

Russia and Turkey

From Sacred Wars to Profane Interests



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This paper discusses and analyzes, in a military and strategic context, the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia, the expected implications of these relations, and their impact on a range of international and regional issues, including Syria, the Caucasus, Libya, Crimea, and Ukraine. The paper begins with a historical introduction to understand the nature and bounds of the Turkish-Russian bilateral relations.

We look at the relations that both countries maintain with regard to other regional causes. In an analytical and descriptive method, we highlight the importance of the strategic competition, their objectives in each cause, and the policies, means, and strategies that Moscow and Ankara have followed to foresee the future of bilateral relations in terms of the interactions of this conflict and the balance of regional and international power:

- The Russian/Ottoman military conflict
- The year after the breakdown of the two empires and the principles of geopolitical rivalry
- The relations during the Cold War and its geopolitical impact
- Turkey and the Russian Federation, their rapprochement and divergence.
- Erdogan and Putin, concerns of history and issues of geopolitical discord.
- The most important geopolitical differences in Erdogan-Putin's strategy:
- The Syrian issue and the Putin-Erdogan strategy.
- The Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.
- Crimea and eastern Ukraine are a renewed historical conflict:
 - ◊ Putin and his strategies to dominate the Crimea.
 - ◊ Erdogan and his alignment behind the Western position.
- Russian-Turkish intervention in the Libyan war.

Introduction

Hostility and tension have been dominating the Turkish-Russian bilateral relations since the establishment of the “Tsardom of Russia” and the “Ottoman Sultanate” for more than 400 years. The wars, whether military or political, have not subsided between Turkey and its rival Russia over the region of Asia Minor and Eastern Europe. Their relation began in 1492, when the Moscow Emirate and the Ottoman Sultanate had the first diplomatic contact. Then, the two parties have entered into conflicts and wars that have established relations based on suspicion and distrust, instead of cooperation and reconciliation.

To understand the relation between the two countries, it should be noted that this conflict is a reflection of the defeats that the Ottoman Sultanate suffered from during 13 huge wars. It created grudges, vengeance, deep mutual wounds, generating a negative discourse and resulted in continuous struggles for hegemony and influence between the Sultanate and the Tsardom. As such, their relation was based on a state of hostility that reated the competition, which was not in the Turkish interests in general.

A history reader of this relationship can note that Russia, like Turkey, a modern country, founded by Michael Romanov (1596-1645), who was the first to hold the title “Caesar,” named after the Byzantine ruler whose state collapsed after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans. The Romanov dynasty ruled until the Communist revolution in 1917, but the real developer of this dynasty was Peter the Great (1672-1725), who worked to build Russia according to the European style, and his most important achievement was the establishment of the city of Saint Petersburg, the new capital of his state. During his reign, Russia became the core of the expansionist empire in Siberia, the Pacific, towards Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Black Sea.

In the early period of the growth of Russian power during the 15th and 16th century, Ottoman officials did not pay much attention to Russia. Hence, they were unable to obtain sufficient information about it, when things began to change in the 17th century and the

Russians arrived on the shores the Black Sea and took control of large parts of the Caucasus.

Ottomans define Russia as an expansionist force, working to dominate a large area from the Black Sea to the Caucasus, from the Balkans to Eastern Europe, up to the Mediterranean Sea in an attempt to reach "warm waters." Likewise, the Russians see in the Ottoman Sultanate an expansionist and tyrannical state, and according to the Russian discourse, it is necessary to save Constantinople and return it to its true Christian roots, control the straits.

Moreover, this enmity is driven by a vengeful and religious fuel, which the two parties share by ruminating about it and its fiery woes from five centuries of conflicts during the Tsarism and the Sultanate. As a result of the major political fluctuations that dominated the relationship between the two countries, Turkey's turbulent policy with the Atlantic countries made the regional security and the issues of energy and trade on Russia's agenda, which sees Turkey as a driving force to achieve balance with Europe.

Nevertheless, Turkey, which is about to complete the seventy years of agreement with the US, is an integral part of the security umbrella of the Euro-Atlantic world, its allies saw it as a pivotal nation in NATO. Moreover, because of the great difference of views on solving regional issues between Turkey, America, and the European Union, especially the issues of the Black Sea, Iraq, Syria, and the Mediterranean, and due to Turkey's foreign policy and its independence in making decisions on these issues, it brought them face to face with Russia. However, the unstable regional balances resulted in an uncertain direction to their bilateral relationship, especially in the last 30 years. The two parties' different views on regional issues, fueled by their historical rivalry, weakened their confidence in each other, and thus created an inability to take a joint decision to confront issues at the regional and international level.

Russian/Ottoman Military Conflicts

Turkish-Russian relations from the 16th century until the First World War were characterized by hostility and tension, due to the ambitions of the Russian tsars to expand south to reach warm waters, where the Ottoman Empire made the Black Sea an Ottoman lake. Then, the Russian tsars tried to break the traditional policy of isolation and to expand westward to control the Baltic Sea and south over the Black Sea, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits, and then reaching warm waters. As a result of all that, a series of major wars between the two countries that can be summarized as follows:

First war (1568-1570)

It was an Ottoman attempt to control Astrakhan on the Volga River, where Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire. The aim of the latter was to maintain hegemony over the Black Sea, which became an Ottoman lake (1) and over the northern states, such as the Crimean Khanate, which was strategically located under the Ottoman protection. (2)

Second War (1571-1574)

In this war, the Ottoman army and the Crimean army in 1571 disgracefully defeated the Russians, the Crimean Tatar army, loyal to the Ottomans, destroyed the southwestern lands of Russia, reached Moscow and burned the villages of the capital. Then a tax was imposed on Russia to pay to the Crimea. Dulat Karay, the ruler of Crimea, reiterated his attack against Russia, but he was defeated in the battle of Molodi in 1572. This defeat weakened the Crimean Khanate and allowed Russia to expand towards the southeast. (3)

Third War (1676 - 1681)

In the seventeenth century, the Cossacks, who were considered Russian nationals, entered into constant clashes with the Turks and Tatars (4) due to the conflict between the two forces over Ukraine. Sultan Mehmed IV managed to seize the Chigirin Castle in Ukraine and repeated his military expedition that resulted in signing the Bahce Sarayi agreement on January 3, 1681.

However, it was the first official agreement between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, in which Ukraine was divided between them, and a peace period of 20 years took place between the two parties. The Dnieper River was supposed to be the border between Russia and Turkey, and this war ended with the victory of the Ottomans. (5)

Fourth War (1686-1700)

Russia waged the war jointly with Austria, Poland, Lithuania, and Venice. But, it was defeated in its military expeditions on the Crimea from 1687-1689. However, it undertook the Azov expeditions in 1695-1696 (6) and succeeded in them. Moreover, as a preparation for the war of the Swedish Empire, Russia signed the Treaty of Farluja with the Ottoman Empire that ended the war. Russian Tsar Peter I managed through the tremendous military power that he mustered to control the Azov fortress, overlooking the Don River during the years 1695 and 1696. (7)

Tsarist Russia back then could not achieve its goals due to the deterrence it was facing from the Ottomans, who continued to incursion into eastern and central Europe. Nevertheless, the prolonged war and the Russians' achievement in a number of victories over the Ottoman Empire stirred both England and the Netherlands, who feared for their commercial and naval interests in the Black Sea. Hence, Lord Paget, the English ambassador to Istanbul, and Coller, the Dutch ambassador, intervened in mediation between the warring parties, and resulted in the signing of a two-year truce between the Ottomans and the Russians on 24 January 1699, followed by the signing of the Treaty of Karl Ovitiz on 26 January 1699. In this Treaty, the Ottoman Empire ceded some of its European provinces to the Austrians and the Venetians in exchange to neutralizing them in the Ottoman-Russian conflict. Pursuant to all these diplomatic arrangements, Russia dominated the city of Azov and the surrounding areas (8).

Fifth War 1710-1711

It was waged when the Russians entered the Ottoman lands in pursuit of King Charles XII of Sweden after his defeat. However, it was just an excuse to regain the lands that Russians won in the Treaty of Farluja. The war ended with the Treaty of Pruth by allowing the

Russian king and his besieged army to return in exchange for leaving the lands that he won from the Treaty of Farluja.

In 1711, Turkey succeeded in forcing the Tsar to return the Azov region to Turkey after he failed in his efforts to end the Turkish control over the Balkans, losing the great battle in 1710 on the banks of the Pruth River that currently separates Moldova and Romania. (9) Under the Treaty of Pruth signed on July 21, 1711, the Ottoman Empire obtained the right to regain the Azov and the surrounding area with the destruction of all the Russian fortresses that were established in it. Russia also forfeited its right to enter its ships to that sea. (10)

Sixth War 1735-1739

In 1735, the Russian and Austrian empires allied, and a war broke out between the two allies on one side and Turkey on the other, where Russia succeeded in controlling Moldavia, which was under Turkish control. (11) However, Russia waged this war because of the repeated attacks of the Crimean on the Cossacks in Ukraine. Russia entered the Crimea in 1736, but they were forced to retreat due to lack of supplies. In 1737, Austria participated in the war against the Ottoman Empire, which ended with the Treaty of Belgrade on September 18, 1739 (12) in which was agreed that both Russia and Austria ceded all their territorial gains on Ottoman lands and that Russia would not build again warships in Sea of Azov. (13)

Seventh War 1768-1774

The reason of it was Russia's invasion and victory in Poland, besides the destruction of the entire Ottoman fleet in the port of Cesme in Izmir in 1770, the seizure of entire Crimea and its separation from the Ottoman Empire, which was forced to sign a truce with the Russians in 1772. (14)

Nevertheless, in the second half of the 18th century, Empress Catherine stood out and her reign was marked by the intensification of Russian-Ottoman conflict in 1768. With a religious motive, Russians protected the Ottoman Orthodox in the Levant, Anatolia and

the Balkans for interrelated reasons and divergent purposes, where the Russian Empire seeks to reach warm waters and tries to control Istanbul and the Ottoman straits.

In 1768, the Ottoman Sultan asked the Empress of Russia, Catherine II, to stop interfering in the internal affairs of Bologna, and thus, the two countries fought a six-year war between 1768 and 1774, in which Russia achieved great victories and finally seized Crimea, the Sea of Azov and the Bessarabia region. At the end of the war, Russia forced the Ottomans in 1777 to sign the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainarge on July 10, 1774(15), which was named after a small town currently located in Bulgaria. However, one of the most prominent items of the treaty was Turkey's recognition of the independence of Crimea from Turkey and the borders of the Russian Empire to reach the Boh River in Ukraine today. Nevertheless, Russia's most important gain was the recognition of its right to maintain a permanent naval fleet in the Black Sea. Also, to allow free commercial passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and to protect the Orthodox Church in the East and Jerusalem. (16)

However, a history reader can tell that the Kutchuk Kainarge agreement retains the pain of ten years of fierce war that led, on the religious dimension, to the Russian Orthodox tutelage over the Christians of the Levant and the Middle East and established its presence in the warm waters. Moreover, Russia got in a much stronger position than before, while the Ottoman Empire faced many setbacks on several fronts. After that, Russian Empress Catherine announced the final annexation of the Crimea to Russia.

Eighth War 1787-1792

War broke out between the two parties in 1787 in which the Austrian Empire sided with Russia. The Russian forces led by General Suvorov managed to control the Dniester and Danube rivers. Further, his subsequent victories forced Turkey to conclude the Treaty of Jassy on January 9, 1792, recognizing Russia's annexation of the Crimea, Bessarabia, Kuban River, and the territories between the Bug and the Dniester rivers, where the last river to be a separating border between the two countries. Accordingly, the Ottoman Sultanate ceded the entire western coast to Ukraine on the Black Sea. (17)

As such, the Jassy Treaty wrapped the last chapter of the Russian/Ottoman dispute over the Black Sea in the 18th century. The dispute that started beginning of the 18th century with absolute Ottoman power and hegemony over the sea. By end of the 18th century, situation was reversed, where Russia had an absolute dominance over the Black Sea. With that victory, doors widely opened to the continued Russian interference in Ottoman internal affairs, which constituted an ongoing pretext for a series of bloody wars that the two parties witnessed throughout the 19th century until the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire. (18)

Ninth War 1806-1812

In 1811, while Russia was preparing for a grinding war against Napoleon's forces, the prominent Russian General Kutuzov launched a surprising and successful attack on the Turkish front. In 1811 and 1812, General Kutuzov inflicted a decisive defeat on the Turkish army that forced the Ottoman Sultanate to conclude the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812 under which Turkey ceded the entire region of Bessarabia to Russia. (19)

Moreover, after Russia secured its dominance over the entire northern coast of the Black Sea, it aimed in its subsequent wars to consolidate its influence in the Balkans, reducing Turkey's influence, controlling the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus and expanding into the Balkans. (20)

Tenth War 1828-1829

It was waged over the Ottomans' anger against the Russians for their participation in the Navarine (21) naval battle, in which the Ottoman, Algerian, and Egyptian fleets were destroyed and ended with a peace agreement in 1829. During the war between the two parties in 1828 and 1829, Russia took control of Bulgaria and the Caucasus and reached the northwestern of Anatolia. Hence, Turkey rushed to sign a peace treaty, where they concluded the Treaty of Edirne in 1829 (22). Accordingly, Russia guaranteed control over the western coast as well as the Black Sea. Moreover, Turkey recognized Russian sovereignty over Georgia and part of present Armenia. (23)

Eleventh War 1853-1856

After Orthodox Russia became a European competing power, it aimed to become the protector of the Orthodox. It achieved it after defeating the Ottoman Empire in the seventh war 1768-1774. Accordingly, Treaty Kutchuk Kainarge was concluded in 1774. However, the Russian/French rivalry turned in 1850 into a dispute between the Catholic and the Orthodox clergy in Palestine over the administration of the Holy Places and the right to protect them, where each party alleged its right to protect them (24). However, the real cause of the war was the consolidation of Napoleon's rule in France, especially after the success of his coup and the declaration of his empire in 1852 and his attempt to plunge people into foreign conflicts. He appeared like a protector for Catholics, and thus he obtained the support of the Catholic clergy in France, which facilitated him to rule France with absolute freedom.(25)

As for the Russian side, Tsar Nicholas I saw in the dispute over the holy places an appropriate and acceptable argument to secure Russia's influence and its expansion into the Ottoman Empire by adopting the Orthodox as a means to achieve this goal (26). In this war, called the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire participated in an alliance with France, Britain and Sardinia against Russia, which entered the war as a protector of the Orthodox under Ottoman rule. Russia was defeated, its fleet was destroyed, it lost its control over the Black Sea, the rights of the Orthodox were settled, and the war ended with a peace agreement in Paris in 1856 (27). After 22 years, the second Crimean War broke out, the last and the most prominent war between Russia and the Ottoman Sultanate, which ended with a fierce defeat for the latter.

However, the goal was the independence of the Balkan countries from the Ottoman Empire with the help of the Russians, who wanted to regain what they lost in the Crimean war and to restore their influence to the Black Sea. Furthermore, the war led to the independence of Bulgaria and a great progress for the Serbs (28).

Twelfth War (The Holy War) 1877-1878

Russia waged the war on the Ottoman Empire on April 24, 1877, Russia and its ally Serbia stood by the protesters against the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Bulgaria. The Russians attacked Bulgaria and their forces arrived in the city of Adrianople (Edirne), located on the borders between Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey. In 1878, as usual, Turkey concluded a new treaty as defeated and weak party, known as the Treaty of San Stefano (29). Under the new treaty, Turkey ceded Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro and granted independence to them, while Bosnia and Herzegovina got autonomy. Bulgaria also gained autonomy under Russian protection. It was a treaty imposed by Russia on the Ottoman government on 3 March 1878 in the village of San Stefano (now Yesilkoy) near Istanbul, thus putting an end to the Russian-Ottoman war that began on April 1878 and aimed to end any effective rule of the Ottoman State in the Balkans.

Nevertheless, Britain and Austria did not accept the Treaty of San Stefano, because it did not serve their interests, but rather Russia. Where Russia gained a wide influence in the Balkans and was able to penetrate the Ottoman Empire, besides its control over vital areas in Asia and Europe.

Moreover, the Western empires feared that the Russians would reach warm waters, which got Germany to intervene, where the German Chancellor Bismarck called on the major powers to review the Treaty of San Stefano and to hold another conference in Berlin, which was convened under the leadership of Bismarck on June 13, 1878 (30).

Furthermore, Russia did not participate directly in the Second Balkan War in 1912-1913. However, it played an indirect role in encouraging Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro to join forces, and it made every effort to establish some kind of balance between the allies. As such, the war ended with the Ottoman Empire losing most of its remaining possessions in Europe. (31)

Thirteenth War 1914-1918

It is known as the "First World War", in which Russia aimed to control the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, and the coasts of the Black Sea. While the Ottomans participated in World

War I to regain the lands they lost in the 1877-1878 war and in the 1912-1913 Balkan war in which Russia helped the Serbs to gain their independence from the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire entered the war together with Germany and was aware of the intention of the coalition countries and Russia to divide their territories among themselves, where Russia would control Istanbul and its straits, while France and Britain would control the rest of the country. However, Russia withdrew from the war due to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, which took a stand on the war against the Ottomans. Therefore, after the World War, the reign of both the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire was over, and the Soviet Union and the modern Turkish republic arose. (32)

The dissolution of the two empires and the motives of geopolitical rivalry

In the beginning of the 20th century, the burdens of the conflict between Russia and Turkey remained firmly entrenched in the memory of the successive regimes, as well as in the popular conscience. The presence of Russian military in the Turkish geographical space evokes painful memories in regard with Russian expansion in the Black Sea, the Balkans, the Crimean Island, and the Middle East. However, Ankara viewed this expansion as a traditional threat to its national security, where the rapprochement with Moscow did not alleviate this threat starting in 1920. Therefore, Ankara sought to place itself under the American-European umbrella to put pressure on Russia on several issues. The least of which was the reconsideration of the complex process of demarcating the borders with Armenia, Greece, and Syria, surrounding Turkey geographically and were under the Turkish sovereignty, as well as pushing Russia to stop its allegations on the sea straits.

In a geopolitical approach to the bilateral relations between the two countries, beginnings of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and end of the Tsarist rule by the Bolsheviks, the relations began to improve gradually, and the two countries signed the Mos-

cow Treaty or the "Treaty of Brotherhood". It is a friendship treaty signed between the Turkish National Assembly led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and the Bolshevik Russia led by Vladimir Lenin on 16 March 1921. (33) The Treaty of "Friendship and Neutrality" followed it in 1925 (34), which marked the beginning of early bilateral relations between the two emerging states. Where the main priorities revolved around ensuring territorial integrity, establishing peaceful and stable relations at the political and economic levels, and the desire of the two parties to refrain from causing issues for each party.

Turkey had problems in its relations with Britain over Mosul, with Italy over the security of the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean islands and with France over border disputes with Syria and in particular the Iskenderun region "Hatay". Therefore, the aforementioned treaty was a significant step to the newly emerging Republic of Turkey to build balanced international relations at that time.

It is worth mentioning that the aim of the Soviet government from behind all of this was to prevent the shift of Turkish attention towards the West. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Turkey from reconsidering its relations with Western countries, especially Britain, amid the constant ambitions of Soviets in the Turkish straits and Istanbul from one hand, and the growing Turkish concern about the communist propaganda carried out by the Soviet Trade Offices inside Turkish territory on the other hand. However, the most visible proof of Turkey's rapprochement with the West is its acceptance on June 8, 1932, as a member of the League of Nations, despite Soviet attempts to persuade Turkey not to take that step. (35)

In light of this rapprochement between the two countries, a Soviet delegation, headed by Voroshilov, the Soviet Defense Minister at that time, visited Turkey on 29 October 1933 to participate in the celebrations on the 10th anniversary of the declaration of the Turkish state. "The friendship of our two people is called the tested friendship. This seems to me to be the most appropriate word. This friendship began in the years when our two countries were facing major historical experiences", stated Voroshilov.

“This friendship was tested in the years of armed fight, in the years of the peaceful reconstruction that followed, and the efforts of our people and two governments to maintain peace from all the dangers threatening it, it is a friendship that does not fear tests. He continued, the deep partnership of interests has continued through the years of construction that were full of obstacles, and when we directed our efforts to strengthen and develop our two countries, this was reflected in the economic and political relations between the two people of the Soviet Union and Turkey”. (36)

However, the legacy of hostility remained as a feature of the mutual mistrust between the Turkish Republic and the Republics of the Soviet Union. It reflected negatively on the bilateral political relations, as the differences were exacerbated when the Soviet demanded a review of the status of the straits and the deployment of Soviet military forces in the region, arguing that the Montreux Agreement would be outdated. That agreement came into force on November 9, 1936. It regulated traffic through the straits of the Black Sea for merchant ships in times of peace and war. It contained 29 topics, four annexes, and a protocol. (37)

Based on the Russian threat in the forties of the last century, Turkey strengthened its political, economic, and military relations with the West under the leadership of the United States. The main goal of Ankara in that period was to become an integral member of the West. Moreover, the conflict took an ideological dimension with anti-communism. As such, Turkey was subject to a series of changes in its internal political structure, in line with its foreign policy options starting in May 1950, when the Democratic Party came to power and Modern Turkey moved from the one-party, founded by the first Turkish president Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, to political pluralism after 1945. Accordingly, the first Turkish parliamentary elections were run by several parties, with the emergence of the Democratic Party in 1946, to become a multi-party Government, by the beginning of 1950, with 25 parties on the list. (38) Nevertheless, these series of changes led to a rapprochement with the United States and the Euro-Atlantic military alliances.

Relationships during the Cold War and their geopolitical impact

Turkey's geostrategic importance has gained a geopolitical influence throughout its political and military history. This has negatively affected its relations with Russia, besides its impact regionally and internationally, including what the period from 1945 to 1952 witnessed from the severe deterioration of relations between the two countries. However, after Russia emerged victorious from World War II and got on the scene as a superpower, it threatened Turkey's stability as well as its neighbors.

Accordingly, Russia canceled the "Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality" with Turkey and demanded the return of the regions of Kars and Ardahan in northeastern Turkey, which it had abandoned under the aforementioned agreement. Russia has also demanded acquiring military bases in the Straits region. (39)

The divergence deepened with Turkey's accession to NATO in 1952, which acted as an alignment in the camp opposite the Soviets who were leading the Warsaw Pact, in the course of the Cold War. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, Turkish and Russian positions diverged on many regional issues, such as the territory of Nagorno Karabakh, the Georgian issue, and the Russian-Iranian rapprochement that worried Ankara. (40)

Moreover, the presence of Turkey on a wide geographical sector on seas' coasts and the distinct straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles) allowed it to control the geostrategic and geopolitical balance between the international and regional powers. The powers that are competing in the regions of the Middle East and the Caucasus, militarily, economically, commercially, and politically, especially in light of the intensification of international and regional competition during the Cold War. Where the Cold War represents a natural extension of the historical competition between Russia and Turkey that prevailed for a period of four centuries, to gain access to warm waters, and thus control the wealth of the East and their resources.

Turkey and the Russian Federation, rapprochement and divergence

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey hastened to recognize the Russian Federation. It conducted many official exchange visits at the ministerial level that culminated in a visit by then Prime Minister Suleyman Demiral to Moscow, during which he signed with Russian President Boris Yeltsin the Treaty of “Principles of Relations between the Turkish Republic and the Russian Federation” in 1992. That treaty marked the opening of a new chapter in the relations between the two countries.(41)

Nevertheless, in view of the total tensions between the Turks and the Russians resulting from the differences of the two parties in the late 90s of the 20th century, the most prominent was the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh; a mountainous enclave locates in the Republic of Azerbaijan. A conflict that has continued for more than 30 years might be a new core of the regional conflict. Thus, Russia supports Armenia and supplies both parties with weapons, while Turkey supports Azerbaijan, despite its historical crisis with Armenia related to the Armenian genocide in 1915. However, Western countries that primarily deal with the Azerbaijani oil and gas fields in the Caspian Sea are keen to resolve the conflict through the decades-long negotiation process within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. (42)

However, at the beginning of the 21st century, relations between the two parties witnessed a historical rapprochement, where the economic dimension played a vital role in easing tensions between them, through bilateral cooperation in the field of energy, space technology, and trade exchanges. (43)

Furthermore, Turkey and Russia succeeded in separating their trade ties and areas of conflict from bilateral relations since the early 2000s of the 21st century and made great progress in many ways. Further, at the beginning of the civil war in Syria, especially with the plane accident, which damaged their relationship and it could have been a justification for a conflict of interests, but with the cooperation of the two countries to resolve the

crisis, relations were restored and resulted in a greater level of cooperation. Thus, the continuation of the areas of business cooperation that characterize the relations between Turkey and Russia depends on the harmonized management of these relations by decision-makers, taking into account potential risks.

Erdogan and Putin, concerns of history and issues of geopolitical discord

After Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia 20 years ago, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan rose to power in 2003, the launch of Putin's project in 2000 to restore Russia's economic power and its external influence coincided with the AKP project in 2002 to revive Turkey's regional and international positions.

From this standpoint, the beginning of the 21st century marked a milestone for the two countries together in terms of political and economic advancement. (45)

The main objective of this vision was to achieve Turkey's grand strategy, by becoming an influential international power by 2023 (the centenary of Turkey's independence). Moreover, to become a major and influential actor in the Middle East map that Turkey might lead again, according to the expectation of the American strategic researcher, George Friedman in his book "The Next 100 Years, a Forecast for the 21st Century." (46)

Furthermore, Turkey, with its advanced economic position, its active political role, and its position as an entrance to the West and the Middle East, is an important motive for Russia to expand its external influence and activate its international standing. As for Turkey, it has the same aspiration in reviving its regional and international position that befits its historical legacy, its geographical location, and its inherent strategic potential. Turkey considers that it has been and remains to be an effective central state. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated: "A central state such as Turkey, which has a central position in the mother continent, Afro-Eurasia, does not accept to remain confined to a spe-

cific region and drown in it, but rather it has the ability to access many other regions at the same time”.

Therefore, Davutoglu** believes that Turkey’s geopolitical situation must be viewed as a means for opening up to the world within interim steps in order to convert regional influence into international influence, and in a way that allows Turkey to make international policies. As such, Turkey works to revive its position for the political and economic presence in many regions, in the east and west, and to establish partnerships with several major international and regional powers, including its historic rival, Russia. (47)

However, Russia has many objectives to achieve through its newly developed relations with Turkey, including facing economic risks, after the Russian economy went through a difficult period due to strict Western sanctions after the Ukraine crisis. Moreover, low oil prices have exacerbated the situation as the largest producer in the world. Taking all of these into consideration, Russia looks forward to Turkey as an economic partner that may contribute to rebalancing the Russian economy. (48)

Accordingly, the economic factor began to play an effective role in establishing strategic relations that lead to political rapprochement between the two counties and reduce tensions between them, through bilateral cooperation in the field of energy, space technology, and trade exchanges. (49)

Nevertheless, despite the geopolitical competition, Russia is trying its best to benefit from the geopolitical relationship with Turkey due to the importance of its geographical location for Russia, as it is a compulsory passage to warm waters, where it became a land passage for Russian exports, especially gas, as 19% of Russia's foreign trade passes through the Turkish straits. (50)

Nevertheless, the geopolitical transformations that the neighboring countries have witnessed, as well as the Turkish and Russian ambitions in the Middle East, were reasons to bring back the competition between them, including the Arab uprisings, the civil war in Syria, and shooting down the Russian warplane. All of these factors have heralded strategic risks. (51)

The most significant geopolitical issues in (Erdogan-Putin) strategy

Moscow stood against the "Arab Spring" and considered the Arab revolutions a conspiracy by Western countries against Russian interests in the region. The Kremlin considered the Arab Spring a source of chaos and instability, and that it came to the Middle East through foreign hands represented in the West. Russia's position was clear through statement of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on October 2012; "The Arab Spring was a harvest of the seeds that George Bush Jr. planted with his concept of "the Greater Middle East" and the democratization of the entire region". (52)

Whereas, the Arab Spring was a test or a major challenge for the Turkish foreign policy, which is based on the strategy of "zero issues" with its geographical neighborhood. In principle, Turkish policymakers welcomed the challenge of totalitarian regimes. Therefore, the Arab Spring revealed the nature of the historical divisions between Russia and Turkey, with regard to the expansion of their areas of influence in the geographical neighborhood, and the influence in the Middle East region that showed up again. (53)

Therefore, the top controversial issues between the two countries are Syria and Libya, as well as Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Serbia, and Kosovo.

The Syrian issue and the strategies of Putin and Erdogan

The strategy of the two countries regarding the Syrian issue is determined by the geopolitical data that got Russia, with all its political and military powers, to support the Assad regime, as its last ally in the region. The fall of Assad would mean losing Moscow's influence in the region. As such, Russia used its entire political means to prevent the overthrow of the Assad regime in order to maintain its interests and strategic position in Syria. Moreover, Russia aims to preserve its naval base in the port of Tartus on the Mediterranean. According to the "Russia Today" newspaper, on January 18, 2017, Russia and Syria signed a document allowing Russian forces to use the "Hmeimim" airbase in Lattakia for a period of 49 years. This means that Russia has guaranteed its geostrategic influence in Syria.

Syria's location is crucial to Turkey, with regard to the peace process in the Middle East. Besides, Ankara's concerns about the continued activity of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Syria, and the growth of Kurdish separatism, after the Kurdish issue became the headline of the hostile relations between the two countries, which developed several times into clashes.

On the contrary, with the start of the Syrian revolution, Turkey declared its support for the Syrian opposition and sheltered thousands of refugees fleeing across its border. It also hosted the second "Friends of Syria" meeting in Istanbul in April.

Nevertheless, in August 2011, Erdogan warned, "We have reached the end of our patience." Where Turkey has lost many of its economic and strategic interests in Syria following the outbreak of the revolution and standing by the opposition. The Turkish role in Syria also rolled back with the complexity of the political scene and the interference of regional and international parties on the line of the crisis, such as Russia, Iran, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, as well as "ISIS". As a result, it weakened the Turkish strategy in the

region and demonstrated the drawback of its political behavior with its geographical neighborhood, and thus the deterioration of its regional role and influence. (54)

However, Turkey relied in its intervention in Syria and carrying out military operations upon Article 51 of the UN Charter; “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations, until the Security Council takes measures necessary to maintain international peace and security”.

In this case, the Turkish side informs the Security Council of the nature of this intervention, through which it seeks to defend Turkish national security. The launch of this intervention was on August 24, 2016, with Operation “Euphrates Shield” in the border city of Jarabulus, where Turkish tanks entered from its crossing as a support force for various factions of Syrian opposition; the latter was able to expel ISIS from the town of Al-Rai. On January 2, 2018, it carried out an operation in Afrin, called “Olive Branch,” in the northern countryside of Aleppo, in sight of the Assad regime forces.

However, Turkey has justified this behavior also based on Article 51 of the UN Charter and Security Council resolutions aimed at combating international terrorism, while respecting the Syrian territories that do not work through these operations to control part of it. (55)

Moreover, Turkey's strategic vision of seeking new Ottoman leverage by becoming the first in democratizing the Arab Spring countries or the overthrow of Assad resulted in a strategic miscalculation. (56)

In this regard, some argue that Turkey cannot achieve the results it aspires to. However, it is not an issue for Turkey, where international changes and new regional mechanisms prove that no single regional or international party, including the United States, can safely lead transformations. Therefore, if Turkey is defective in its limited capabilities in this regard, the same applies to other parties. (57)

Accordingly, Turkey's support for opposition against the Assad regime contradicts Russia's interest in the region, as the latter supports the axis extending from Iran and Iraq

through Syria, hoping to protect it from the corresponding support for the Muslim North Caucasus.

This means different interests and priorities regarding the Syrian conflict. Likewise, the Kurdish issue, which is the Turkish weak point, in terms of the relationship with Russia. Where the Syrian Kurds extended their control over northern Syria through the “People's Protection Units, YPG”, which was established in 2011, and it established good relations with the Russians and the Americans in fighting ISIS. However, Russians used the Kurdish file against Turkey in the Syrian arena. As such, these factors may escalate the conflict between Russia and Turkey in the region in the future. (58)

However, it seems that the Russian-Turkish rapprochement represents an economic partnership rather than a political alliance. It is likely that the rapprochement between them will continue economically, especially in the field of energy, but it is unlikely to develop much further on the political level. Where Moscow is working to acquire Syria, on its own. While in terms of its partnership with Turkey, it was sheer political, and related to the withdrawal of the Syrian case from Geneva, managed by the UN and supervised by America, which means to cancel the political process in Syria.

Accordingly, Russia jointly founded the Astana Group with Turkey under the pretext of stopping hostilities between the warring parties and monitoring the de-escalation zones, which were identified and agreed upon between the guarantor states of the Astana Group, Russia and Turkey, and then Iran joined them.

As a result, the continuation of the military option, the expansion of the conflict, the multiplicity of its participants, and its shift from clashes between local agents to a direct conflict between regional and international powers. All are factors that pose a great threat to regional and international peace, which makes it difficult to build close relations between Moscow and Ankara in the long run.

The Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over the territory of "Nagorno Karabakh"

The dispute in this region dates back to 1988 when the Soviet Union collapsed and left the region in a state of continuous conflict. The mountainous Nagorno Karabakh region is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but it has been under Armenian control since the war stopped in 1994. (59)

After thirty years, the conflict over this territory has turned into a regional conflict, as Russia supports Armenia and supplies both parties with weapons, while Turkey supports Azerbaijan. However, renewed fighting in April 2016 led to confrontations between the two parties and resulted in 18 dead among the Armenian forces and 12 among the Azerbaijani forces according to the two parties, who exchanged accusations and were responsible for the tension. (60)

This pushed the population in the areas of the clashes to displace and both parties deployed their weapons on the front line of the battle. Meanwhile, Russia showed up as one of the most prominent international voices calling for an end to the fighting between the two parties and commits to the ceasefire resolution signed in 1994. This position may seem strange in light of Russia's continued arms sales to both sides and its eagerness to possess more lethal weapons to achieve a balance of power for each of them against the other. Moreover, Azerbaijan wants to end Armenia's occupation of the region, while Armenia seeks to maintain the status quo on the ground. Further, Russia's keenness to supply the two opponents of the South Caucasus with weapons and to be the main supplier for them reflects its desire to deepen Moscow's military influence in the region and eventually the political. As such, Russia pursues to be a major force between the South Caucasus competitors, as happened in the post-conflict understandings of 2016.

Nevertheless, Ankara has placed the support of Azerbaijan on top of its priorities since the conflict over the territory of Nagorno Karabakh. Where Turkish Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar, stressed his country's rejection of the recent clashes between the two parties.

He stated; “The pain of the Azerbaijani Turk is our pain, we want you to know that what kind of difficulties you feel there (in Azerbaijan) we feel it deeply here (in Turkey). The blood of our Azerbaijani brothers will not remain without revenge”. (61)

While the Russian president was forced to adhere to a neutral position in this conflict. He described the fighting between the two countries, which were parts of the Soviet Union before 1989, as a "tragedy" and said on a television interview: "We hope that the fighting will end in the very near future, as people are dying and both parties incur heavy losses."

Moscow's dilemma, which prevents it from interfering in the interest of either side, lies in its association with a military alliance with Armenia, besides having a military base there. At the same time, it maintains close relations with the government of Azerbaijan **and has economic interests with it, including large Russian arms deals. (60)

On September 27, 2020, the Azerbaijani army launched an operation in the occupied Karabakh region, in response to an Armenian attack targeting civilian areas. As such, it managed to regain control of five cities, the last of which was Shusha, three towns, and more than two hundred villages, including strategic hills. (61)

After forty-four days of fighting, the Russian President announced that Azerbaijan and Armenia have reached a ceasefire agreement in Karabakh, with the forces of the two countries remaining stationed in their current areas of control, provided that Azerbaijan regains three occupied provinces within a period of time not exceeding the 1st of December.

A member at the Faculty of International Relations at the Turkish Nişantaşı University, Norsin Oglu Konay, commented on this, “The fact that Turkey and Azerbaijan reached a deal with Russians who consider the South Caucasus as its backyard in the region, is considered an important diplomatic success. Therefore, the acceptance of Russia and Armenia to ratify the ceasefire agreement is a vital development. By this agreement, Russia also gave Armenia a message that says; “I saved you, not the West”. Konlay added; “Although we are still in opposing positions with Russia in Libya and Syria, reaching

an agreement on the Karabakh issue is a remarkable success and a turning point in Ankara's diplomacy." (62)

During the past years, Turkey sought to extend its external influence with incursions into neighboring Syria and Iraq, besides providing military support to the internationally recognized government in Libya. Moreover, Turkey sent some opposition fighters from Syria to Azerbaijan, which further escalated the geopolitical rivalry between Ankara and Moscow.

Crimea and eastern Ukraine: a renewed historical conflict

The renewed events in Crimea and Ukraine, the "Black Sea" region, were the outcome of old and multiple bloody conflicts between the Ottoman Sultanate and Russian Tsarist. These events are parts of the cold Russian-Turkish conflict that aims to reshape the future map of all geopolitical issues in the South Caucasus and the Middle East.

The Republic of Crimea, which is officially still a part of Ukraine, is located on a peninsula extending in southern Ukraine between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. It is separated from Russia from the east by the Kerch Strait. In early 2014, Crimea became the core of the most serious East-West crisis since the Cold War, after the elected Ukrainian President (and pro-Russian) Viktor Yanukovich was toppled by violent protests in Kiev.

At this point, pro-Russian forces took control of Crimea, and then the population of the region, the majority of whom were of Russian origin, voted in a referendum to join the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, Ukraine and the Western countries decided that the referendum was illegal. (63)

Crimea was originally a Muslim land in which** Turkic tribes known as the Crimean Tatars lived. These tribes followed their rulers, who were called the Turkish title "Khan", meaning the king of the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire, and they shared their military adventures in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. However, in the 18th century AD, with the

weakness of the Ottomans, the growing influence of the Russian tsars, and the desire of the latter to reserve a place for their state on the warm waters, Crimea, with its ports overlooking the Black Sea, became the major focus of the conflict between the Ottoman and Russian states. In 1783, Russians succeeded in finally annexing Crimea, and broke the known, up to that date, that the Black Sea was an Ottoman lake. (64)

After the fall of Tsarist Russia and the rise of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Republic was established and affiliated with the Soviet Union. Crimean Tatars were granted a six-year autonomy of the Crimean Peninsula, and Tatar women got the right to vote in the same year. It was the first Muslim country to achieve that step. However, the population of Crimean Tatars has decreased from about 6 million with the invasion of Queen Catherine to less than three hundred thousand with the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution (65), which means 39% of the population were Tatars at the beginning of World War II. After the end of the war, Joseph Stalin strengthened the Russian influence in the Crimean peninsula by mass deportation of the Tatar population to the interior of the Soviet Union along with other target groups, allegedly in cooperation with Nazi Germany. (66)

Putin's strategies to onslaught Crimea

After the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 90s of the last century, Crimea was re-granted autonomy, but within limits that kept it under the Ukrainian government in Kiev. With the dawn of the third millennium and the arrival of Vladimir Putin to the presidency of the Russian Federation, it became clear that he wanted to regain the strategic advantages of Crimea, which would make it a permanent passage to the Black Sea and then to the Mediterranean, and the Middle East.

In late November 2013, a wave of public protests, known as the Europe Square Movement began in Kiev, against the decision of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich' for suspending an Association Agreement with the European Union, while he chose closer ties to Russia, given that Yanukovich is known for his loyalty to Putin. Meanwhile, Russian citizens in Crimea expressed their condemnation of the protests and their support

for the policies of the Ukrainian president. Then, in an escalating step, on February 4, 2014, the Presidency of the Supreme Council of the Crimean Autonomous Republic expressed its desire to hold a referendum on the status of Crimea, during which the Russian government would be the guarantor of the right to vote. (67)

Accordingly, the Ukrainian revolution flared up in Kiev in late February 2014, against Viktor Yanukovich for suspending the EU deal. Hence, he was forced to flee towards Moscow, and the situation exploded completely in the Crimea.

The Russian government described what happened to its man in Kiev as a coup. Then demonstrations erupted in Crimea against the new Ukrainian government. On the night of February 22, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with the heads of his security services, which resulted in an order to invade Crimea militarily and return it to Russia. (68)

Erdogan and his alignment behind the Western position

As for Turkey, it remained on the sidelines from these hot events, lining up, as expected, behind the American/European position against the Russian invasion of Crimea. However, the Crimean Tatars, with their Turkic origin in addition to the Turkish-Ukrainian relations, opened a gate for Ankara to gain access to Crimea. (69)

Nevertheless, Erdogan's speech reflects a Turkish rejection of Russia's invasion of Crimea, based on fears of Moscow's persecution of Muslim Tatars who wish to remain within the borders of the Ukrainian Republic. Moreover, Erdogan has fully expanded this policy fully in the last decade, inflating it with the spirit of neo-Ottomans, and making it an argument that he always uses to justify his military moves in the region. Similarly, he used it in the Libyan case, when he indicated his inability to remain silent about the support of the Koulouglis, who are Libyans of Turkish origin after they supported him against his opponents in the Arab country. (70)

Russian presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated: "Turkey's position on the Crimean peninsula is one of the big disagreements between Moscow and Ankara, noting that Russia is patiently trying to convey its point of view to the Turks on this issue. Peskov

explained to reporters, "Russian-Turkish relations are beneficial to both parties, and they are based on the principles of non-interference in internal affairs and respect for each other's interests. There are disagreements in our relationship, Crimea is one of them, and here we have an opposite view. We will continue to inform our Turkish counterparts of our firm position on the Crimean peninsula." Earlier, the head of one of the committees of the local legislative council in Crimea, Yuri Gembel, has revealed the main reason why the Turkish authorities do not recognize the island as a territory belonging to Russia.

"The Turkish authorities do not officially recognize Crimea's affiliation with Russia, not because it is in solidarity with Ukraine, which rejects the decision to return the island to Russia, but because it has ambitions in this island," Gimbel said during an exclusive interview with Sputnik. (71)

However, we cannot claim that the policy pursued by Turkey during the tensions that Russia experienced with Ukraine and the West has posed a challenge to the Kremlin. Where Turkey strengthened its trade relations with Ukraine and supported the Crimean Tatars in the international diplomatic community. Especially that the annexation of Crimea to Russia gives the control of the Black Sea in the interest of Russia and against Turkey's security. Although this move threatens to change the rules of the game in the region and affects trade, its transformation into an issue of global dimensions in the tensions between the United States and Russia has prevented Turkey from speaking out against Russia with regard to Ukraine. (72)

As a result, the rapprochement between Turkey and Ukraine has increased, through mutual visits between the Turkish and Ukrainian presidents during the last two years, which reflected positively on the bilateral relations between the two countries. Furthermore, it enabled Turkey to pressure Russia in Syria and Libya, and to convince it of the necessity of accepting the Turkish presence in these collapsed countries, hence, sharing their spoils. Nevertheless, Russia is aware of Turkey's intentions in not recognizing Moscow's annexation of Crimea, as well as their constant raising of the Tatar minority issue; however, Russians do not react to Turkey's statements in this regard since this does not change anything on the ground in the peninsula. Moreover, Russia understands the long-term

goals of the Erdogan regime in Syria or Libya. Therefore, as long as the rules of the Cold War are all about the recruitment of mercenaries, create governments, hunker down behind nationalities, and use alliances, hence, all will go hand in hand with the exchange of goods, energy supplies, and arms deals until the conflicting parties settle on the shares that each side deems fair and satisfactory. (73)

Russian/Turkish intervention in the Libyan war

After the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya descended into civil war. Two competing governments emerged to control Libya: the Libyan National Army in Tobruk, led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, and the Government of National Accord led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj. Moreover, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and France intervened in this war, as well as Russia and Turkey. (74)

In April 2019, Khalifa Haftar intensified his offensive moves to control Tripoli, the capital of the internationally recognized government headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, supported from Russia through the private military company “Wagner”, owned by the businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, who is from Putin's inner circle. This clearly shows that Russia secretly supported Khalifa Haftar from the beginning. (75) Where Russia announced its alliance with him several months after the latter launched his military operation on Tripoli. Furthermore, Moscow wanted to secure a new foothold on the shores of the Mediterranean, which would allow it to have more influence on the policies of the European Union countries, and further to preserve its role in creating the Libyan regime. It also recently started recruiting Syrian fighters from the Assad regime-controlled areas and sending them to fight in Libya alongside Haftar's forces. (76)

While Turkey sent military consultants along with drones, claiming that its direct participation in the conflict in favor of the Sarraj government came after the signing of a military agreement allowing Turkey to send soldiers (77) so that this agreement would be a legitimate cover for the current Turkish military and political moves in Libya. (78) Accord-

ingly, Ankara has overseen the transfer of thousands of Pro-Turkey Syrian fighters to the fighting bases around Tripoli, where the support has been clearly reflected in the field.
(79)

In this regard, the security and energy were behind the interference of Russia and Turkey in the Libyan war. Where they found themselves on opposite sides and their interference in Libya along with other parties was one of the latest examples of the failure of their efforts to achieve stability in Libya.

In his recent attack, General Haftar received military support from the private Russian Wagner mercenaries, but Turkey's active involvement in the Libyan war on the side of the Sarraj government hampered Haftar's hopes of seizing Tripoli. Because the survival of the Sarraj government means the key to the Turkish presence in the eastern Mediterranean, and Turkey has benefited from the legitimate status of the Sarraj government in the international scene, which allows it to demand the legitimacy of the bilateral agreements concluded with the Government of National Accord.

Therefore, Turkey is working to preserve the Sarraj government in Libya at all costs. On the other hand, Russia appears to be siding with Khalifa Haftar and providing him with support in his efforts to control Tripoli. According to Stephen Townsend, Commander of American Forces in Africa (AFRICOM), there have been indications of increased Russian military intervention, through introducing combat aircraft into Libya to turn the balance of power in the civil war there. Stephan Townsend further considered this step as “a potential security threat to NATO.” However, despite risking its ties with Turkey, Russia is formally distancing itself from Haftar and maintaining contacts with Sarraj.

Furthermore, its support to the Libyan National Army affiliated with Haftar aims to strengthen its position at the negotiating table, which is Russia's external goal in gaining access to warm waters, thus expanding its sphere of influence on the African continent.
(80)

Nevertheless, it seems that the two parties, Russia and Turkey, do not want any military confrontation between them in Libya, even indirectly, and therefore they focus on how to

de-escalation, and to agree to a ceasefire in Libya, within the framework of the Berlin conference's outcomes **held on January 19, 2020. Therefore, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu stressed "the need to continue exchanging views on ways to normalize the situation in Libya, ceasefire, and hold the dialogue with the participation of the United Nations", as declared by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

As such, Turkey and Russia renewed their** strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Libya, as well as the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter. This came as a result of consultations conducted by a Russian delegation with its Turkish counterpart in Ankara on July 22, 2020, which resulted in what could be called a Turkish-Russian consensus on forming a joint working group about Libya. (81)

However, Turkey's increasing assertion of support for the GNA involves reducing Haftar's control over Libya. Further, the interference of the UAE and Egypt reflects that Russia is not the only force to influence Haftar's decision. This reduces Russia's role in controlling Haftar, who remains dependent on Egypt and the UAE. Thus, the intervention of many foreign states is a contributing factor in prolonging the Libyan conflict.

Finally, what happened in Syria in the past, applies in Libya now and in the future. The interests that unite Russia and Turkey urged them to avoid confrontation, as Erdogan and Putin have more than once showed their ability to maneuver and reach understandings despite the conflicting visions. However, this has become relatively more difficult than before for several considerations related to the recently improved Turkish-American and Turkish-European relations, and Ankara's keenness to continue in this way. (82)

Conclusion

It seems that the historical conflict, that smashed the two empires during three centuries of their history, is almost identical to the status quo in all circumstances and facts. The Turkish-Russian bilateral relations took an unstable direction in the past 30 years, where the main reason for instability was driven by the conflict of bilateral historical roots that carries mutual grudges, acts of vengeance, and deep wounds resulted in creating an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust between the two parties. Its events simulate previous events, political or military, with a difference in describing the ability, role, and position of each party. Therefore, this is what pushed the two countries to move from a state of sacred wars to a state of profane interests.

Despite sufficient historical reasons for distrust between the two parties, their desire to influence the troubled regional and global balances urges the two parties to compulsory cooperation, besides the cooperation in economic and trade relations that results in a rapprochement between the two countries.

Nevertheless, the relations are expected to continue toward calm, as the quarrels between them over geopolitical issues would destabilize the regional and international security, which is suffering from fractures since the incident of the Russian warplane that was shot down on October 24, 2015, and the massacre of Turkish soldiers in Blyon in the southern countryside of Idlib in 2020. Moreover, experiences have shown that the two parties have the ability to control the bilateral relations, and despite the measures taken to reduce the intensity of the tensions, the motives for this still exist. Where the aspirations of the two parties to achieve geopolitical goals will not diminish and Turkey's apprehension about its national security remains. Therefore, what they can do is to work for a longer de-escalation in the hotbeds of conflict that have turned between the two parties into battlefields burdened by a bloody history and a geopolitical rivalry.

Perhaps the failure of the relationship between the two parties to turn into normal and institutional relations is due to the hostile tendencies of both Putin and Erdogan, which is affected by the progress of the conflict. Where the competition in Central Asia and the

Caucasus has led to negative results, and the failure to reach a common vision. As for the turmoil of the Black Sea, and the developments of Ukraine, Crimea, Syria, and Libya, they led to the collapse of the successes and joint actions achieved in previous years, because the relationship between them stands on fragile grounds.

Considering these developments in the Turkish-Russian relations and the increasing influence of Russia and Iran in the Middle East, they are signs that the next stage will be challenging. Therefore, Turkey will need its Western allies in order to strike a balance.

