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**The Russian-Turkish relations in the context of unprecedented
US-Turkey tensions**

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The article discusses the development of the US-Turkey strategic relations, the main reasons behind the tension in these relations in recent years, as well as the prerequisites and prospects for its development. Due to disagreements between Turkey and the US over a number of issues, the mistrust between the two countries has increased significantly, reflecting also on Turkey-NATO relations. The article analyzes the positive impact of the crisis of the two NATO member states on the strengthening of the Russia-Turkey cooperation. Taking advantage of the crisis between Ankara and Washington, Russia is intensifying its multilateral ties with Turkey, which deepens Turkey's disagreements with the US and NATO. A particular emphasis is on the conflicting interests of Russia, Turkey and the US in the Middle East region in recent years, and particularly within the Syrian conflict.

Keywords

Turkey, Russia, US, Middle East, Syrian conflict, Kurdish issue, NATO

Introduction

In recent years, more than half a century of the US-Turkey strategic partnership has been put to the test. Turkey's decision to acquire Russian S-400 air defense system not only aggravated the already strained relations between Ankara and Washington, but also contributed to the deepening of military-political cooperation between Turkey and Russia. Taking advantage of the deepening US-Turkey crisis, Russia is strengthening its geopolitical, military and economic ties with Turkey, seeking to involve the country in the pursuit of

strategic interests in its region, thereby increasing Turkey-US-NATO disagreements.

The crisis in the US-Turkey strategic relations and the prospects of enlargement of Russia-Turkey cooperation in this context stem from a number of factors and strategic interests.

Since the mid-20th century, Turkey has been one of the major loyal allies of the US. During the Cold War, within the general system of defense of Western Europe against the Soviet system, Turkey has been viewed as the southern wing of NATO, being the outpost of the West at the borders of the USSR¹. In the 1990s, Turkey played a key role in deterring Iraq and Iran, assisted Washington in its policy implementation in the Balkans², as well as in the construction of the “East-West” energy corridor³. In the early 2000s, Turkey was a member of the US-led international coalition and a partner in the settlement of the Afghan issue⁴.

In the 1990s, with the support of the US, the idea of a “Turkish model” was put forward, on the one hand to weaken Russia's and Iran's involvement in the post-Soviet region, on the other hand to make this model applicable to the newly independent Muslim

¹ **Atmaca Ö. A.**, The Geopolitical Origins of Turkish-American Relations: Revisiting the Cold War Years. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 2014, **3**, 1, 19-34; **Ergüvenç Ş.**, Turkey's Security Perceptions, *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, June-August 1998, **3**, 2, 1-5.

² **Güzelipek A. Y.**, Türk Dış Politikasının Bosna-Hersek Sınavı (1990-1995), *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt: 3, Sayı: 1, Bahar 2013, 133-142; **Uzgel İ.**, The Balkans: Turkey's Stabilizing Role, *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multi-regional Power*, edited by Barry M. Rubin, Kemal Kirişçi, Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder, 2001, p. 53.

³ **Souleimanov E., Kraus J.**, Turkey: An Important East-West Energy Hub, *Middle East Policy*, 2012, **19**, 2, 157-168; **Tekin A., Williams P.A.**, Turkey's Role as a ‘Trans-European’ Energy Corridor, *Geo-Politics of the Euro-Asia Energy Nexus. New Security Challenges Series*, 2011, London, pp. 145-165; **Çeviköz Ü.**, Could Turkey Become a New Energy Trade Hub in South East Europe?, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 2016, **15**, 2, 67-76.

⁴ **Tanrisever, O.**, Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11, «IOS Press», 2013, pp. 160-165; **Rubin R. B.**, Peace-building and State-building in Afghanistan: Construction Sovereignty for Whose Security, *Third World Quarterly*, 2006, **27**, 1, 175-185; **Wildman D., Bennis P.**, The War in Afghanistan Goes Global, *Critical Asian Studies*, 2010, **42**, 3, 469-480.

republics⁵. All this pointed to the close strategic partnership between the US and Turkey. It has had its meaningful reflection on bilateral relations for over seven decades, overcoming several regional conflicts, as well as changes in worldwide political and economic situations.

The coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey in 2002 affected the US-Turkey relations. Under the AKP rule, Turkey's modern foreign policy has been based on the "New Ottomanism" ideology and the "Strategic Depth" theory. Among the main theorists of these ideologies was Davutoglu, Turkey's former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister. He suggested building relations with neighboring states on the basis of five principles. He has also outlined new guidelines and criteria for regional policy⁶. Davutoglu attached great importance to Turkey's active role in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire - the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Mediterranean, the South Caucasus, the Caspian and the Black Sea basins. He believed that Turkey should not depend on any power, but it should strive for balanced relations and alliances.

The Iraq war became the first serious testament to the US-Turkey relations. On March 1, 2003, the bill to deploy 62,000 US troops to Turkey and remove the Turkish troops from the country was rejected by the Turkish Grand National Assembly⁷, which, according to the US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, caused "great disappointment" for the US administration⁸. As a result, the US began cooperating with the Iraqi Kurdish unions in the overthrow of Saddam

⁵ **Bal I.**, The Turkish Model and the Turkic Republics. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, September-November 1998, **3**, 3, 1-17.

⁶ **Davutoğlu A.**, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiyenin Uluslararası Konumu*, Istanbul, 2001, s. 118.

⁷ **Altunışık B. M.**, Turkey's Security Culture and Policy Towards Iraq, *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, Spring 2007, **12**, p. 77.

⁸ Turkey's future directions and U.S. – Turkey relations,- *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Europe of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Eighth Congress*, First session, October 1, 2003, Serial no. 108-50, p. 25.

Hussein in 2003. This allowed the government officials of the Iraqi Kurdistan region to increase the independence of their institutions, thereby provoking the anger of Turkey which considered the Kurdish nationalism as a threat⁹. Certainly, this was not yet a serious threat to the strategic partnership. Moreover, the further events could have been viewed as manifestations of overcoming the given situation and deepening of the US-Turkey relations. In particular, in 2009, the newly-appointed US president Barack Obama made his first foreign visit to Turkey. Thrilled by the success of the country's economic development and democratization reforms, the President named the relations between the two countries “model partnership”¹⁰. Later, in 2012, Obama named Recep Tayyip Erdogan one of the five leaders in the world he fully trusts¹¹. But a few years later, during an interview with journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, Obama referred to the Turkish leader as “unlucky and autocratic”¹².

Thus, regardless of the attempts to overcome the preconditions created by the Iraq war for the strain of the US-Turkey relations, they have become more profound in recent years.

⁹ **Balcı A.**, *Dış Politikada Hesaplaşmak: AK Parti, Ordu ve Kemalizm*, İstanbul, Etkileşim Yayınlar, 2015, s. 98;

Jüde J., Contesting borders? The formation of Iraqi Kurdistan's de facto state, *International Affairs*, 2017, **93**, 4, 860–861.

¹⁰ Remarks by President Obama to the Turkish Parliament. The White House. Office of the Press Secretary, - Washington, D.C., 06.04.2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-turkish-parliament>; **Han K. A.**, From “Strategic Partnership” to “Model Partnership”: AKP, Turkish–US Relations and The Prospects Under Obama, *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, N° 23 (May / Mayo 2010), p. 23.

¹¹ **Abramowitz I. M., Edelman S. E.**, From Rhetoric to Reality: Reframing U.S. Turkey Policy, *National Security Program: Foreign Policy Project*, Bipartisan Policy Center, 2013, p. 16.

¹² **Goldberg J.**, The Obama Doctrine, *The Atlantic magazine*, 07.04.2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>; **Zanotti J.**, Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief, - *US Congressional Research Service Report*, 18.03.2016, p. 2.

The Transformation of the US-Turkey relations and the Main Causes of the Current Tensions

The deep crisis between the two countries is due to a number of issues on which Ankara and Washington have diametrically different positions and interests. This particularly refers to the Syrian crisis and the Kurdish issue, Fethullah Gulen's case, the prosecution of the American Protestant pastor Andrew Brunson as well as the Turkish-Russian cooperation and its impact on Turkey-NATO relations.

Disagreements between Ankara and Washington deepened due to the Syrian conflict. The positions of Turkey and the US greatly differed particularly in relation to the President of Syria Bashar al-Assad and the armed groups involved in the Syrian conflict (from the "Syrian opposition" to Kurdish militias). Political instability in the Middle East has forced Turkey to rethink its foreign policy and the strategic directions of national security¹³.

The US and, in general, the West stopped strongly insisting on Assad's removal in mid-2010 (like it was at the beginning of the Syrian crisis), whereas Recep Tayyip Erdogan strongly opposed such an approach. It was also reflected in an agreement to withdraw chemical weapons from Syria in 2013¹⁴, when, in contrast to the changed rhetoric of the US, Turkey did not abandon its tough stance on Syria's leader, despite rapprochement with Russia and Iran in the Syrian conflict¹⁵. The situation was the same with the armed groups fighting against the Assad regime. Since 2014, the US has cut military aid to the Syrian opposition. In July 2017, the newly elected President

¹³ **Ulchenko N., Shlykov P.**, Dynamics of Russian-Turkish relations in the context of growing global instability, Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, 2014, pp. 18-29 (in Russian).

¹⁴ **Weitz R.**, *Syria and Beyond: The Future of the Chemical Weapons Threat*, - Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Security Studies Center, Proliferation Paper 51, December 2014, pp. 27-28; **Weiss S. A., Ng N.**, *Collision Avoidance: Lessons From U.S. and Russian Operations in Syria*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2019, p. 6.

¹⁵ **Shlykov V. P.**, US-Turkey relations in the mirror of the Middle Eastern and Euro-Atlantic dimensions, "Actual problems of Europe", 1, "Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of RAS", 2019, p. 212 (in Russian).

Donald Trump has decided to suspend any military aid provided to the anti-Assad military units¹⁶. In contrast to the US, Ankara not only reduced the military-technical assistance to anti-Assad fighters, but it also actively used those fighters as allies within the “Shield of Euphrates” and “Olive Branch” operations¹⁷.

Ankara and Washington have also come up with diametrically opposed approaches in identifying threats from the Islamic State (IS), Jabhat al-Nusra, and other terrorist groups, which have been clearly demonstrated in the fight against the expansion of IS. A year later Turkey joined the US-led coalition against IS. It was only then that it was allowed to use the Incirlik air base to launch air strikes on terrorist positions. This caused serious dissatisfaction in the West¹⁸.

The above events point out that Turkey does not share the views of the US on confronting IS and regarding the fight against the expansion of terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. This made Washington look for alternative allies in the Middle East. It turned to be the People’s Protection Units (YPG) of Syria that proved its effectiveness in countering Islamists and has been viewed by Turkey as a terrorist organization¹⁹.

¹⁶ **Jaffe G., Entous A.** Trump ends covert CIA program to arm anti-Assad rebels in Syria, a move sought by Moscow, *The Washington Post*, 19.07.2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-ends-covert-cia-program-to-arm-anti-assad-rebels-in-syria-a-move-sought-by-moscow/2017/07/19/b6821a62-6beb-11e7-96ab-5f38140b38cc_story.html; **Humud E. C., Blanchard, M. C., Nikitin B. M.**, Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response, *US Congressional Research Service Report*, 02.12.2019, p. 37.

¹⁷ **Van Leeuwen J., Van Veen E.**, Turkey in northwestern Syria: Rebuilding empire at the margins, *CRU Policy Brief*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, June 2019, pp. 1-10; **Dacrema E., Talbot V.**, Rebuilding Syria: The Middle East’s Next Power Game?, *The Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)*, 2019, p. 84.

¹⁸ **Sly L., De Young K.**, Turkey agrees to allow U.S. military to use its base to attack Islamic State, *The Washington Post*, 23.07.2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/turkey-agrees-to-allow-us-military-to-use-its-base-to-attack-islamic-state/2015/07/23/317f23aa-3164-11e5-a879-213078d03dd3_story.html; **Zanotti J.**, Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief, *US Congressional Research Service Report*, December 2015, p. 10.

¹⁹ **Shlykov V. P.**, op. cit, pp. 203-214.

According to S. Ulgen, “No other political decision in history has harmed the image of the United States in Turkey as much as the continued arming of the “People’s Protection Units” in Syria”²⁰. The US-Turkey relations deteriorated sharply after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. The failed coup attempt on July 15 to July 16 got considerable attention not only within the state but worldwide. Following the uprising, mass arrests began in the country against alleged supporters of the President. President Erdogan's harsh reaction to this event caused a deepening negative attitude of the West²¹.

Erdogan has openly blamed the West, especially the US, not only for failing to support him after the coup attempt, but also to organize the return of Fethullah Gulen to Turkey. Gulen has been living in Pennsylvania since 1999, and he was accused of organizing the failed coup²². Erdogan noted, “I’m calling on the US: what kind of strategic partner are we, that you can still host someone whose extradition I have asked for?”, meanwhile blaming the West for supporting terrorism and hinting that “the scenario of the coup was written outside of Turkey”²³. The failed coup attempt contributed to the rise of anti-American and anti-Western sentiments in Turkey. This is also evidenced by the results of a sociological study conducted by the American Pew Research Center, at the end of 2017. According to the results of research, Turkey was the only country where the global threats stem from the US, rather than the international terrorism or

²⁰ Why Turkey refuses to cancel the purchase of S-400? Vesti, Ekonomika, <https://www.vestifinance.ru/articles/121260>, 24.06.2019 (in Russian).

²¹ **Ataman M.**, July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey: Context, Causes and Consequences, *SETA Publications*, 2017, pp. 234-238; **Sloat A.**, The West’s Turkey Conundrum, *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, Robert Bosch Foundation Transatlantic Initiative (BBTI), 2018, pp. 5-6.

²² **Abramowitz M., Edelman E.**, Beyond the Myth of Partnership: Rethinking U.S. Policy Toward Turkey, *National Security Program: Foreign Policy Project*, Bipartisan Policy Center, 2016, p. 11.

²³ **Hille K., Pitel L.**, West uneasy as Moscow and Ankara edge closer, - *Financial Times*, 07.08.2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/bbcd39ba-5b0d-11e6-9f70-badea1b336d4>.

migration flows (as to 72% of respondents)²⁴. After a failed coup d'état in the fall of 2016, among other foreign nationals arrested, was Andrew Brunson, the American shepherd of Evangelical church in Izmir, who was accused of supporting Gulen's movement²⁵. Brunson's arrest in the US was considered a political act, and the US officials demanded his release. President Trump also supported the arrested shepherd, noting that Brunson is a good man and a Christian leader who is being persecuted in Turkey for no reason, hoping that he will be allowed to return home²⁶.

Brunson's imprisonment not only caused a serious diplomatic crisis in relations between the two NATO allies, but also affected the Turkish economy. Demanding the release of Brunson, Washington imposed a series of sanctions on Turkey, after which the national currency began to depreciate sharply, putting the economy under serious threat²⁷. So Ankara tried to ease the Us-Turkey tensions. On October 12, 2018 the court of Izmir sentenced Brunson to 3 years in prison, but he was released from the courtroom, given the fact that he spent three years in custody during the preliminary investigation. The US President Trump's response was not delayed. The leader of the White House, who has been demanding for months the release of Brunson, calling his detention a disgrace, wrote on his Twitter page: "My thoughts and prayers are with Brunson. We hope that he will

²⁴ **Manevich D., Chwe H.**, Globally, more people see U.S. power and influence as a major threat, *Pew research center*, 01.08.2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/01/u-s-power-and-influence-increasingly-seen-as-threat-in-other-countries/>.

²⁵ **Erdemir A., Edelman E.**, Erdogan's Hostage Diplomacy: Western Nationals in Turkish Prisons, The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), Washington, DC, pp. 6-8.

²⁶ **Erdemir A., Edelman E.**, op. cit, pp. 21-22; **Maza C.**, Andrew Brunson Case: Donald Trump Threatens Turkey with Sanctions if Pastor is not Released, 26.07.2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-threatens-turkey-sanctions-if-christian-pastor-not-released-1043964>.

²⁷ **Martin W.**, The lira is tumbling after the US said it's ready to kick its battle against Turkey up a notch, *Business Insider*, 17.08.2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-usa-sanctions-against-turkey-2018-8>.

return home soon”²⁸. It seemed that Brunson's release would help to ease the tensions in the US-Turkey relations, but Turkey's decision to acquire the Russian S-400 missile system has strained bilateral relations.

In December, 2017 Moscow and Ankara signed a deal on acquiring S-400 anti-aircraft defense systems worth of US \$ 2.5 billion. Turkey would buy four S-400 anti-aircraft missile complexes, becoming the first NATO member state to make such a major military deal with Russia²⁹. Turkey's decision caused great dissatisfaction not only in the US, but also among the leadership of NATO. At jubilee event marking NATO's 70th anniversary, the US Vice President Mike Pence explicitly referred to Ankara: “Turkey must choose: Does it want to remain a critical partner in the most successful military alliance in history of the world or does it want to risk the security of that partnership by making reckless decisions that undermine our alliance?”³⁰. In response to Pence's threats, Turkey's Vice President Fuat Oktay declared that “the United States must choose whether it want to remain Turkey's ally or endanger the friendly relations of the two countries by uniting forces with terrorists”³¹. It was unacceptable for the US, that Turkey, a key NATO member, was going to acquire the Russian anti-aircraft complex system, designed initially to track and strike NATO warplanes.

Afterward, Pentagon started threatening to expel Turkey from the F-35 program and to impose sanctions if it purchased the Russian

²⁸ **Kelly C., Sullivan K.**, Released US Pastor Andrew Brunson Returns to US, Meets With Trump, *CNN*, 14.10.2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/13/politics/us-pastor-andrew-brunson-trump-oval-office/index.html>.

²⁹ **Kibaroglu M.**, On Turkey's Missile Defense Strategy: The Four Faces of the S-400 Deal Between Turkey and Russia, *SAM Papers*, No.16, April 2019, p. 3.

³⁰ **Hacaoglu S., Kozok F.**, U.S.-Turkey Showdown Escalates as Pence Warns on Missiles, *Bloomberg*, 04.04.2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-04/u-s-turkey-showdown-escalates-as-pence-gives-missiles-warning>.

³¹ **Keşvelioğlu A., Oğuz A., Akca M. E., Türkcan L. M.**, Turkey's Procurement of the S-400 System : An Explainer, *TRT World Research Centre*, 2019, p. 7.

air defense systems³². As an alternative, The US State Department has offered Turkey for about US \$ 2.5 billion American Patriot missile deal³³. Turkey rejected Washington's deal. It pointed to the fact that the US does not provide its partners with Patriot air defense system discounts and refuses to exchange technology³⁴.

Turkey's decision to use the S-400 system has deeper roots. For the past 10 years Ankara has sought to acquire the American Patriot systems, but it did not succeed. The US opposed Turkey's demands for technology transfer and domestic production. Therefore, Ankara began looking for potential alternatives, including a Chinese missile system which failed in 2013 due to the US objections. Following the coup attempt in 2016 against Erdogan, including the Turkish Parliament's air bombardment, the acquisition of anti-aircraft systems became imperative to Ankara.

For two years, Washington has been doing everything to persuade Erdogan to cancel the S-400 deal. The S-400 system is not only incompatible with NATO's defense infrastructure in Turkey, but it could also lead to the imposition of the US sanctions. But nothing forced Erdogan to change his decision. The first batch of Russian air defense systems was transferred to Turkey in July 2019, after which the US announced that it was expelling Turkey from its F-35 fighter plan. In particular, the White House Press Secretary S. Grisham noted: "Unfortunately, Turkey's decision to purchase Russian S-400 air defense systems renders its continued involvement with the F-35 impossible. Turkey has been a longstanding and trusted partner and NATO Ally for over 65 years, but accepting the S-400 undermines the

³² **Özer İ. A.**, Arming Countries: With or Without the United States, *SETA Analysis*, 55, 2019, p. 18.

³³ **Yeşiltaş M., Aslan M., Özkizilcik Ö.**, SETA Security Radar: Turkey's Security Landscape in 2019, *SETA Report*, 2019, pp. 48-49.

³⁴ **Mehta A.**, Turkey cleared by US for \$3.5 billion Patriot missile deal, despite S-400 row, *Defense News*, 18.12.2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2018/12/19/turkey-cleared-by-us-for-35-billion-patriot-missile-deal-despite-s-400-row/>; **Wemer A. D.**, After Russian air defense deal, can Ankara and Washington repair their relationship?, *Atlantic Council*, 15.07.2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/after-russian-air-defense-deal-can-ankara-and-washington-repair-their-relationship/>.

commitments all NATO Allies made to each other to move away from Russian systems³⁵. Removing Turkey from the F-35 fighter plan was a serious blow to Ankara not only in military but also in economic terms. Turkey has signed a contract to purchase 100 F-35s from the US, made big investments in its production, and the Turkish companies are producing 937 parts of those fighters³⁶.

Mutual threats exacerbated the US-Turkey crisis, endangering the 70-year-old military cooperation between the two countries and Turkey-NATO relations. Ankara's acquisition of Russian S-400 missiles, despite objections from the US and other NATO members, has even led to calls for Turkey to withdraw from NATO³⁷. The members of the alliance pointed out not only to Ankara's internal political mistakes but they were also concerned that Turkey was an unreliable partner in NATO's security policy. Washington's decision to expel Turkey from further involvement in the F-35 fighter program certainly reflected not only the US concerns³⁸.

In this context, the statement made by H. Akar, the Turkish Minister of Defense, on the readiness of the country for the US sanctions does not seem surprising³⁹. The reason was surely Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defense systems. According to

³⁵ Statement by the Press Secretary, 17.07.2019,

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-64/>;

Leone D., Turkey Might Lose the F-35 Thanks to Buying Russia's S-400 System. So What About Greece?, *The National Interest*, 18.07.2019,

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/turkey-might-lose-f-35-thanks-buying-russias-s-400-system-so-what-about-greece-67632>.

³⁶ **Keşvelioğlu A., Oğuz A., Akca M. E., Türkcan L. M.**, Turkey's Procurement of the S-400 System : An Explainer, *TRT World Research Centre*, 2019, p. 15; **Slijper F.**, Power Projection: Turkey's Military Build-Up: Arms Transfers and an Emerging Military Industry, *PAX: Power Projection*, 2017, pp. 19-26.

³⁷ **Sari A.**, Can Turkey be Expelled from NATO? It's Legally Possible, Whether or Not Politically Prudent, 15.10.2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/66574/can-turkey-be-expelled-from-nato/>.

³⁸ **Carpenter G. T.**, It's time to expel Turkey from the Western alliance, *The Washington Post*, 19.07.2019,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/07/19/its-time-expel-turkey-western-alliance/?noredirect=on>.

³⁹ **Zanotti J., Clayton T.**, Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief, *CRS Report, Congressional Research Service*, 09.07.2019, p. 6.

Kuru, Turkish politicians, led by President Erdogan, are seriously debating Turkey's geopolitical position in the event of suspending NATO membership. Such demand is already present in some segments of the Turkish society. For the past five years, the majority of Turkish society has adopted the anti-American course, most likely at the highest level since 1952⁴⁰. Despite the challenges in relations with the US and NATO, Turkey is likely to remain a part of NATO, as partition would be very harmful to both parties. First, NATO is not only a military alliance, but also a political union. Being part of it is like being part of the developed world, that Turkey has been striving for since 1923. Second, Turkey is able to greatly influence Brussels' policy, by remaining in the alliance. In principle, all NATO decisions require consent. Thus, Ankara can effectively block any decision running against its interests. For example, in 2017 Turkey has blocked NATO's attempt to develop partnership relations with Austria in response to Vienna's repeated veto for Turkey's EU membership⁴¹.

Referring to NATO's main motives for keeping Turkey in the alliance, it should be emphasized that in number and combat capability Turkish Armed Forces lag behind the US. In addition, Turkey has geopolitical significance both for Europe and the US. It is the only NATO member to have borders in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq and Iran) and Europe at the same time. Moreover, in the context of the Syrian crisis, Turkey serves as a major endpoint in Europe, accepting more than four million refugees. Turkey controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, two of the most important spots in the world that have historically blocked the entry of Russia into the Mediterranean. The Incirlik air base and the Kurecik radar station (a

⁴⁰ **Kuru T. A.**, Why is Turkey torn between the United States and Russia?, 11.06.2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/why-turkey-torn-between-united-states-and-russia/>.

⁴¹ **Lute D., Burns N.**, NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis, *Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship Report*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs Harvard Kennedy School, 2019, p. 49;

Toperich S., Noi Ü. A., Turkey and Transatlantic Relations, *Center for Transatlantic Relations*, The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 2017, p. 44.

ballistic missile deterrent station some 300 miles far from the Iranian border) are also important to NATO. They ensure NATO's viability in protecting Europe from threats emanating from the Middle East⁴². The effectiveness of the Incirlik air base was proved during the wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Syria. Though Cyprus, Kuwait and Crete have been considered alternatives to Turkey, Washington has not attempted to use these options, as the strategic position and infrastructure of Incirlik are virtually indispensable.

Thus, Turkey's withdrawal from NATO is not beneficial to either side. It is important to find out whether this is another attempt by Ankara to use the “Russian playing card” against the US and NATO, or a real turning point in Turkey's foreign policy. According to Crook, “If Turkey is really seeking to turn to Russia, then it will surely be of great strategic importance. It will mean the disappearance of the last real stronghold of US dominance in the Middle East, as well as the collapse of the NATO-formed ring around Russia”⁴³.

Stressing that Turkey and the US have been strategic allies within NATO for 60 years, Erdogan warned: “If Washington does not stop showing a one-sided and disrespectful attitude towards Turkey, then we will start looking for new friends and allies”⁴⁴.

⁴² **Demirdas A.**, Should Turkey be Kicked out of NATO?, *Jerusalem Post*, 31.07.2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Should-Turkey-be-kicked-out-of-NATO-597323>; **Kelleher C.**, Missile Defense, Extended Deterrence, and Nonproliferation in the 21st Century, *Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, School of Public Policy*, 2017, pp. 9-22.

⁴³ **Kruk A.**, Erdogan between Russia and the United States. What will happen to the idea of neo-Ottomanism, 11.08.2016, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/global-processes/Erdogan-mezhdu-Rossiei-i-SShA-Chto-budet-s-ideei-neosmanizma-18309> (in Russian).

⁴⁴ **Erdogan T. R.**, Erdogan: How Turkey Sees the Crisis With the U.S., *New York Times*, 10.08.2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/opinion/turkey-erdogan-trump-crisis-sanctions.html>.

Prerequisites and Prospects for the Development of Turkish-Russian Cooperation

Russia and Turkey are united both by their shared geographical position in the hubs of Europe and Asia and by the complex stages of development. At the same time, the geopolitical component, in particular the regional rivalry, has been and is an integral part of the Russian-Turkish interaction at all stages of the development of bilateral relations. The evolution of bilateral relations is most evident in regions where both Russia and Turkey have historically formed interests. After a seven-month crisis in Russian-Turkish relations following the Russian Su-24 shot down in November 2015, the process of normalization of relations began due to the impact of the complex geopolitical and economic situation in two countries. The failed attempt of the coup in Turkey in July 2016 also contributed to the rapprochement of Turkish-Russian relations. It received a significant response not only within the state but also internationally. Unlike the West, which condemned the harsh actions of the Turkish authorities inside the country⁴⁵, Russia has publicly supported Erdogan⁴⁶. As a result, after a failed coup attempt in Turkey, Erdogan made his first visit, not to one of NATO's allies, but to Russia, with whom relations were still far from friendly.

In particular, on August 9, 2016, after the crisis in bilateral relations, the first meeting of the Presidents of Russia and Turkey took place in St. Petersburg, during which Putin and Erdogan affirmed their readiness to restore cooperation in all areas, to bring the Russian-Turkish relations to pre-crisis levels and to look for compromises on

⁴⁵ **Bodkin H., Millward D., Ensor J., Rothwell J.**, Turkey coup attempt: World leaders warn President Erdogan not to use uprising as excuse for crackdown as more than 6,000 arrested, *The Telegraph*, 18.07.2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/17/turkey-coup-plot-president-erdogan-rounds-up-thousands-of-soldie/>.

⁴⁶ **Çelikpala M., Erşen E.**, Turkey's Black Sea Predicament: Challenging or Accommodating Russia?, *PERCEPTIONS*, 2018, **23**, 2, 72-92; **Özertem S. H.**, Turkey and Russia: A Fragile Friendship, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 2017, **15**, 4, 121-134.

the Syrian issue⁴⁷. This caused serious concern in the West, as, after the military coup attempt, the President of Turkey was negotiating with his Russian counterpart, rather than his NATO allies⁴⁸.

Efforts to normalize political relations between Moscow and Ankara were a major impetus for the parties to strengthen their cooperation in trade, economy, energy, gas and nuclear sectors having been frozen. Practical steps have been taken on the construction of the “Turkish Stream” pipeline and “Akkuyu” Nuclear Power Plant. Thus, on November 19, 2018, in Istanbul, the President of Russia and the President of Turkey announced the completion of the first part of underwater section of the “Turkish Stream” gas pipeline linking Russia to the European shores⁴⁹ (the intergovernmental agreement on its construction was signed in October 2016⁵⁰). Through this project, Turkey promoted Russia's long-term strategy to be Europe's major gas supplier, meanwhile reducing the importance of Ukraine as a transit corridor. Thus, in addition to the shipping routes through Ukraine and the Baltic Sea, the third - Russian gas corridor is being created, which faces a continuous confrontation of the US.

One of the key components of the Turkish-Russian cooperation is Russia-led project to build Turkey's first “Akkuyu” Nuclear Power Plant. Within the project, worth of US \$ 20 billion, it is expected to build a 1,200 MW nuclear power plant with four reactors, the first of which will be put into use in 2023. In 2018, the President of Russia and the President of Turkey participated in a teleconference

⁴⁷ **Koru S.**, The Resiliency of Turkey-Russia Relations, *Foreign Policy Research Institute, Black Sea Strategy Papers*, 2018, p. 16; **Rüma İ., Çelikpala M.**, Russian and Turkish Foreign Policy Activism in the Syrian Theater, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 2019, **16**, 62, p. 70.

⁴⁸ **MacFarquhar N.**, Russia and Turkey Vow to Repair Ties as West Watches Nervously, *The New York Times*, 09.08.2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/10/world/europe/putin-erdogan-russia-turkey.html>.

⁴⁹ **Pierini M.**, Russia's Gas Strategy Gets Help From Turkey, *Carnegie Europe*, 03.12.2018, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/77855>.

⁵⁰ **Ediger Ş. V., Durmaz D.**, Energy in Turkey and Russia's Roller-Coaster Relationship, *Insight Turkey*, 2017, **19**, 1, p. 151.

inauguration ceremony of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant in Turkey⁵¹.

Overcoming the Turkish-Russian crisis also had a positive impact on the development of tourism. According to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the number of Russian citizens visiting Turkey in 2018 was about 6 million, more than in 2017 by 25.4% (4.7 million)⁵². The volume of trade turnover between Turkey and Russia has also been steadily declining due to the Turkish-Russian crisis. In 2016, trade turnover between the two countries decreased by 32.1% reaching to US \$ 15.5 billion, of which export increased by 29% (US \$ 13.4 billion), import by 47% (US \$ 2.2 billion)⁵³. In 2018, the volume of trade turnover between Turkey and Russia amounted to US \$ 25.5 billion, of which Russian exports US \$ 21.3 billion, imports from Turkey US \$ 4.2 billion⁵⁴.

Despite the dynamics of Turkish-Russian trade turnover, the leaders of the two countries want to increase the volume to US \$100 billion, as stated by President Erdogan on August 27, 2019, at the opening ceremony of MAKS-2019 International Aviation and Space Show held at Zhukovsky International Airport⁵⁵.

The efforts of the two countries' leaders to overcome geopolitical differences also reflected on the development of cooperation in military-political field. By the end of 2016, Russia and Turkey began cooperating within the process of monitoring the

⁵¹ **Masumova R. N.**, Russia and Turkey: Resetting Economic Partnership, *PERCEPTIONS*, 2018, **23**, 2, 33-50; Russia starts building Turkey's first nuclear power plant, *World Nuclear News*, 03.04.2018, <http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NN-Russia-starts-building-Turkeys-first-nuclear-power-plant-03041801.html>.

⁵² **Sitdikov R.**, Interstate relations between Russia and Turkey, 14.02.2019, <https://ria.ru/20190214/1550722597.html> (in Russian).

⁵³ Russian-Turkish economic relations. Dossier, 02.04.2018, <https://tass.ru/info/5088157> (in Russian).

⁵⁴ **Klimentyev M.**, Interstate relations between Russia and Turkey, 29.06.2019, <https://ria.ru/20190629/1555928137.html> (in Russian); **Özel S., Uçar G.**, The Economics of Turkey-Russia Relations, *Edam: Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, Foreign Policy & Security*, 2019/10, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Turkey aims to boost trade with Russia to \$100bn, 28.08.2019, <https://www.rt.com/business/467449-russia-turkey-trade-turnover/>.

cessation of hostilities in Syria. In January 2017, the Russian air forces, along with the Turkish air forces, began to strike at the positions of terrorist groups in Syria⁵⁶. This was followed by Turkey's intention to acquire the Russian S-400 defense systems. In December 2017, Turkey and Russia signed an agreement to acquire Russian S-400 anti-aircraft defense systems, which not only caused a serious crisis in Turkey's relations with the US and NATO, but also brought Turkish-American relations to the lowest level ever in the history.

According to Hansberry, restoring relations with Turkey has helped Russia to achieve at least two goals. First, Russian-Turkish cooperation contributed to the damage of NATO's reputation with which Russia has strained relations, and the existence of which has caused serious concerns in Moscow since the end of the Cold War. Second, and not least, this cooperation allowed Russia to use the Turkish straits without any constraint⁵⁷.

Notwithstanding US pressure, not only did Erdogan decline a deal to acquire Russian air defense systems (the second batch of which was shipped to Turkey in September 2019)⁵⁸, but he also expressed a desire to deepen cooperation with Russia in the military-technical field, including military aviation. According to the Russian and Western media, using Washington's decision to remove Turkey from the F-35 fighter program, Russia has offered Ankara to acquire the Su-35 fighter jets as a replacement for the lost F-35⁵⁹. In

⁵⁶ Chief of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the RF, Colonel-General Sergei Rudskoy held a briefing for the media, 18.01.2017, https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12108689@egNews (in Russian); **Grove T.**, Russian and Turkish Jets Strike Islamic State Positions in Northern Syria, *The Wall Street Journal*, 18.01.2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-and-turkish-jets-strike-islamic-state-positions-in-northern-syria-1484764790>.

⁵⁷ **Hansbury P.**, Is Turkey's turn from NATO to Russia possible, *Kommentarii*, no. 30, 13.09.2019, <http://minskdialogue.by/research/opinions/vozmozhen-li-povorot-turteii-ot-nato-k-rossii> (in Russian).

⁵⁸ **Gumrukcu T.**, Turkey says delivery of second S-400 battery complete, *Reuters*, 15.09.2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-defense-russia/turkey-says-delivery-of-second-s-400-battery-complete-idUSKBN1W00AQ>.

⁵⁹ **Vladimirov V.**, Moscow offers Ankara Su-35 instead of F-35, 19.07.2019, <https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/experts-on-possible-sale-of-su-35-to->

particular, during the August 2019 meeting in Moscow, Putin and Erdogan discussed not only the issue of the Russian SU-35 fighters, but also the possibility of working jointly on the new SU-57s⁶⁰.

The above mentioned projects as well as the S-400 missile deal between Turkey and Russia prove that Moscow uses effectively the US-Turkey tensions and Ankara's relative diplomatic isolation.

The Syrian Crisis at the Core of Russia-Turkey-US Conflict of Interests

The Syrian crisis, initially seen as a recurrent uprising against the authoritarian leader within the Arab Spring, has over time turned into a brutal mediated war, involving many regional and world powers. In particular, in September 2014, the US-led coalition launched air strikes on IS positions and infrastructures in support of the Kurdish land forces⁶¹. On September 30, 2015, Russia was drawn into the conflict⁶². The situation has become extremely confusing and explosive after massive bombardment of the Syrian opposition and IS positions by the Russian air forces.

After Russia's intervention, the ratio of forces on the Syrian front changed. Syrian government troops managed to regain control of Aleppo and other major Islamist-occupied cities⁶³. At the same time,

turkey/5006962.html (in Russian), **Episkopos M.**, Could Turkey Lose the F-35 Stealth Fighter and Pass on Russia's Su-57?, *The National Interest*, 17.09.2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/could-turkey-lose-f-35-stealth-fighter-and-pass-russias-su-57-81321>.

⁶⁰ **Tétrault-Farber G.**, Erdogan says Turkey wants to continue defense cooperation with Russia, *Reuters*, 27.08.2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-turkey-planes/erdogan-says-turkey-wants-to-continue-defense-cooperation-with-russia-idUSKCN1VH1QS>.

⁶¹ **Ford M. C.**, Syria: Can International Law Cope? Workshop Report, *International Law Studies*, 2016, **92**, 340-352.

⁶² **Coşkun B.B.**, Turkey's Relations with Russia after the Failed Coup: A Friend in Need of a Friend Indeed?, *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 2019, **9**, 1, 36-52;

Mamedov R., Lukyanov G., Russia and Turkey: Approaches to Regional Security in the Middle East, *PERCEPTIONS*, 2018, **23**, 2, 51-71.

⁶³ **Akhmedov V. M.**, Syrian uprising: history, politics, ideology, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2018, s. 138 (in Russian).

the YPG force with the support of the US liberated Raqqa and northeast Syria⁶⁴. Only the Syrian province of Idlib remains under the control of IS. These achievements have strengthened Assad's positions, which previously seemed quite shaky.

Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict caused serious disagreements in the Turkish-Russian relations. In November 2015, after the Turkish bomber struck a Russian bomber, the relations between the two countries became extremely strained. However, after a 7-month crisis, as a result of the rapprochement with Russia, Turkey was able to return to the Syrian battlefield and carry out the “Shield of Euphrates” and “Olive Branch” operations⁶⁵, as well as to participate with Russia and Iran in the Astana process aimed at the resolution of the Syrian conflict, since January 2017⁶⁶.

Thus, the “Astana Process” gradually became the main format of discussions on the post-war future of Syria. It united the three most important players in this region who have always been hostile for the last three centuries. Of course, the actors involved in the Syrian crisis are not limited to these countries, but it is clear that in recent years this trio has become the most influential in this issue. The main principle of discussions within this format (instigated by Iran and Russia) is to preserve Syria's territorial integrity and to achieve an immediate end to the war.

For its part, Ankara was seriously concerned about the existence of a Kurdish autonomous region stretching along the border with Turkey. A military operation called “Peace Spring”, launched by Turkey on October 9, 2019 in the North-East of Syria was aimed at

⁶⁴ **Borovkova M. I.**, The struggle of the United States against the “Islamic State” in Syria during the Trump administration: 2017 - 2019, *Mirovaya politika*, 2019, 2, 12-21, (in Russian).

⁶⁵ **Yeşiltaş M., Seren M., Özçelik N.**, Operation Euphrates Shield Implementation and Lessons Learned, *SETA: Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research*, İstanbul, 2017, pp. 1-57; **Kasapoğlu C., Ülgen S.**, Operation Olive Branch: A Political–Military Assessment, *Edam: Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, Foreign Policy & Security*, 2018/2, pp 1-16.

⁶⁶ **Mezra K., Varvelli A.**, MENA Region: A Great Power Competition, ISPI and Atlantic Council, 2019, pp. 56-57.

neutralizing this threat. Erdogan has been stating that the purpose of the “Peace Spring” operation was to “eliminate the terror corridor on Turkey's Southern border, neutralize Kurdish militants and Islamic State detachments, create a security zone and provide conditions for return of Syrian refugees”⁶⁷.

The international community, however, did not take seriously Turkey's reasoning regarding the Kurdish threat. When Turkish troops, accompanied by the “Syrian National Army” formed by Ankara, were moving to Tel Abiad and Ras ul-Ain, the UN, all 28 EU members, the Arab League, including Palestine, African countries, the Vatican, the US, Russia, Iran, China, as well as Israel unanimously condemned Turkey for invasive actions⁶⁸. It is noteworthy that the Turkish invasion led to the old rivals Israel and Palestine appear in the camp of those condemning.

The recent invasion of Turkish troops in Syria caused new tensions in the US-Turkey relations. US President Donald Trump has threatened Turkey on a social network that it would destroy Turkey's economy if the latter continues its attack against the US-allied Kurds in northeastern Syria, and the Pentagon announced it had closed airspace for the Turkish warplanes in north-eastern Syria⁶⁹. Despite the threats, posed by the US, the Turkish military operation was in fact

⁶⁷ **Stickings T.**, Recep Tayyip Erdogan warns that he will start wiping out Kurdish 'terrorists' in new assault tomorrow and boasts about 'neutralising' 765 fighters, 21.10.2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7595479/Turkey-resume-onslaught-against-Kurdish-fighters-Erdogan-says.html>; **Smith S.**, Turkey launches military operation in northeast Syria after U.S. withdraws, 10.10.2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/turkey-launches-operation-syria-3-days-after-trump-announces-u-n1063576>.

⁶⁸ **Kaplan Y.**, Turkey: the spring of peace, *Yeni Şafak*, 11.10.2019, <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/yusufkaplan/turkey-the-spring-of-peace-2047196>; World leaders unite in condemnation of Turkey's Syria operation, 11.10.2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/world-leaders-unite-condemnation-turkey-s-syria-operation-n1064591>.

⁶⁹ **Gaouette N.**, As Trump threatens to destroy Turkey's economy and Kurds die, many wonder if penalties will have teeth, *CNN*, 15.10.2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/14/politics/trump-turkey-sanctions-skepticism/index.html>; Turkey-Syria border: Trump threatens to 'obliterate' Turkish economy, *BBC*, 08.10.2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49966216>.

made possible when the Pentagon started to withdraw a large number of US forces from the Kurdish-controlled part of Syria, under the order issued by the US President Donald Trump.

Turkey's military operations in Syria have given Ankara a new opportunity to maneuver and gain dividends from the conflicting interests of Russia and the US in the region. On the one hand, on October 17, 2019, Turkey agreed to the US Vice President Mike Pence's proposal to establish a 120-hour ceasefire in Northern Syria, enabling the Kurdish groups by the help of the US to withdraw within five days from the bordering regions, designated by Turkey as a "security zone"⁷⁰. On the other hand, Erdogan immediately responded to Putin's invitation and arrived in Sochi on October 22.

As a result of the talks between the Presidents of Russia and Turkey, according to Vladimir Putin, the parties were able to make fateful decisions on the situation in Syria. In particular, the two countries signed a Russian-Turkish memorandum on Syria, the key points of which are:

1. The countries reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining Syria's political unity and territorial integrity as well as Turkey's national security.
2. The Presidents emphasized their determination to fight all forms and manifestations of terrorism and to eliminate the agenda of separatism in Syria.
3. Within this framework, the established status quo of the Operation Peace Spring area, covering Tell Abyad and Ras al Ayn with a depth of 32 kilometers from the border, will be maintained.
4. The two parties affirmed the importance of the Adana Agreement. Russia would, under the current circumstances,

⁷⁰ **Fabian J., Hacaoglu S.**, Turkey, U.S. Agree to Brief Cease-Fire to Allow Kurdish Retreat, *Bloomberg*, 18.10.2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-17/turkey-agrees-to-120-hour-cease-fire-in-syria-pence-says>.

facilitate the application of the provisions of the Adana Agreement.

5. Starting from 12.00 noon on 23 October, Russian military police and Syrian border guards will enter the Syrian border territory outside the Operation Peace Spring area to facilitate the removal of the YPG in the area with a depth of 30 kilometers from the border, which should be finalized within 150 hours. Hereafter, joint Russian–Turkish patrols will start to the west and east of the Operation Peace Spring area to a depth of 10 kilometers from the border, excluding Qamishli city.
6. The YPG will be removed from both Manbij and Tal Rifat.
7. Both parties would take measures to prevent the penetration of the elements of terrorism.
8. A joint effort would be made to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of refugees.
9. An agreement was reached to establish a joint monitoring and control mechanism to oversee and coordinate the implementation of this memorandum.
10. Turkey and Russia will continue efforts to find lasting political solution to Syrian conflict within Astana format and to support the work of Constitutional Commission.⁷¹

This deal was beneficial to almost all parties involved. Ankara, without a large-scale war with the Kurds, got what it wanted along the buffer zone, Damascus restored its sovereignty in the north-east of Syria without a war with “Syrian Kurdistan”, Moscow got what it wanted (Americans were leaving Syria, and it is likely that only a small troop of US troops will remain), and the US President Donald

⁷¹ **Hodge N.**, Putin and Erdogan just did a deal on Syria. The US is the biggest loser, *CNN*, 23.10.2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/22/middleeast/putin-erdogan-syria-deal-hodge-analysis-intl/index.html>; **Khimshashvili P.**, Putin and Erdogan agreed on Syria, 22.10.2019, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/22/10/2019/5daf46a19a7947e2eade81a6> (in Russian).

Trump got what he wanted; to stop the US involvement in at least one of the protracted wars.

The Kurds were the only losers in this great geopolitical game. Being at the forefront of the war against the Islamic State for more than four years, defeating this terrorist group and establishing a semi-autonomous administration in the territories liberated from the Islamic State, they subsequently lost both their territories and their autonomy. The US left them, Turkey was bombing them, Russia considered them simply a pawn on the geopolitical chessboard⁷².

The Sochi Agreement was surely a huge success for Russia. After the withdrawal of the American troops from Syria, Russia became a major military force and a leading political player in the Syrian conflict. The agreement confirmed that Moscow was able to impose its decisions on Turkey and the Syrian leadership (it did not participate in the talks), on the Kurds (they controlled one-third of Syria's territory in early October and enjoyed US support), as well as on its ally Iran. With the signing of the Sochi Agreement, the Syrian conflict has entered a new phase where the US is no longer there, with the Kurds having lost their former importance along with their political and military structures, and the Turks who had to “quench their appetite”.

Conclusion

1. The US-Turkey long-term strategic relations have undergone significant changes in the last ten years. Turkey's new foreign policy guidelines since the AKP came to power, as well as a new Middle East policy in the context of US counterterrorism, have caused disagreements between the two allies, which have been exacerbated by the “Arab Spring” and the Syrian crisis.

⁷² **Johny S.**, Putin takes centre stage in Syria, *The Hindu*, 25.10.2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/putin-takes-centre-stage-in-syria/article29789785.ece>.

2. The deep crisis between Ankara and Washington caused by the Kurdish issue, the factor of Fethullah Gülen, the acquisition of Russian S-400 air defense systems and a number of other issues not only had a negative impact on the strategic relations and geopolitical interests of the two countries, but also on Turkey-NATO relations, creating an atmosphere of mutual distrust among Turkey-US-NATO leadership.
3. The roots of the crisis between the two countries are much deeper than political and economic contradictions. Turkey wants the US to recognize its status as a regional power and to take into account its interests in the Middle East. But so far, the Americans have not responded to any of these expectations, whether it is the Kurdish issue or the settlement of the Syrian conflict.
4. The Syrian conflict has clearly shown the disagreements between the two NATO allies. The US efforts to create and support the autonomous Kurdish union in Syria, which Turkey sees as a real threat to national security, are forcing Ankara to turn to Moscow, which, according to Erdogan, is more careful to Turkey's challenges. In addition, for Erdogan, Putin is a more reliable partner than Trump or any other NATO member country.
5. Although in recent years the perspectives of Turkey's withdrawal from NATO have been frequently discussed in the West due to Turkey's foreign and domestic policy, nevertheless, Turkey's withdrawal from NATO in the foreseeable future is not favorable for either party. The Turkish leadership is well aware that in the event of its withdrawal from the West, the country will not only be deprived of NATO's military and political support, but will also find itself in Russia's sphere of influence, deprived of the opportunity to maneuver and pursue its own policy. For its part, Turkey is of key importance to NATO, due to its geographical position as

- well as the number and combat readiness of its military alliance.
6. Overcoming the Turkish-Russian crisis has been a serious impetus for the development of multilateral bilateral relations, creating also new prospects in the military-technical field. Cooperation in the politics, trade, economic, energy, nuclear and other spheres began to develop rapidly, and military-technical relations entered a new phase (the S-400 system deal and the acquisition of Russian SU-35 fighters by Turkey).
 7. Turkey's policy in the Syrian conflict and its attempts to maneuver between Russia and the US in this context make clear the interests and concerns of Turkey. Ankara was seriously concerned about the existence of a Kurdish autonomous region stretching along the country's border, which threatens its security. Turkey insisted that a "security zone" of 30-40 km from the border should be created here. Moreover, it is here that Turkey seeks to resettle a majority of nearly three million Syrian refugees who have fled to its territory.
 8. It is clear that the purpose of the security zone is not only to rule out the creation of another Kurdish autonomy near the Turkish border with all its further consequences (which failed in the Northern Iraq), but it is also an attempt to change the demographic image of the region. If the planned resettlement takes place, there will be predominantly Sunni Arab refugees along Turkey's borders, who are far more loyal and controllable for Ankara than the Kurds.
 9. Involving a 5,000-strong military contingent in the conflict by the Sochi Agreement, Moscow (along with Tehran) strengthened the shattered Syrian regime by restoring Damascus's power to fight insurgents in the country. This, in turn, ensured the security of the Russian bases in Syria, reinforcing its military and diplomatic significance in the region.

10. With regard to the diplomacy, Russia has expanded its partnership with Iran, transformed tensions with Turkey into actively developing relations and have become an important regional player. Moreover, Russia finally forced the US to conduct large-scale talks on regional issues while the US and other Western powers punished the Kremlin for “annexing Crimea” and other Moscow’s actions in Europe.