticize Campaign Conditions in Turkey as Unequal,” *Voice of America*, June 25, 2018. (<https://www.voanews.com/europe/osce-eu-criticize-campaign-conditions-turkey-unequal>)
348. “Назарбаев предлагает принять Турцию в члены Таможенного союза [Nazarbayev proposes to admit Turkey to the Customs Union],” *RIA Novosti (Russia)*, October 24, 2013. (<https://ria.ru/20131024/972393944.html>)
349. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “News conference following a meeting of the High-Level Russian-Turkish Cooperation Council,” November 22, 2013. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19677>)
350. Russian Federation Presidential Executive Office, “Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council,” December 23, 2014. (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47311>); “Türkiye’nin Avrasya Ekonomik Birliği ile işbirliği için yol haritası hazırlanıyor [Turkey is preparing roadmap for cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union],” *Sputnik (Russia)*, December 25, 2014. (<https://tr.sputniknews.com/analiz/201412251013265606/#ixzz3tfG1c9y7>)
351. Ali Unal, “Following July 15, Turkey will transform into one of the most developed democracies in the world,” *Daily Sabah (Turkey)*, August 22, 2016. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2016/08/22/following-july-15-turkey-will-transform-into-one-of-the-most-developed-democracies-in-the-world>)

Still, such an agreement remains unlikely — not least because Armenia, which, in addition to being an EAEU member and a formal Russian ally, is a bitter enemy of Turkey and categorically rejects Turkish involvement in the organization.³⁵² Moscow has indicated sensitivity to Armenia’s concerns³⁵³ and may be wary of facilitating pan-Turkic ambitions in Central Asia.³⁵⁴

BRICS

Turkey has expressed interest in joining BRICS, an international grouping of emerging economies — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — designed to promote economic development and challenge the West’s dominant role in global economic governance.³⁵⁵ In April 2017, then-Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek said Turkey was “seriously considering” joining the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB).³⁵⁶

In 2018, Erdogan attended the 10th annual BRICS summit in his capacity as term chairman of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, marking Turkey’s first high-level official contact with BRICS. At

the summit, Erdogan called on the BRICS countries to admit Turkey,³⁵⁷ pointing to the potential for joint economic projects and cooperation in the BRICS NDB and Business Council. He also expressed hope that negotiations for Turkish NDB membership would be completed soon,³⁵⁸ calling on the BRICS countries and Turkey to establish a more “impartial” international credit rating agency.³⁵⁹ For years, Erdogan has lashed out at the major Western-based agencies for downgrading Turkey’s rating amid the country’s democratic backslide and economic difficulties.³⁶⁰

“Russia and its BRICS partners are generally receptive to Turkey’s desire for cooperation, and while Russia at present is not ready to expand BRICS, Moscow likely sees Turkish membership as an eventual possibility.”

Russia and its BRICS partners are generally receptive to Turkey’s desire for cooperation, and while Russia at present is not ready to expand BRICS, Moscow likely sees Turkish membership as an eventual possibility.³⁶¹

352. The EAEU’s founding Astana Treaty requires that decisions in the Supreme Eurasian Council, the bloc’s governing body, be made by consensus, thus giving Armenia veto authority over any Turkey-EAEU deal.

353. Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova,” August 24, 2017. (https://www.mid.ru/en/kommentarii_predstaviteley/-/asset_publisher/7gVir6Z7EIX8/content/id/2844695?novelty-display-dynamic=novelty#22)

354. Farkhad Sharip, “Revival of Pan-Turkism in Kazakhstan Threatens Pillars of Eurasian Union,” *The Jamestown Foundation*, July 12, 2018. (<https://jamestown.org/program/revival-of-pan-turkism-in-kazakhstan-threatens-pillars-of-eurasian-union>)

355. Rachel S. Salzman, *Russia, BRICS, and the Disruption of Global Order* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019); “Towards a Long-Term Strategy for BRICS,” *BRICS Think Tank Council*, 2015. (http://www.nkibrics.ru/ckeditor_assets/attachments/55cca92662726921aa020000/na_puti_k_dolgosrochnoy_strategii_stran_briks_angl.pdf?1439476006)

356. “Turkey may become member of BRICS bank,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), April 27, 2017. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/finance/2017/04/27/turkey-may-become-member-of-brics-bank>)

357. Vahap Munyar, “Erdogan suggests adding ‘T’ to BRICS,” *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), July 29, 2018. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-suggests-adding-t-to-brics-135160>)

358. “Erdogan: Turkey seeks to enhance collaboration with BRICS countries,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), July 28, 2018. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/07/28/erdogan-turkey-seeks-to-enhance-collaboration-with-brics-countries>)

359. “BRICS-Turkey meeting an opportunity: Erdogan,” *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), July 27, 2018. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/brics-turkey-meeting-an-opportunity-erdogan-135116>)

360. See, for example: “Erdogan blasts credit rating agencies: ‘What is the referendum to you?’” *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), February 7, 2017. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-blasts-credit-rating-agencies-what-is-the-referendum-to-you-109452>); “Ignore rating agencies’ monkey business, Erdogan says,” *Ahval* (Turkey), March 9, 2018. (<https://ahvalnews.com/economy/ignore-rating-agencies-monkey-business-erdogan-says>)

361. Georgy Toloraya, “Why Does Russia Need BRICS?” *Russia In Global Affairs*, March 19, 2015. (<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/why-does-russia-need-brics>); “BRICS talks Turkey: Erdogan’s wish to join group cannot be fulfilled now, expert says,” *TASS* (Russia), July 30, 2018. (<https://tass.com/world/1015343>)

Countering U.S. Sanctions

Putin and Erdogan both loathe U.S. sanctions. The Russian leader has decried American “impudence” in targeting Russia,³⁶² while his Turkish counterpart has accused Washington of behaving like “wild wolves.”³⁶³ This antipathy is not surprising: U.S. sanctions have exacerbated Russia’s and Turkey’s economic woes in recent years, undermining the strongmen’s domestic political positions.

As a result, Russia and Turkey have worked to insulate themselves from this threat, including by pursuing de-dollarization to reduce the reach of U.S. sanctions. This assumed particular importance for Moscow following the imposition of U.S. sanctions over Russia’s 2014 aggression in Ukraine.³⁶⁴ Turkey has likewise sought insulation from U.S. sanctions amid clashes with Washington over issues such as Turkey’s S-400 purchase, facilitation of Iranian and Venezuelan sanctions evasion,³⁶⁵ and 2016 imprisonment of American pastor Andrew Brunson.³⁶⁶

Toward that end, Russia and Turkey signed an agreement in October 2019 aimed at conducting mutual payments in the ruble or lira instead of the dollar; connecting Turkish banks and companies to SPFS, Russia’s alternative to the SWIFT financial messaging system; and expanding access for MIR cards, Russia’s alternative to VISA and MasterCard.³⁶⁷ That agreement followed urgent talks the previous July as Turkey scrambled to protect itself amid the intensifying U.S.-Turkey dispute over Ankara’s S-400 purchase.³⁶⁸ The threat of additional U.S. sanctions over Turkey’s possible receipt of a second S-400 batch may fuel further Russian-Turkish cooperation on de-dollarization.

In addition, Ankara and Moscow both actively facilitate evasion of U.S. sanctions. Turkey has long been a permissive jurisdiction for sanctions evasion and other forms of illicit finance, often with the involvement of senior Turkish officials. Likewise, the Putin regime is a major purveyor of illicit finance,

362. Thomas Grove, “Putin Condemns U.S. ‘Impudence’ as Congress Pushes New Sanctions,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2017. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-condemns-u-s-impudence-as-congress-pushes-new-sanctions-1501183550>)

363. “Turkey’s Erdogan denounces dollar; US acting like ‘wild wolves,’” *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), September 2, 2018. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2018/9/2/turkeys-erdogan-denounces-dollar-us-acting-like-wild-wolves>)

364. Xu Wenhong, “The SWIFT System: A Focus on the U.S.–Russia Financial Confrontation,” *Russian International Affairs Council* (Russia), February 3, 2020. (<https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-swift-system-a-focus-on-the-u-s-russia-financial-confrontation>); Andrey Biryukov, “Putin’s Pledge to Ditch the Dollar Is Slowly Becoming a Reality,” *Bloomberg*, August 3, 2019. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-04/putin-s-pledge-to-ditch-the-dollar-is-slowly-becoming-a-reality>)

365. Aykan Erdemir and Philip Kowalski, “U.S. Court Exposes Turkey’s Role in Iran’s and Venezuela’s Sanctions Evasion Schemes – Again,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 19, 2020. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/03/19/u-s-court-exposes-turkeys-role-in-irans-and-venezuelas-sanctions-evasion-schemes-again>)

366. See, for example: “Turkey’s Erdogan denounces dollar; US acting like ‘wild wolves,’” *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), September 2, 2018. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/turkey-erdogan-denounces-dollar-acting-wild-wolves-180902112548821.html>); “Erdogan urges use of Turkish lira instead of dollar,” *Hurriyet Daily News* (Turkey), November 26, 2019. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-urges-use-of-turkish-lira-instead-of-dollar-149142>)

367. Russian Federation Ministry of Finance, “Первый вице-премьер - Министр финансов Антон Силуанов подписал соглашение о расчетах и платежах в национальной валюте с Правительством Турецкой Республики [First Deputy Prime Minister - Minister of Finance Anton Siluanov signed an agreement on settlements and payments in national currency with the Government of the Republic of Turkey],” October 8, 2019. (https://www.minfin.ru/ru/press-center/?id_4=36795-pervyi_vitse-premer_-_ministr_finansov_anton_siluanov_podpisal_soglashenie_o_raschetakh_i_platezhakh_v_natsionalnoi_valyute_s_pravitelstvom_turetskoi_respubliki); “Russia, Turkey agree on using rouble, lira in mutual settlements,” *Reuters*, October 8, 2019. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-turkey-forex/russia-turkey-agree-on-using-rouble-lira-in-mutual-settlements-idUSR4N26O04T>)

368. Andrey Biryukov and Anna Baraulina, “Trash Discovery Shows Turkey Eyes Putin’s Anti-Sanctions Network,” *Bloomberg*, August 21, 2019. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-21/trash-discovery-shows-turkey-eyes-putin-s-anti-sanctions-network>)

from ill-gotten gains laundered overseas³⁶⁹ to funds moved covertly to evade sanctions, support rogue regimes,³⁷⁰ pilfer Western technology,³⁷¹ or facilitate Russian influence and “active measures” abroad.³⁷²

In recent years, Russia and Turkey have worked in parallel to help the regime of Venezuelan strongman Nicolás Maduro evade U.S. sanctions. Russian state oil company Rosneft, a longtime player in the Latin American country, facilitated sanctions-busting Venezuelan oil exports to Asia, helping the regime stay afloat. After Treasury sanctioned two Rosneft subsidiaries involved in the scheme, Moscow shifted gears, buying Rosneft’s Venezuela operations in March 2020 to protect the company from sanctions. Reuters later revealed that almost two dozen phantom companies, mostly based in Russia, were chartering vessels to covertly ship Venezuelan oil to Asia. Amid increased U.S. sanctions pressure, those companies were virtually the only customers left on the export

schedule of Venezuela’s state-owned oil company.³⁷³ The websites for 15 of the companies were reportedly registered by a Moscow-based company founded in March 2020 by a Russian man who shares business interests with Betsy Desirée Mata Pereda, a Venezuelan woman implicated in a notorious Turkish-Venezuelan sanctions-evasion scheme that supported the Maduro regime.³⁷⁴

Russian Information Operations in Turkey: Complicity and Conflict

Turkey ranks among the countries most exposed to disinformation and most vulnerable to it.³⁷⁵ This is partly because the Erdogan government is the world’s leading jailer of journalists; independent and credible media outlets are increasingly scarce. Russia’s Turkish-language propaganda outlets, such as *Sputnik Turkiye* and RFSM Radio, are among the few remaining media organizations outside of Erdogan’s control. This

369. John O’Donnell, “Europol highlights Russian money as biggest laundering threat,” *Reuters*, June 13, 2019. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-moneylaundering-europol/europol-highlights-russian-money-as-biggest-laundering-threat-idUSKCN1TE2K6>); Roman Anin, Olesya Shmagun, and Dmitry Velikovskiy, “The Secret Caretaker,” *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, April 3, 2016. (<https://www.occrp.org/en/panamapapers/the-secret-caretaker>)

370. See, for example: U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Designates Illicit Russia-Iran Oil Network Supporting the Assad Regime, Hizballah, and HAMAS,” November 20, 2018. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm553>)

371. Andrea Stricker and John Hardie, “Biden Must Stop Russia’s Illicit Procurement of Sensitive American Technologies,” *The National Interest*, August 30, 2021. (<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/biden-must-stop-russia%E2%80%99s-illicit-procurement-sensitive-american-technologies-192555>)

372. Josh Rudolph and Thomas Morley, “Covert Foreign Money: Financial loopholes exploited by authoritarians to fund political interference in democracies,” *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, August 2020. (<https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ASD-Covert-Foreign-Money.pdf>)

373. Marianna Parraga, Rinat Sagdiev, and Parisa Hafezi, “Special Report: Phantom oil buyers in Russia, advice from Iran help Venezuela skirt sanctions,” *Reuters*, November 10, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-oil-exports-special-report/special-report-phantom-oil-buyers-in-russia-advice-from-iran-help-venezuela-skirt-sanctions-idUSKBN27Q295>); Luc Cohen and Marianna Parraga, “Exclusive: Venezuela resumes direct oil shipments to China despite U.S. sanctions,” *Reuters*, November 26, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-oil-china-exclusive/exclusive-venezuela-resumes-direct-oil-shipments-to-china-despite-u-s-sanctions-idUSKBN287031>)

374. Marianna Parraga, Rinat Sagdiev, and Parisa Hafezi, “Special Report: Phantom oil buyers in Russia, advice from Iran help Venezuela skirt sanctions,” *Reuters*, November 10, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-oil-exports-special-report/special-report-phantom-oil-buyers-in-russia-advice-from-iran-help-venezuela-skirt-sanctions-idUSKBN27Q295>); Aykan Erdemir, “Businessman’s Extradition to U.S. Could Expose Turkish-Venezuelan Collusion to Evade Sanctions,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, September 10, 2021. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/09/10/turkish-venezuelan-collusion-evade-sanctions>)

375. Servet Yanatma, “Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018,” *Reuters*, 2018. (<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/Digital%20News%20Report%20-%20Turkey%20Supplement%202018%20FINAL.pdf>); H. Akin Unver, “Russia Has Won the Information War in Turkey,” *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2019. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/21/russia-has-won-the-information-war-in-turkey-rt-sputnik-putin-erdogan-disinformation>)

makes them popular among Turks seeking something other than Turkish government propaganda.³⁷⁶

Russia's Turkey-related information operations generally aim to cultivate support for Russia's foreign policy agenda, undermine NATO, and divide Turkey from its Western allies.³⁷⁷ With rare exceptions, pro-Russia propagandists in Turkey do not disseminate "fake news," instead providing factually accurate information with a pro-Russia spin.³⁷⁸ This allows pro-Russia propaganda to achieve greater impact in a Turkish information space already saturated with falsehoods.³⁷⁹

Russia also maximizes its propaganda's reach by playing both sides of the Turkish information space. Russia influences mainstream pro-government networks through its ties to the Turkish government, including cooperation between Russian and Turkish state media, while *Sputnik Turkiye* and RSFM Radio often support pro-opposition narratives. This strategy allows Russia to pivot quickly to whatever narrative is most useful, especially during crises.³⁸⁰ State-directed social media accounts and bots amplify this content among the Turkish public.³⁸¹ Pro-Russia Turkish outlets, such as the Patriotic Party's *Aydinlik* and Ulusal Kanal, further add to this mix.³⁸²



The main newsroom of Russia's state-owned Sputnik media outlet in Moscow on April 27, 2018. (Photo by Mladen Antonov/AFP via Getty Images)

Russia's information activities have had a direct impact on Russian-Turkish relations, and vice versa. For example, Russia's efforts to delegitimize Turkey by connecting it to the Islamic State not only distracted both Turkey and NATO from Russia's brazen violation of Turkish airspace, but also helped fuel Turkey-NATO friction over Ankara's policy toward the terror group.³⁸³ In response, Turkey banned *Sputnik Turkiye* in April 2016 and revoked its branch chief's work visa. However, following Erdogan's August 2016 meeting with Putin in St. Petersburg, Ankara lifted the ban and worked to restore the outlet's image.³⁸⁴ In a

376. For comparison, *Sputnik Turkiye* has over 1 million Twitter followers as of December 2021, while Turkey's state-run *Anadolu Agency* has almost 3.3 million. *Sputnik's* global service, by contrast, has roughly 325,000 followers. *DW Turkiye* has just over 847,000 Twitter followers, although some other Western outlets, such as BBC News Turkce (4 million), have far more.

377. Katherine Costello, "Russia's Use of Media and Information Operations in Turkey: Implications for the United States," *RAND Corporation*, 2018. (<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE278.html>)

378. H. Akin Unver, "Russia Has Won the Information War in Turkey," *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2019. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/21/russia-has-won-the-information-war-in-turkey-rt-sputnik-putin-erdogan-disinformation>)

379. H. Akin Unver, "Russian Digital Media and Information Ecosystem in Turkey," *Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies*, March 2019. (<https://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ak%C4%B1n-%C3%9Cnver-Russian-Digital-Media.pdf>)

380. H. Akin Unver, "Russia Has Won the Information War in Turkey," *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2019. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/21/russia-has-won-the-information-war-in-turkey-rt-sputnik-putin-erdogan-disinformation>); "An Unlikely Opposition," *DFFLab*, March 31, 2017. (<https://medium.com/dfflab/an-unlikely-opposition-8c549705581f>)

381. Ben Nimmo, Camille François, C. Shawn Eib, and L. Tamora, "From Russia With Blogs," *Graphika*, February 12, 2020. (<https://graphika.com/reports/from-russia-with-blogs>); "Operation 'Secondary Infection,'" *Atlantic Council*, 2019. (https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Operation-Secondary-Infektion_English.pdf); H. Akin Unver, "Russian Digital Media and Information Ecosystem in Turkey," *Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies*, March 2019. (<http://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ak%C4%B1n-%C3%9Cnver-Russian-Digital-Media.pdf>)

382. "Media Organs," *Vatan Partisi*, accessed November 17, 2021. (<https://vatanpartisi.org.tr/english/haberler/media-organs-10958>)

383. H. Akin Unver, "Russia Has Won the Information War in Turkey," *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2019. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/21/russia-has-won-the-information-war-in-turkey-rt-sputnik-putin-erdogan-disinformation>)

384. "An Unlikely Opposition," *DFFLab*, March 31, 2017. (<https://medium.com/dfflab/an-unlikely-opposition-8c549705581f>)

further display of goodwill, Russia's state *TASS News Agency* and *Anadolu Agency*, its Turkish counterpart, signed a content-sharing agreement during a March 2017 Putin-Erdogan meeting.³⁸⁵

Sputnik Turkiye's reinstatement and the subsequent *TASS-Anadolu* cooperation deal suggest Ankara and Moscow have developed at least a tacit understanding regarding propaganda. Indeed, after Erdogan's August 2016 meeting with Putin, Russian propaganda regarding Turkish-ISIS oil trade disappeared from Russian Turkish-language media, while Turkish pro-government media assumed a pro-Russian stance.³⁸⁶

Moscow has also shown willingness to respect Turkey's concerns. In June 2018, *Sputnik* announced it was shuttering its Kurdish-language branch, *Sputnik Kurdi*, reportedly at Ankara's request.³⁸⁷ Yet tensions linger. As Russian-Turkish tensions spiked during the 2020 crisis over Idlib, Turkish law enforcement raided *Sputnik Turkiye's* office, briefly detaining its editor-in-chief and three of its journalists.³⁸⁸

In cases where Russian and Turkish interests align, their information operations can work synergistically. For example, both regimes have waged campaigns against Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch and Archbishop of Constantinople, for various reasons.³⁸⁹ In August 2016, Erdogan mouthpiece *Aksam* published an article accusing Bartholomew I, the CIA, and U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen of plotting the coup to thwart Ankara's rapprochement with Moscow. As evidence, *Aksam* cited an article published by *Oriental Review*,³⁹⁰ a disinformation site controlled by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service.³⁹¹

While Turkish media historically have not tried to exert influence in Russia, this looks to be changing. In March 2020, Turkey's state-run broadcaster TRT announced a new digital platform to reach Russian-speakers. TRT said the new platform and its social media presence will "play a key role in battling disinformation and manipulation," suggesting Ankara seeks to shape how Russians and other Russian speakers view Turkey.³⁹²

385. "Russia's TASS Signs Cooperation Deal With Turkey's Anadolu News Agency," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 11, 2017. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-tass-signs-cooperation-agreement-anadolu-turkish-news-agency/28363230.html>)

386. H. Akin Unver, "Russia Has Won the Information War in Turkey," *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2019. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/21/russia-has-won-the-information-war-in-turkey-rt-sputnik-putin-erdogan-disinformation>)

387. Ari Khalidi, "Russia's Sputnik to close Kurdish language website: source," *Kurdistan24* (Iraq), June 19, 2018. (<https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/16315-Russia%27s-Sputnik-to-close-Kurdish-language-website:-source>); "Russian Sputnik shuts down Kurdish website at Turkey's request," *Ahval* (Turkey), June 30, 2018. (<https://ahvalnews.com/media/russian-sputnik-shuts-down-kurdish-website-turkeys-request>)

388. "Russian News Agency Staff Attacked, Detained in Turkey," *Associated Press*, March 1, 2020. (<https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/03/01/business/bc-eu-russia-turkey-journalists-attacked.html>)

389. Aykan Erdemir and John Lechner, "The Embattled Ecumenical Patriarch Caught Between Russia and Turkey," *Providence*, October 31, 2018. (<https://providencemag.com/2018/10/the-embattled-ecumenical-patriarch-caught-between-russia-and-turkey>); Aykan Erdemir and John Lechner, "Erdogan's Interests Converge with Putin in Moldova's Gagauzia," *The Turkey Analyst*, November 29, 2018. (<https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/611-erdo%C4%9Fan%E2%80%99s-interests-converge-with-putin-in-moldova%E2%80%99s-gagauzia.html>)

390. Katherine Costello, "Russia's Use of Media and Information Operations in Turkey," *RAND Corporation*, 2018. (<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE278.html>)

391. Michael R. Gordon and Dustin Volz, "Russian Disinformation Campaign Aims to Undermine Confidence in Pfizer, Other Covid-19 Vaccines, U.S. Officials Say," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2021. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-disinformation-campaign-aims-to-undermine-confidence-in-pfizer-other-covid-19-vaccines-u-s-officials-say-11615129200>)

392. "Turkish State Broadcaster Launches Russian Channel To Fight 'Disinformation And Manipulation,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 24, 2020. (<https://www.rferl.org/a/turkey-russia-media-erdogan/30631868.html>)

Policy Recommendations

Erdogan's rapprochement with Russia reflects a fundamental shift in Turkish foreign policy. Ankara seeks to balance between East and West in pursuit of greater strategic independence and influence on the world stage. Although Ankara does not want to exit NATO, the alliance should not expect Turkey to be a reliable ally while Erdogan remains in power.

With that reality in mind, Washington and its allies must develop a long-term, unified strategy for relations with Turkey. This strategy should aim to make the most of the current situation by pursuing cooperation where Western and Turkish interests align, such as countering Russia in the Black Sea region and promoting alternatives to Russian energy. At the same time, the strategy should employ a combination of carrots and sticks to discourage Turkey from further aligning with Russia or otherwise undermining NATO, while mitigating against risks of further deterioration in Western-Turkish relations. Finally, the strategy should lay the groundwork to improve relations with Turkey in the post-Erdogan era.

Making the Most of the Current Situation

The United States and its allies should make the most of the present state of Turkish-Western relations by pursuing cooperation with Ankara where their interests align.

- **Work with Turkey to compete with Russia in the Black Sea region.** The region is a critical theater in the strategic competition with Russia, and no

NATO strategy in the region can succeed without Turkey. Ankara wants to do more to support NATO interests in the Black Sea but fears NATO will abandon Turkey in a conflict with Russia. Washington and its allies should try to assuage these fears and work with Turkey toward a stronger NATO presence in the region.³⁹³ In addition to improving coastal and air defense assets in Romania and Bulgaria,³⁹⁴ Washington and its NATO allies should pursue opportunities to support Turkish security cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, for example through combined exercises and multilateral weapons-development programs. NATO should also work toward a Turkey-led Black Sea maritime patrol operation modeled on the alliance's Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean.³⁹⁵

In the event Russian-Turkish military tensions flare up again, the Western allies should firmly and tangibly support Turkey — including Ankara's control over the Turkish Straits, a likely focal point of any major military conflict between Russia and Turkey or between NATO and Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁹⁶ Washington could also encourage European allies to explore Turkish (as well as Ukrainian, Georgian, and Moldovan) membership in the Three Seas Initiative, a political platform designed to promote European cohesion, transatlantic ties, and infrastructure, energy, and digital interconnectivity among countries bordering the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas.³⁹⁷

- **Promote alternatives to Russian energy.** Turkey and the West share the goal of reducing dependence on Russian gas and have achieved tangible results

393. Ben Hodges, "The Black Sea ... or a Black Hole?" *Center for European Policy Analysis*, January 21, 2021. (<https://cepa.org/the-black-sea-or-a-black-hole>)

394. Stephen Flanagan and Irina Chindea, "Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security Strategy," *RAND Corporation*, 2019. (https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF400/CF405/RAND_CF405.pdf)

395. Gonul Tol and Yoruk Isik, "Turkey-NATO ties are problematic, but there is one bright spot," *Middle East Institute*, February 16, 2021. (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-nato-ties-are-problematic-there-one-bright-spot>)

396. Maria Tsvetkova and Yoruk Isik, "Russia reinforces Syria before Putin-Erdogan talks - flight and shipping data," *Reuters*, March 4, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-russia/russia-reinforces-syria-before-putin-erdogan-talks-flight-and-shipping-data-idUSKBN20R2QP>)

397. "About," *Three Seas Initiative Summit*, September 2018. (<http://three-seas.eu/about>)

through the recently completed Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), whose largest leg runs through Turkey. Washington and its transatlantic allies should look to sustain this progress by working with Ankara to provide political, technical, and financial assistance for further projects. Washington should support U.S. LNG exports, including by easing burdensome permit requirements and facilitating the construction of pipeline infrastructure in the United States.³⁹⁸ Likewise, the allies should support expansion of the SGC as well as the construction of a Trans-Caucasus Pipeline and associated interconnector pipelines to bring Turkmen (and potentially Kazakh) gas to the SGC.³⁹⁹ Washington and the European Union should also encourage Western companies to help Turkey exploit its new Black Sea natural gas reserves.

Furthermore, Washington should join the European Union in supporting Turkey's renewable energy and energy efficiency, which remain limited. The European Union should also encourage Ankara to liberalize Turkey's gas market by fully implementing its Natural Gas Market Law of 2001, which would align the Turkish market to EU standards and allow Turkey to join the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas and the Energy Community. In the nuclear realm, the European Union should engage Turkey through Euratom to pursue nuclear cooperation, align Turkey's regulatory framework with EU standards, and promote nuclear safety and security.⁴⁰⁰

Carrots and Sticks

While fundamental improvement in Turkish behavior is unlikely in the near term, Washington and its allies should work to manage relations with Erdogan's Turkey to discourage Ankara from further aligning with Russia or otherwise undermining the NATO alliance.

- Washington should make clear that Turkey will face additional sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act if Ankara deploys the S-400 or purchases additional Russian weapon systems.** Possible incentives, preconditioned on Ankara's return or mothballing of its batteries, could include favorable financing for Patriot sales and support for bailout packages from international financial institutions. If Ankara starts unwinding its commitment to the S-400, NATO countries should work to rebuild military-to-military ties with Turkey. When appropriate, NATO should also renew and strengthen support for Turkish counterinsurgency efforts against the PKK while encouraging Ankara to resume the Kurdish peace process. A key carrot in this effort could be the resumption of the military intelligence cooperation that Washington suspended following Turkey's October 2019 incursion into northeast Syria.⁴⁰¹ Another could be Turkish participation in the European Union's Permanent Structured Cooperation framework.
- Washington and its allies should warn that Turkey will face further diplomatic, economic, and other costs if it continues to disrupt NATO unity and destabilize the Eastern Mediterranean.** Ankara should pay a price for watering down NATO's

³⁹⁸ European Commission, "EU-U.S. LNG Trade," January 8, 2020. (https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/eu-us_lng_trade_folder.pdf); "Joint API-IOGP Policy Recommendations for enabling increased options for U.S. LNG in the European Union," *American Petroleum Institute*, May 2019. (<https://www.api.org/-/media/Files/Policy/LNG-Exports/API-IOGP-US-EU-LNG-Joint-Position-Paper.pdf>)

³⁹⁹ Luke Coffey and Efgan Nifti, "A Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline: Start Small but Aim Big," *The National Interest*, May 16, 2019. (<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/trans-caspian-gas-pipeline-start-small-aim-big-58012>)

⁴⁰⁰ Simone Tagliapietra, "A New Strategy for EU-Turkey Energy Cooperation," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Fall 2018. (https://www.bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/a-new-strategy-for-eu-turkey-energy-cooperation_en_1369.pdf)

⁴⁰¹ Humeyra Pamuk and Phil Stewart, "U.S. halts secretive drone program with Turkey over Syria incursion," *Reuters*, February 5, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-drone-exclusive/exclusive-u-s-halts-secretive-drone-program-with-turkey-over-syria-incursion-idUSKBN1ZZ1AB>); Gordon Lubold, Julian Barnes, and Margaret Coker, "U.S. to Expand Intelligence Cooperation With Turkey," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 2017. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-expand-intelligence-cooperation-with-turkey-1494436533>)

May 2021 condemnation of Belarusian strongman Alexander Lukashenko’s forced diversion of a Ryanair flight to arrest journalist Roman Protasevich.⁴⁰² Likewise, the allies should impose further sanctions if Turkey continues its gunboat diplomacy to derail energy projects in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Mitigating Risks

Turkish-NATO relations are likely to deteriorate further in the near term. Given that NATO lacks an expulsion mechanism, the allies must limit the damage Turkey can do to allied security.

- **Prepare for Ankara to terminate U.S. access to one or more bases in Turkey.** Erdogan threatened to do so most recently in December 2019.⁴⁰³ The departments of Defense and State should maintain up-to-date contingency plans presenting options for the U.S. response — bilaterally and within NATO — at the political and military levels. These plans should include measures to mitigate the immediate fallout; alternative basing options; and an analysis of the impact on NATO military activities, along with options to address resultant gaps.
- **Deepen military cooperation with partners in the Eastern Mediterranean to hedge against Turkish aggression and Russia’s increased military presence.** The bipartisan U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, passed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June, would take positive steps toward this goal. The act would authorize U.S. funding to provide Greece with International Military Education and Training assistance and to help Greece meet its defense needs and transition away from Russian

equipment. The legislation would also authorize expedited F-35 deliveries to Greece and establish an inter-parliamentary group comprising the United States, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel.⁴⁰⁴ The renewed and expanded defense protocol the United States and Greece signed in October carried these efforts further by offering Washington greater access to Greek military bases, thereby facilitating deterrence of Ankara and Moscow.⁴⁰⁵

Preparing for a Post-Erdogan Era

As they pursue these short-term objectives, the Western allies should keep an eye toward the future. Erdogan’s tenure will not last forever. His eventual departure could present an opportunity to bring Turkey back into the transatlantic fold. The West should lay the groundwork now to seize that opportunity when it presents itself. This should include a broad, coordinated effort to reengage the Turkish people and support Turkey’s democratic institutions and media environment.

- **Do not give up on the EU accession process.** Growing anti-Western sentiment among Turks stems partly from purposeful manipulation by Erdogan, but also from Western mistakes, including the European Union’s poor handling of Turkey’s accession process. Accession will prove impossible so long as Erdogan remains in power. But demonstrating continued EU willingness to accept Turkey should it meet the requisite criteria could help mitigate anti-Western sentiment in Turkey and facilitate improved EU-Turkish relations once Erdogan leaves office. The European Union should outline tangible steps to move the process forward. This roadmap should

⁴⁰². Aykan Erdemir, “Erdogan Saves Putin’s Belarusian Ally By Playing Spoiler Role Within NATO,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, May 28, 2021. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/05/28/erdogan-saves-putins-belarusian-ally>)

⁴⁰³. Matt McGarry, “Analysis: Turkey once again threatens to close U.S. bases,” *ABC News*, December 16, 2019. (<https://abcnews.go.com/International/analysis-turkey-threatens-close-us-bases/story?id=67751304>)

⁴⁰⁴. U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Press Release, “Menendez, Rubio Applaud SFRC Passage of U.S.-Greece Defense and

Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021,” June 22, 2021. (<https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/menendez-rubio-applaud-sfrc-passage-of-us-greece-defense-and-interparliamentary-partnership-act-of-2021->)

⁴⁰⁵. Bradley Bowman and Aykan Erdemir, “Erdogan’s Belligerence Has U.S., Greece Expanding Ties,” *Foreign Policy*, October 26, 2021. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/26/us-greece-erdogan-turkey-defense-security-nato-russia>)

include a plan to modernize and improve the EU-Turkey Customs Union agreement or replace it with a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, conditioned on structural reforms for ensuring transparency and institutionalizing anti-corruption measures.⁴⁰⁶

- **Address Erdogan’s democratic backslide.** To help limit the damage done by Erdogan, the West should invest in initiatives to restore the rule of law, checks and balances, and academic and media freedoms and to monitor human rights violations. Re-engagement should include initiatives at the nongovernmental level, where Washington and its allies should invest in civic associations and initiatives to promote liberal ideals and norms to counter Turkey’s Islamist and Eurasianist bent. Sanctions targeting human rights violations and corruption under the Magnitsky Act and its European equivalents can help hold the Erdogan regime accountable and communicate to ordinary Turks that the West cares about their future. The Western allies should likewise support investigative journalism reporting on corruption involving Turkey.
- **Washington should cooperate with European governments and media to counter Russia’s propaganda efforts in Turkey, including by pushing Ankara to increase access for Western media.** Washington should create a Radio Free Europe outlet dedicated to Turkey and insist that Ankara allow it access. Washington should also make Russia’s Turkey-focused propaganda and disinformation a

priority for the Global Engagement Center, and the European Union should do the same with its East StratCom Task Force.

- **Reconsider U.S. withdrawals from the Middle East.** Such withdrawals lead Turkey and other actors to hedge by pursuing closer ties with Russia. In Syria, while continuing its ongoing security cooperation with the SDF, the United States should also look for ways to promote cordial relations between the SDF and the governments of Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. The Biden administration, in its willingness to rely on Turkish troops for guarding and running the Kabul International Airport following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, should avoid giving the Erdogan government the impression that it can enjoy impunity for its transgressions at home and abroad in exchange for transactional deals.

Conclusion

Although Erdogan and Putin have found ways of cooperating, often at the expense of the United States and its allies and partners, Turkey’s and Russia’s respective interests and ambitions conflict or diverge on multiple fronts. Washington should seek to leverage these tensions to undermine Erdogan’s collusion with Putin and contain Moscow in the short run, while laying the groundwork to bring Ankara back into the NATO fold in the post-Erdogan era.

⁴⁰⁶. European Commission, “Study of the EU-Turkey Bilateral Preferential Trade Framework, Including the Customs Union, and an Assessment of Its Possible Enhancement,” October 26, 2016. (https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2017/january/tradoc_155240.pdf); Fadi Hakura, “EU-Turkey Customs Union: Prospects for Modernization and Lessons for Brexit,” *Chatham House*, December 2018. (<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2018-12-12-eu-turkey-customs-union-hakura.pdf>)

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