

## **The Turkish-Russian Conflictual Cooperation Through the Perspective of ‘Kriter’ Magazine**

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### **Abstract**

Since the mid-2010's, Turkey and Russia have maintained a fruitful dialogue and cooperation on many open fronts despite their long-lasting differences. The search for cooperation began amid the biggest crisis of the last period in the Russian-Turkish relations, that is the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet in Syria, and it intensified after the failed coup in Turkey. The multi-level cooperation between Turkey and Russia is described by modern analysts as ‘conflictual’ or ‘adversary’. This paper focuses exclusively on the last six years of Turkish-Russian relations (2016-2022) and analyzes the Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation through the lens of the Turkish magazine ‘Kriter’, which reflects the positions of the Turkish Government.

### **Keywords**

Turkey, Russia, Black Sea, Mediterranean, conflictual cooperation

### **Introduction**

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Since the mid-2010s, Turkey and Russia have managed to overcome their differences.<sup>2</sup> The search for cooperation began amid the biggest crisis of the last period in the Russian-Turkish relations, that is the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by the Turkish Air Force on the Turkish-Syrian border in 2015, and it intensified after the failed coup in Turkey in 2016. In 2016, with Moscow's consent, Ankara began its military operations in Syria's northern territories. Shortly after, in 2017, Turkey began the process of acquiring a Russian S-400 missile system. A few years later, in 2020, Russia and Turkey worked together to settle the Karabakh issue. At the same time, the cooperation of the two countries in the fields of economy, tourism and energy continued, with Russia undertaking the task of building Turkey's first nuclear power plant in Akkuyu.

The multi-level cooperation between Turkey and Russia is described by modern analysts as 'conflictual' or 'adversary'. This paper focuses on the last six years of Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation and analyzes Ankara's compartmentalisation strategy through the lens of the Turkish magazine 'Kriter'. The 'Kriter (Criterion)' as mentioned on its official website, is a monthly magazine published by the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), with the aim to set out 'the criteria for the new era in which Turkey is struggling to recover and stand up'.<sup>3</sup> The first issue of the magazine was released in 2016, just a few weeks before the failed coup in Turkey. The SETA is based in Ankara, Turkey, and was founded by Professor Ibrahim Kalın in 2006. Kalın served as the foundation's director from 2005 until 2009. In 2018, Kalın was

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<sup>2</sup> Daria Isachenko, 'Turkey and Russia' (2021) Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), n.d. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021RP07/>.

<sup>3</sup> 'Hakkımızda (About Us)', Kriter Dergi, accessed 3 May 2022, <https://kriterdergi.com/hakkimizda>.

appointed chief advisor to Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and deputy chairman of the Turkish Presidency's Security and Foreign Policy Council. He also served as the Turkish President's spokesperson. The SETA issues analyses on Turkey's political, economic, and foreign policy and although it is not the official government mouthpiece it has close relations with the conservative government of Turkey. As we will see below, the think tank's analyses concur with official government policies that are also reflected in the pro-government press in Turkey. The close ties between SETA and the government may moreover be traced to the sources of the think tank's funding. According to the Federal Government of Germany, 'SETA is not a government agency. Its headquarters are in Ankara, and it has outposts in Cairo, Istanbul, Brussels, Washington, and, as of 2017, Berlin. The Albayrak family provides the majority of the funding for the pro-government group'.<sup>4</sup> The family is known for their close ties to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's family and the country's ruling party.

This paper first provides a summary of the theoretical framework of conflictual cooperation discussing the general outline of the theory provided by modern scholars. Then it moves on to connect the theory with the recent developments in Turkish-Russian relations. Next, the paper analyses selected articles from the archives of 'Kriter' that shed light on the Turkish-Russian disagreements. Following this, the paper closes with the analysis of the ways in which the two countries have managed to bridge their differences after 2016.

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<sup>4</sup> "Alman Hükümeti SETA'nın Mali Kaynağını Açıkladı (German Government Discloses SETA's Funding)." *Deutsche Welle*, November 14, 2019. <https://www.dw.com/tr/alman-hükümeti-setanın-mali-kaynağını-açıkladı/a-51233211>.

## 1. A concise theoretical assessment of the Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation

The term ‘conflictual cooperation’ has attracted the interest of numerous theorists in the field of humanities. Focusing on the sociological and psychological dimensions of the term, Erik Axel describes the process of conflictual cooperation as a coordination attempt between ‘contradictory varying understandings’. In this sense, different individuals or groups attempt to build their cooperation based on their common causes.<sup>5</sup> Framing this approach within the scope of international relations, Ward approaches conflict and cooperation in the modern world as two sides of the same coin. For the theoretician, ‘Conflict and cooperation are not only simultaneously present in the foreign policy behaviors of a wide range of international actors, but at the aggregate level, they are also related to one another in a strong positive fashion’.<sup>6</sup> For the interdependence between cooperation and conflict<sup>7</sup> Hastedt, Lybecker and Shannon add that:

Cooperation entails working together and coordinating one's actions with that of a group to achieve a large purpose. It does not mean an absence of disagreement about the means and ends. One collaborator may try to impose its views on others, while another may threaten to defect from the group unless its demands are met.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Erik Axel, 'Conflictual Cooperation' (2011) *Nordic Psychology*, Vol 63(4) 75–76.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Don Ward, 'Cooperation and Conflict in Foreign Policy Behavior: Reaction and Memory' (1982) *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol 26(1) 87.

<sup>7</sup> Michiel S. de Vries, 'Interdependence, Cooperation and Conflict: An Empirical Analysis' (1990) *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 27(4) 429–44.

<sup>8</sup> Glenn Hastedt, Donna L. Lybecker, and Vaughn P. Shannon, *Cases in International Relations: Pathways to Conflict and Cooperation* (CQ Press, 2014) 53.

Scholars claim that a variety of elements foster the ideal conditions for the establishment of conflicting cooperation in the modern world scene. As East and Gregg argue, the international context plays an important role in the emergence of the right terrain for the conflict cooperation model.<sup>9</sup> Ward explains that diplomacy often employs this model to manage non-military conflict.<sup>10</sup> Mansfield and Pollins pay attention to the factor of the economic interdependence,<sup>11</sup> whilst Majeski and Frick's attention is focused on the transnational communications which have the potential to increase cooperation.<sup>12</sup> Hastedt, Lybecker and Shannon complete the inventory of the factors that determine the cooperation-conflict relationship by referring to 'the distribution of economic, political, and military power; the stability of the system; the underlying values of the system; and the presence of non-state actors.'<sup>13</sup> Adding to these, Hastedt, Lybecker and Shannon mention "the world views and personalities of leaders, the structure of the decision-making process, domestic political influences, and bureaucratic competencies."<sup>14</sup>

How do international actors develop their relationships based on the conflictual cooperation model? Seeking an answer to this question, Cornell focuses on the implementation of the compartmentalisation strategy. According to this strategy, the actors 'separate areas of agreement from areas of disagreement.'<sup>15</sup> Using the

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<sup>9</sup> Maurice A. East and Phillip M. Gregg, 'Factors Influencing Cooperation and Conflict in the International System'(1967) *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 11(3) 167.

<sup>10</sup> Ward. 'Cooperation and Conflict in Foreign Policy Behavior: Reaction and Memory'.

<sup>11</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Brian M Pollins, 'Interdependence and Conflict: An Introduction', n.d., 238.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen J. Majeski and Shane Fricks 'Conflict And Cooperation in International Relations' (1995) *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 39(4) 622–45.

<sup>13</sup> Hastedt, Lybecker, and Shannon, *Cases in International Relations*, 39–40.

<sup>14</sup> Hastedt, Lybecker, and Shannon, 39–40.

<sup>15</sup> Cornell, Svante E. 'The Fallacy of "Compartmentalisation"': The West and Russia from Ukraine to Syria' (2016) *European View*, vol. 15(1) 97–109.

EU as an example, Orbie and Biondo emphasize that by separating the areas of agreement, such as providing aid, from the areas of disagreement, such as security or democratization issues, the international actors can secure limited collaboration on a number of topics.<sup>16</sup>

The case of the Turkish-Russian bilateral relations of the recent period includes both conflict and cooperation components. In their interactions over the past six years, Ankara and Moscow have attempted to coordinate their disagreements and common interests. During this period, a variety of factors paved the way for the emergence of the conflictual cooperation model in their bilateral relations. Cooperation between the two neighbors has been made easier because of the international context, mainly the challenges the two nations face in their dealings with the West. While the USA has been concentrating on the containment of China and Russia, the international community has been going through a phase of slow erosion of the international order.<sup>17</sup> The Ukraine War in 2022 ended up severely harming both the international order and relations between Russia and the West. During the same period, Turkey's ties to the West were also at an all-time low. Turkey was challenged by its longtime friends after claiming a bigger role in regional and international affairs.<sup>18</sup> For example, the Turkish government's perception that 'the West and especially the USA did not support us in confronting the coup d'état attempt in Turkey' exacerbated the already tumultuous relationship

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<sup>16</sup> Orbie, Jan, and Karen Del Biondo. 'The European Union's "Comprehensive Approach" in Chad: Securitisation and/or Compartmentalisation?' (2015) *Global Society*, vol. 29(2) 243–59.

<sup>17</sup> Peter W. Schulze, *Polarity: The Promise of Disharmony* (New York: Campus Verlag, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Oya Dursun-Özkanca *Turkey–West Relations: The Politics of Intra-Alliance Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

between Turkey and the USA.<sup>19</sup> It also made Ankara<sup>20</sup> and Moscow realizing that they needed to find a counterweight to their relations with the West.<sup>21</sup> Turkey, which was facing multiple crises in its relations with the EU and the USA, resorted to using its well-known diplomatic tactic, which is the conflictual cooperation with its interlocutors,<sup>22</sup> in an attempt to counterbalance the West. In the case of Russian-Turkish relations, this tactic cleared the door for a win-win, multifaceted partnership.<sup>23</sup> From Ankara's point, another factor which facilitated the Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation was the new turmoil in the Turkish economy. Faced with historic challenges in its relations with the West, in recent years Turkey has turned to alternative economic partners. Russia has been one of the Erdogan government's first choices in this search.<sup>24</sup> In addition to external developments and the economy factor, internal factors also had a significant

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<sup>19</sup> Nezir Akyeşilmen, Vanessa Tinker, and Mohammed Ishmael 'Turkey-US Relations in the Context of the Syrian Conflict: From Cooperation to Confrontation' (2020) *Przeegląd Strategiczny*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Moira Goff Tailor, 'Why Turkey Needs Russia' *Wilson Center*, available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-turkey-needs-russia> (last accessed 7 June 2022).

<sup>21</sup> Fiona Hill, Omer Taspinar, 'Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?' (2006) *Survival*, vol. 48(1) 81–92; Russell Martin, 'Russia-Turkey Relations' (European Parliament Think Tank, 2 November 2021), available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)679090](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)679090).

<sup>22</sup> Beken Saatçioğlu, 'EU-Turkey Relations: Towards a Transactional Future amid Conflictual Cooperation?' in Beken Saatçioğlu and Funda Tekin (eds), *Turkey and the European Union: Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios*, 1st edition, Turkey and European Union Studies (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021) 189–206.

<sup>23</sup> "Iran and Turkey Will Compartmentalise Relations." *Emerald Expert Briefings*, May 10, 2021.; Ruslan Mamedov and Grigory Lukyanov, 'Russia and Turkey: Approaches to Regional Security in the Middle East', n.d., 21; Hossein Aghaie Joobani and Mostafa Mousavipour, 'Russia, Turkey, and Iran: Moving Towards Strategic Synergy in the Middle East?' (2015) *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 39(2) 141–55; Hasan Özertem, 'Turkey and Russia: A Fragile Friendship' (March 2017) *Turkey Policy Quarterly*, vol. 15 (4) 121–34.

<sup>24</sup> Ali Askerov (ed), *Contemporary Russo-Turkish Relations: From Crisis to Cooperation* (Littlefield: Rowman 2018).

impact on the establishment of the Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation model. Notably, the personal involvement of two countries' leaders 'in making not only key but often also routine decisions'<sup>25</sup> played a crucial role in the intensification of the Turkish-Russian dialogue based on the conflictual cooperation model.<sup>26</sup>

The adoption of the model of conflictual collaboration assisted Moscow and Ankara in overcoming their mutual diplomatic isolation.<sup>27</sup> The two countries developed fruitful collaboration in a series of fields such as the Syrian crisis<sup>28</sup> energy.<sup>29</sup> economy and tourism.<sup>30</sup> For instance, relying on Moscow's cooperation, Ankara gradually built a buffer zone in the northern part of Syria. Similarly, Russia and Turkey cooperated in the Caucasus area. After the latest victory of Azerbaijan, Moscow and Ankara cooperated to impose a compromise on the parties involved in the Karabakh region and its surrounding territories, which had been controlled by Armenia for the last 26 years.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. The shadow of the perpetuated mistrust

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<sup>25</sup> Baev, 'Russia and Turkey. Strategic Partners and Rivals'.

<sup>26</sup> Robert E. Hamilton, and Anna Mikulska, 'The Issues of Competition and Cooperation' (Report, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2021) available at <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1469180/cooperation-competition-and-compartmentalization/2120129/>. (Last accessed 29 Mar 2023).

<sup>27</sup> Baev, 'Russia and Turkey. Strategic Partners and Rivals'.

<sup>28</sup> Özertem, 'Turkey and Russia'.

<sup>29</sup> Rémi Bourgeot, 'Russia-Turkey: A Relationship Shaped by Energy' Russia/NIS Center, in cooperation with the Turkey Program, Ifri, March 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, 'Turkey and Russia in a Shifting Global Order: Cooperation, Conflict and Asymmetric Interdependence in a Turbulent Region' (2016) *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 37(1) 71–95.

<sup>31</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz and Vasif Huseynov, 'The Second Karabakh War: Russia vs. Turkey?' (2020) *Middle East Policy*, vol. 27(4) 103–18.



The intriguing aspect of the Turkish-Russian ‘conflictual cooperation’ is how during the past six years, in spite of their divergent ideologies and lack of mutual trust, the two countries’ partnership has grown. Ankara and Moscow's attempt to develop the conflictual cooperation model in their bilateral relations by compartmentalizing the areas of agreement and disagreement was overshadowed by significant challenges. For instance, in addition to the lack of trust in bilateral relations, the legacy of the Cold War,<sup>32</sup> the proxy conflicts in Syria and Libya, the rivalry in the southern Caucasus, the ex-Soviet Central Asia and the Black Sea areas further perplexed the Russian-Turkish dialogue.<sup>33</sup>

The clashing views between Moscow and Ankara have been mirrored in the conservative Turkish government's official narrative channeled through the Turkish media. For instance, the conservative publication ‘Yeni Akit’ claimed in the final days of 2020 that ‘[t]he homicidal Assad regime oversees the Qamishli district, where Russia has dispatched hundreds of soldiers and vehicles. Russian commanders continued to train the deadly Assad soldiers.’<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, back in May 2016, ‘Kriter’ published an article accusing Moscow of ‘civilian massacres

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<sup>32</sup> Burak Bekdil, 'Turkey's Tactical Bear Hug with Russia' *BESA Center Perspectives Paper* (The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 3 June 2018), available at <https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/853-Turkeys-Tactical-Bear-Hug-with-Russia-Bekdil-final-1.pdf>, (Last accessed 29 March 2023).

<sup>33</sup> Pavel Baev, 'Russia and Turkey. Strategic Partners and Rivals' *Russia/NIS Center*, May 2021, available at <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/russieneireports/russia-and-turkey-strategic-partners-and-rivals> (last accessed 1 July 2022)..

<sup>34</sup> Yeni Akit, ‘Rusya’dan Katil Esed’e Askeri Destek (Rusya’dan Katil Esed’e Askeri Destek)’ 29 December 2020, available at <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/rusyadan-katil-esede-askeri-destek-1492450.html>(last accessed 1 July 2022).

carried out by Russian, Iranians and Hizbullah's soldiers who fought alongside the Assad administration'<sup>35</sup>:

Russia's massacres of civilians with airstrikes and Iran and Hezbollah's military assistance to the Assad regime justified the Daesh's (Islamic State) actions. The Daesh has become a source of legitimacy due to the crimes against humanity committed in Syria by the Assad administration and its supporters. The regime (with the help of Russia and Iran) responded to the demands of its people for freedom and justice with barrel bombs and chemical weapons and weakened the moderate Syrian opposition. (Due to) the Assad-Russia-Iran-Hezbollah axis' errors the damage inflicted by Daesh transcended the borders of Syria and spread to the Middle East.

According to 'Kriter', Moscow contributed to the perpetuation of the crisis in Syria by supporting a corrupted regime. At the same time, it intensified the crisis in the Middle East, and therefore indirectly contributed to the strengthening and prevalence of radical groups. For 'Kriter' Russia's stance in the Syrian crisis was duplicitous. Russia only pretended 'to seek a political solution at the negotiations table through its relationship with Turkey, (when in fact) she has helped the (Syrian) regime take over almost the entire country in this process'<sup>36</sup>:

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<sup>35</sup> Kemal İnat, 'Suriye Trajedisi ve Türkiye'nin Pozisyonu (Syrian Tragedy and Turkey's Position)', *Kriter Dergi*, 1 May 2016, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/suriye-trajedisi-ve-turkiyenin-pozisyonu> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Nuri Salık, 'Rusya'nın Müdahalesi Esed'in Önünü Açtı (Russia's Intervention Paves The Way for Assad)', *Kriter Dergi*, 1 March 2020, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-idlib-catismasi/rusyanin-mudahalesi-esedin-onunu-acti> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

It is obvious that in 2015, Russia's entanglement to the Syrian crisis changed the course of the events. Although Russia acts as if it is seeking a political solution at the table through the trust relationship it has established with Turkey, it helped the regime to seize large areas. The examples of Aleppo, Daraa and Eastern Ghouta in Idlib, where the Syrian crisis is knotted, means that Turkey is left with a humanitarian crisis that the country cannot handle itself. Turkey should remind Russia of its limits. The stance taken thus far in the recent Idlib crisis clearly demonstrates Turkey's military and diplomatic determination to protect its national interests.

The magazine's reference to 'Turkey's military and diplomatic determination' is not coincidental. The weakening of the central government of Syria and the DAESH at that time has resulted in the gradual strengthening of the Kurdish separatist movement in the northeastern part of Syria. The separatist movement maintains close ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been in a state of continuous conflict with the Turkish state since 1983. The Turkish Interior Ministry referred to this 'threat' as the attempt of 'the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian branch of the PKK/KCK terrorist organization, which has been operating inside Turkey's borders for many years to present itself as a legitimate actor in the international arena and to turn the civil unrest in Syria into an opportunity serving its political agenda.'<sup>37</sup> 'Kriter' criticized Moscow for its support to the PYD, arguing that Russia collaborated with an organization that has

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<sup>37</sup> Turkish Interior Ministry. "PKK/KCK Terör Örgütünün Suriye Kolu: PYD-YPG (The Syrian Branch of the PKK/KCK Terrorist Organization: PYD-YPG)" May 2017, Available at [https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/kurumlar/icisleri.gov.tr/lcSite/strateji/deneme/YAYINLAR/ICERIK/pyd\\_arapca.pdf](https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/kurumlar/icisleri.gov.tr/lcSite/strateji/deneme/YAYINLAR/ICERIK/pyd_arapca.pdf). (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

been clashing with the Turkish state for four decades. According to the magazine, ‘the possible consolidation of the PYD in northern Syria will lead to the PKK directly or indirectly gaining access to sophisticated weapons systems from the United States and Russia and carrying out other acts of terrorism against Turkey.’<sup>38</sup> In the same article, the following opinions also stand out:

The developments in Syria challenged Turkey's geopolitical position and security. The Raqqa operation, the Russian-initiated agreements between the Syrian regime and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and most importantly, the relations between the U.S. and the PYD, as well as the weapons, ammunition, training, and military concept support provided by the U.S. to the People's Defense Units (YPG), the armed wing of the PYD, affect Turkey's security. Russia sides with the PYD in Afrin and continues its military presence under the name of peace observation. (At the same time, under the auspices of the United States and Russia) the PYD threatens Turkey along its southern border.<sup>39</sup>

‘Kriter’ agrees with Ankara's official opinion that Russia's posture is problematic in other areas as well. In the case of the Black Sea with special emphasis on the Ukrainian crisis, Turkey's foreign minister clarified that he ‘cannot accept Russia's aggressive behavior’ since his country supports Ukraine's

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<sup>38</sup> Necdet Özçelik, ‘Fırat Kalkanı Harekatı Sonrası: Riskler Ve Fırsatlar (After Operation Euphrates Shield: Risks and Opportunities)’ *Kriter Dergi*, 3 April 2017, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/siyaset/firat-kalkani-harekatı-sonrası-riskler-ve-fırsatlar> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>39</sup> Necdet Özçelik, ‘Fırat Kalkanı Harekatı Sonrası: Riskler Ve Fırsatlar (After Operation Euphrates Shield: Risks and Opportunities)’.

territorial integrity.<sup>40</sup> In alignment with this statement, the magazine stated that Moscow jeopardises the delicate balances in the Black Sea by approaching the region as Russia's sphere of influence and trying to impose its agenda to the neighboring countries.<sup>41</sup> In the instance of the Eastern Mediterranean, 'Kriter' took the same course of action. While the official news agency of Turkey, 'Anadolu Agency', emphasized that the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean could actually help to reduce Russia's influence in the region and the EU's dependence on Russian energy supplies,<sup>42</sup> 'Kriter' asserted that Russia is one of Turkey's main competitors in the Eastern Mediterranean because Moscow has established a presence in Syria and weaponized its natural resources in its conflict with the West.<sup>43</sup> According to the magazine, 'After the decline of US influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Russia has strengthened its hand considerably by taking advantage of the "power vacuum" and the impact of the Syrian civil war.

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<sup>40</sup> Cnn Türk. 'Çavuşoğlu: "Ukrayna'nın Toprak Bütünlüğünün Garanti Altına Alınması Lazım" (Cavusoglu: "Ukraine's Territorial Integrity Must Be Guaranteed")' 29 August 2022, Available at <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/cavusoglu-ukraynanin-toprak-butunlugunun-garanti-altina-alinmasi-lazim> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>41</sup> Ferhat Pirinççi, 'Türkiye'nin Ukrayna Politikası: Dengeli Aktivizm (Turkey's Ukraine Policy: Balanced Activism)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 67, 1 April 2022, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-ukrayna-krizi/turkiyenin-ukrayna-politikasi-dengeli-aktivizm> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>42</sup> Anadolu Agency, 'Doğu Akdeniz Enerji Kaynakları, AB'nin Rus Gazına Bağımlılığını Azaltmada Rol Oynayabilir (Eastern Mediterranean Energy Resources Could Play a Role in Reducing the EU's Dependence on Russian Gas)' 24 March 2022, available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/dogu-akdeniz-enerji-kaynaklari-abnin-rus-gazina-bagimlilikini-azaltmada-rol-oyunayabilir/2544284> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>43</sup> Meryem İlayda Atlas, 'Enerji mi, Egemenlik mi: Rusya'nın Doğu Akdeniz'de Var Olma Stratejisi (Energy or Sovereignty: Russia's Strategy for Existence in the Eastern Mediterranean)' *Kriter Dergi*, 1 September 2020, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-dogu-akdenizde-ne-oluyor/enerji-mi-egemenlik-mi-rusyanin-dogu-akdenizde-var-olma-stratejisi> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

As for the Eastern Mediterranean gas, Russia wants to get the biggest share and manipulate prices in the energy market.’<sup>44</sup>

As stated by ‘Anadolu Agency’, for Ankara, the Russian and Turkish historical showdown in the ‘imaginary’ Libya-Eastern Mediterranean-Syria-Caucasus line interacted with areas of conflict in the depths of Africa, where Russia and Turkey had been attempting to claim leading roles.<sup>45</sup> Branding Russia as one of Turkey’s main competitors (along with France) in Africa,<sup>46</sup> ‘Kriter’ warned that in the aforementioned regions ‘Russia has become the most belligerent actor after the United States.’<sup>47</sup>

### 3. Cooperation despite conflicting stakes

The archive of the “Kriter” helps us to understand that in the recent period despite their conflicting objectives, Moscow and Ankara focused on building conflictual cooperation separating areas of agreement from areas of disagreement. Even though Moscow and Ankara strongly disagreed on several topics, the two nations became partners in a number of areas because of the altering worldwide power dynamics, the effect of domestic factors, and the leadership of their

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<sup>44</sup> Meryem İlayda Atlas, 'Enerji mi, Egemenlik mi: Rusya'nın Doğu Akdeniz'de Var Olma Stratejisi (Energy or Sovereignty: Russia's Strategy for Existence in the Eastern Mediterranean)'..

<sup>45</sup> Anadolu Agency, 'Afrika Kıtasındaki Rus-Fransız Çekişmesinin Yeni Adresi: Burkina Faso (The New Address of the Russian-French Rivalry on the African Continent: Burkina Faso)' 4 October 2022, available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/afrika-kitasindaki-rus-fransiz-cekismesinin-yeni-adresi-burkina-faso/2702069>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>46</sup> Mehmet Çağatay Güler, 'Rusya'nın Afrika Politikası (Russia's Africa Policy)', *Kriter Dergi*, no. 63, 1 December 2021, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-afrikada-turkiye/rusyanin-afrika-politikasi>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>47</sup> Sabir Askeroğlu, 'Rusya'nın Büyük Güç Olma Stratejisi (Russia's Strategy to Become a Great Power)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 52, 1 December 2020, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/rusyanin-buyuk-guc-olma-stratejisi> (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

presidents. Therefore, whilst their ties with the West were deteriorating, the personal decisions made by the presidents of the two nations not only strengthened their domestic political hegemony, but also made it easier for Russia and Turkey to focus on implementing the conflictual cooperation model. During the last period, the two regional powers have steadily developed a successful partnership by cooperating and coordinating their efforts to achieve goals like counterbalancing the West and harvesting mutual gains in the economy and energy sectors. The Turkish President placed this partnership based on ‘cooperation on issues of common interests.’ According to him ‘the fact that we are working (again, after the recent fluctuations in bilateral relations) so closely together, particularly during this normalization process, will (surely) further improve ties between Turkey and the Russian Federation.’<sup>48</sup> In the same vein, at the beginning of this process, immediately before the failed coup in Turkey and the launch of Ankara's military plans for the northern part of Syria, ‘Kriter’ stressed that:

The rationalization of the bilateral ties will have significant consequences for both sides. Both Turkey and Russia have suffered from the tensions. Economically, many sectors, especially tourism, were severely affected. Diplomatically, both sides were unable to discuss the Syrian issue. Now it's time to get over this. However, more importantly, an agreement will have a serious security dimension. Syria is a region that

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Erdoğan: Rusya ile İlişkilerimiz Daha Da Güçlenecek (Erdogan: Our Relations with Russia Will Get Stronger)’ *Deutsche Welle*, 13 November 2017, Available at <https://www.dw.com/tr/erdođan-rusya-ile-iliřkilerimiz-daha-da-guclenecek/a-41351615>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

produces insecurity. If they desire a solution, the parties should set aside their disagreements.<sup>49</sup>

According to the 'Kriter', the Turkish-Russian rapprochement was part of the effort to breathe new vision into Turkey's foreign policy:

Diplomatic talks between the two sides had never broken down. Negotiations at the level of foreign ministries were already underway. Now the issue has been taken to the level of heads of state. A point has been reached where it is possible to bypass symbolic barriers and focus on concrete goals. Considering that Turkey has also reached the ground of normalization with Israel, it becomes clear that these diplomatic steps were taken within the framework of a certain plan. Turkey expands its diplomatic maneuvering area and partners with as many actors as possible.<sup>50</sup>

The magazine's heightened interest in the cooperation between the two neighboring countries coincided with the surfacing of several serious problems in Turkey's relations with the West and especially the USA. This turn of attention towards Moscow grew bigger just after the failed coup in 2016. According to 'Kriter' this was to be expected particularly since 'the Western democracies remained silent (both) in the (past) coups and the July 15 coup attempt':

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<sup>49</sup> Hasan Basri Yalçın, 'Rusya İle Yakınlaşma Adımı (Step closer to Russia)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 3, 4 July 2016, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/rusya-ile-yakinlasma-adimi>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>50</sup> Hasan Basri Yalçın, 'Rusya İle Yakınlaşma Adımı (Step closer to Russia)'.



In the coups of May 27, 1960, March 12, 1971, and September 12, 1980, the policy pursued by Western democracies is proof that the values of the liberal democracies have succumbed to pragmatism. The actions taken by the West to support the May 27, 1960, coup d'état and ties with the putschist regime (are well known). The fact that the March 12, 1971, Memorandum was written after the White House openly disagreed with the Demirel administration, particularly on the growing of poppies, demonstrates how far the US took its attitude toward the 1960 coup. The United States' attitude did not change in the wake of the coup d'état on September 12, 1980. The head of the CIA in Turkey at the time, Paul B. Henze, is reported to have said to US President Jimmy Carter, 'Our boys did it.'<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, as 'Kriter' articles argued, the Western democracies not only failed to show their solidarity with the Turkish government in its time of need, meaning after the failed coup of 2016, but also moved on to cooperate with its enemies inside and outside the country. This stance brought on the intensified cooperation on the Ankara-Moscow axis:

Turkey is going through a very critical period. On the one hand, the liquidation of FETÖ (the organization led by the exiled

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<sup>51</sup> Serdar Karagöz, 'Batı 15 Temmuz'da Sınıfta Kaldı (West Failed on July 15)', *Kriter Dergi*, no. 15, 6 July 2017, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/bati-15-temmuzda-sinifta-kaldi>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

religious leader Fethullah Gülen) continues and on the other hand, an effective fight against terrorism is being carried both at home and abroad. The cost of the US investment in the PYD/YPG is the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia. In this regard, the meeting between Erdogan and Putin on August 10 (2016) and the stepped-up discussion with Iran on 'Syria's territorial integrity' show that these three parties are interacting more frequently. The tensions between these three actors will push the US to adopt a new stance, even though it is difficult to discuss the establishment of a bloc against the US at this time.<sup>52</sup>

In agreement with 'Kriter', the pro-government newspaper 'Sabah' published relevant statements of the Turkish government's representatives arguing that Turkey was forced to work with Russia as a result of the West's stance in a series of developments. According to the newspaper, 'Europe's support in the war on terrorism and the refugee crisis has been negligible in comparison to Turkey's burden.'<sup>53</sup> As stressed by another pro-government newspaper, the 'Habertürk', Ankara evaluated its relations with Moscow considering 'the misguided practices the West had pursued in its relations with Turkey'. Therefore, although Turkey is a member of NATO, she chose to adopt the same stance as two other Western-aligned nations, Saudi Arabia and Israel, and to reject 'the West's plan of weakening Russia through economic sanctions'. Based on the newspaper's

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<sup>52</sup> Veysel Kurt, 'Türkiye'nin Cerablus Operasyonu (Turkey's Jarablus Operation)', *Kriter Dergi*, no. 5, 1 September 2016, available <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/turkiyenin-cerablus-operasyonu>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022)

<sup>53</sup> Duran, Burhanettin. 'Türkiye'nin Rusya Politikasını Doğru Anlamak (Understanding Turkey's Russia Policy Properly)' *Sabah*, 12 August 2022, available at <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/duran/2022/08/12/turkiyenin-rusya-politikasini-dogru-anlamak>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

assessment Ankara's strategic decision resulted in Europe's new emerging challenges.<sup>54</sup>

As 'Kriter' argues, although the West's cold attitude towards the existing conservative government of Turkey and the Kurdish factor brought Turkey and Russia together, however the new multi-level Turkish-Russian cooperation was not in any case an alternative to Turkey's historical relations with the West:

Turkey has serious problems with its most important ally (the USA). The United States has seriously disappointed Turkey not only on the issue of the coup, but also regarding Syria and the PKK. For this reason, Turkey diversifies its collaborations.<sup>55</sup>

Whilst Ankara's disappointment with the West grew deeper, by August 2016, a series of contracts signed by the presidents of the two countries and the deployment of Turkish and pro-Turkish forces in the northern part of Syria marked the further intensification of the Turkish-Russian collaboration. Even though Turkey was not prepared to completely abandon its ties to the West and bind itself to Russia, according to 'Kriter', the Turkish army operations on the outskirts of Aleppo, in Jarablus, Al-Bab and Afrin, which were launched in consultation with Moscow, brought the two countries together.<sup>56</sup> This development disappointed

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<sup>54</sup> Çetin, Çetiner, 'Küresel Düzendeki Yeni Arayışlar (New Searches in Global Order)' *Habertürk*, 21 October 2022, Available at <https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/cetiner-cetin/3531354-kuresel-duzende-yeni-arayislar>. (Last accessed 1 July 2022).

<sup>55</sup> Hasan Basri Yalçın, 'Rusya ile Yakınlaşmanın Rasyonel Zemini (The Rational Basis for Rapprochement with Russia)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 5, 1 September 2016, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/rusya-ile-yakinlasmanin-rasyonel-zemini>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>56</sup> Can Acun, 'Fırat Kalkanı Harekatı'nın Muhtemel Yönü (Possible Direction of Operation Euphrates Shield)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 6, 1 October 2016, available at

those who wished to see them in opposite camps, especially Ankara's Western counterparts.<sup>57</sup> The operation in Afrin, to which the magazine refers, began shortly after President Erdogan's official visit to Moscow. As part of this visit, the Turkish President's close associates discussed with Russian officials the new Turkish plans for the northern part of Syria. In these contacts, Turkey received Moscow's approval to use Syrian airspace for the needs of the operation in Afrin.<sup>58</sup> Considering the bigger picture, the USA expressed alarm over the Turkish attack on Afrin claiming that the offensive would divert attention away from the task of destroying the 'Islamic State'.<sup>59</sup>

Disagreeing with Washington's concern, 'Kriter' stated that the deployment of the Turkish forces into the Syrian city of Afrin and the following military operations in the eastern part of the Euphrates were the natural outcome of the strategic cooperation between Russia and Turkey.<sup>60</sup> The US' cooperation with the

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<https://kriterdergi.com/siyaset/firat-kalkani-harekatinin-muhtemel-yonu>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>57</sup> Abdullah Erboğa, 'Türkiye'nin Bab Merkezli Yeni Güvenlik Öncelikleri (Turkey's New Security Priorities in Al Bab)', *Kriter Dergi*, no. 8, 2 December 2016, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/turkiyenin-bab-merkezli-yeni-guvenlik-oncelikleri>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>58</sup> 'Rusya'ya Afrin Ziyareti (Afrin Visit to Russia)' *NTV*, 19 January 2018, Available at <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/rusyaya-afirin-ziyareti,MAU8111nrUmJmUmPpqtqtA>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>59</sup> Landler, Mark, Carlotta Gall, and Eric Schmitt, 'Mixed Messages From U.S. as Turkey Attacks Syrian Kurds' *The New York Times*, 24 January 2018, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/world/middleeast/us-nato-turkey-afirin-manbij.html>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>60</sup> Necdet Özçelik, 'Afrin'e Zeytin Dalı Harekatı (Operation Olive Branch to Afrin)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 21, 4 February 2018, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/afrine-zeytin-dali-harekati> (last accessed please provide date of last access); Aylin Ünver Noi, 'Firat'ın Doğusuna Operasyon Meşru Müdafaa (Self-Defense Operation to the East of the Euphrates)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 31, 1 January 2019, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/firatin-dogusuna-operasyon-mesru-mudafaa>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

Kurdish separatist movement in the northern part of Syria left Ankara no choice but to launch military operations on Syrian territory in agreement with Moscow. These operations and the coordination between Ankara and Moscow ‘expose the US administration, and especially its military bureaucracy, to serious criticism both domestically and internationally for its affiliation with the PKK.’<sup>61</sup> The Turkish government shared ‘Kriter’s’ criticism of the U.S. policy in Syria. Notably the Turkish president took it upon himself to clarify that his nation would never accept the US relationship with the Kurdish armed forces and their allies while also accusing the USA of ‘helping terrorist organizations’ in northern Syria.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to Ankara's moves in the northern part of Syria, in 2017, Turkey, Russia, and Iran joined forces to find a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis by initiating the ‘Astana process’. The partnership between Turkey, Russia, and Iran on the Syrian crisis, according to President Erdoğan, has produced favorable outcomes on a number of fronts.<sup>63</sup> Partaking in Erdoğan's arguments, ‘Kriter’ characterized this process as the agreement between these three countries to establish ‘temporary ceasefires, and along the way a permanent ceasefire and a

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<sup>61</sup> Necdet Özçelik, ‘Afrin’e Zeytin Dalı Harekatı (Operation Olive Branch to Afrin)’ *Kriter Dergi*, no. 21, 4 February 2018, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/afrine-zeytin-dali-harekati>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>62</sup> ‘Başkan Erdoğan’dan İran Dönüşü Suriye’ye Operasyon Mesajı (President Erdoğan’s Message on Syria Operation on His Return to Iran)’ *Sabah*, 20 July 2022, Available at <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2022/07/20/son-dakika-baskan-erdogandan-iran-donusu-suriyeye-operasyon-mesaji-abdye-f-16-gondermesi>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>63</sup> The Turkish Presidency, ‘Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Soçi’de Üçlü Suriye Zirvesine Katıldı (President Erdoğan Attends Trilateral Syria Summit in Sochi)’ 22 November 2017, Available at <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/87429/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-socide-uclu-suriye-zirvesine-katildi.html>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

state of de-escalation, and on top of this build a permanent political peace.’<sup>64</sup> For ‘Kriter’ the ‘Astana process’ paved the way for the control of the crisis in Syria, in a way that served Turkey's interests:

The three main results reached at the end of the talks in Astana seem to be in line with Turkey's expectations. The tripartite mechanism established by Russia, Turkey, and Iran to maintain the ceasefire will bring Turkey and Iran side by side and deter the Assad regime from using armed force. The second important issue is to pave the way for the participation of armed opponents, in other words the Free Syrian Army (Turkey's ally), in the Geneva leg of the negotiation process. In this context, it is necessary to underline the fact that the PYD has been left out of the game. Another issue that has been agreed upon is that all the forces in the field should fight jointly with Daesh and al-Nusra. This issue aims to put an end to proxy wars as well as prevent a confrontation between regime forces and Turkey.<sup>65</sup>

During the same period, the ‘Kriter’ also focused on the strengthening of Turkish-Russian relations in the fields of economy and energy. In particular, the magazine’s columnists welcomed the boost in Moscow's and Ankara's economic and tourism relations and turned their attention on the cooperation of the two

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<sup>64</sup> Can Acun, 'Astana Süreci ve İdlib (Astana Süreci ve İdlib)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 17, 2 October 2017, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/astana-sureci-ve-idlib>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>65</sup> Beril Dedeoğlu, 'Astana Müzakereleri: Suriye'de Ateşkes, Yaraların Sarılması ve Yeniden Yapılanma (Astana Talks: Ceasefire, Healing of Wounds and Reconstruction in Syria)' *Kriter Dergi*, 1 February 2017, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/astana-muzakereleri-suriyede-ateskes-yaralarin-sarilmasi-ve-yeniden-yapilanma>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

neighbors in the field of energy. In this framework, the magazine underlined the importance of the Russian construction of Turkey's first nuclear power plant:

As a result of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project, undertaken by the Russian company Rosatom, (Turkey and Russia) began to develop training and partnership relations in the field of nuclear energy, with applications in many sectors from medicine to communication. Putin's proposal for the Turkish Stream project during his December 2014 visit symbolized the peak point of Turkish-Russian relations in geo-strategic and geo-economic terms.<sup>66</sup>

The assassination of the Russian Ambassador, in Ankara, in late 2016, did not overshadow the enthusiasm of the magazine's articles for the Russian-Turkish cooperation in Syria, energy and economy fields.<sup>67</sup> The magazine claimed that the assassination was carried out by Turkish Government adversaries who wanted to sour Turkey's relations with Russia. In the same vein, the state television 'TRT' reported that the usual suspect, that is the Fethullah Gülen Organization, was responsible for the Ambassador's assassination.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Sadık Ünay, 'Türkiye-Rusya Yakınlaşması: Jeo-Ekonomik Boyut (Turkey-Russia Convergence: Geo-Economic Dimension)', *Kriter Dergi*, no. 5, 1 September 2016, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/turkiye-rusya-yakinlasmasi-jeo-ekonomik-boyut>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>67</sup> Ufuk Ulutaş, 'Karlov Suikastı: Bir Kaos Operasyonu (Karlov Assassination: An Operation Chaos)', *Kriter Dergi* 9, 1 January 2017, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/siyaset/karlov-suikastci-bir-kaos-operasyonu>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>68</sup> 'Karlov Davasında Gerekçeli Karar: Kripto Suikastçı İle Yeni Darbe Hazırlığıydı ( Reasoned Verdict in the Karlov Case: A New Coup Was Being Prepared with the Contribution of a Crypto Assassin)' *TRT Haber*, 19 April 2021, available at <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/karlov-davasinda-gerekceli-karar-kripto-suikastci-ile-yeni-darbe-hazirligiydi-573983.html>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

The Turkish-Russian cooperation in the field of defense was also welcomed by the magazine's columnists. In 2017, Turkey brokered a deal reportedly worth \$2.5 billion with Russia for acquiring the Russian S-400 missile system. Publishing Ankara's official reaction to this development, the pro-government newspaper, 'Yeni Şafak', argued that this decision had 'a strategic impact on Turkey's defense industry.'<sup>69</sup> Despite warnings from the USA and other NATO allies, Turkey received the first of four missile batteries in July 2019. NATO reacted to this development arguing that the Russian mobile surface-to-air missile system posed a risk to the NATO alliance as well as the new generation fighter aircraft of type F-35. As a result, against Turkey's insistence of acquiring the Russian missile system, Washington imposed sanctions on Turkey and removed the country from the F-35 program.<sup>70</sup> According to 'Kriter', Ankara's choice was strategic and reflected the new trends in the international arena such as the fragmentation of alliances and the increase of strategic weapons:

The evolution of world politics towards uncertainty and the consequent increase of threats pushes Turkey to make new strategic choices. The fragmented alliances, and the tendency to increase the number of the strategic weapons are important changes. The S-400 choice is an important strategic choice that reflects these two tendencies. Global fluctuations and security threats around Turkey require preparation for multiple risks.

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<sup>69</sup> Bucak, Afra Nur, 'S-400'ün Savunma Sanayiine Stratejik Etkisi (The S-400's Strategic Impact on Defense Industry)' *Yenisafak.Com*, 9 September 2021, available at <https://www.yenisafak.com/dusunce-gunlugu/s-400un-savunma-sanayiine-stratejik-etkisi-3701454>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>70</sup> Amanda Macias, 'U.S. Sanctions Turkey over Purchase of Russian S-400 Missile System' *CNBC*, 14 December 2020, available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/14/us-sanctions-turkey-over-russian-s400.html>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).



The use of terrorism as a tool and new phenomena such as proxy wars don't overshadow the reality of conventional warfare. Therefore, it is necessary to take measures against conventional and even nuclear threats.<sup>71</sup>

'Kriter' was not the only voice to support the Turkish-Russian cooperation in the field of defense. During the same period, President Erdoğan himself warned that 'Ankara is considering obtaining more of the Russian defense systems in defiance of US objections.'<sup>72</sup> Commenting on this development, the magazine expressed the view that the Western allies were the ones that forced Turkey to search alternative policies in the field of defense.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, according to the magazine, Turkey's possible retreat on the purchase of S-400 air defense systems 'may provide only temporary relief since the USA could in the future attempt to impose its views on Ankara using new pressures'<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Veysel Kurt, 'Savunma Sistemi İhtiyacı ve S-400'ler (Defense System Requirement and S-400s)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 17, 2 October 2017, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/siyaset/savunma-sistemi-ihciyaci-ve-s-400ler>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>72</sup> 'Erdoğan: Turkey Could Buy More Russian S-400s despite US Warnings' *Al Jazeera*, 26 September 2021, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/26/erdogan-turkey-could-buy-more-russian-s-400s-despite-us-warnings>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>73</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, 'Türkiye-ABD Gerginliğinde Yeni Cephe: S-400 (New front in the Turkey-US tension: S-400)' *Kriter Dergi*, 8 April 2019, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/turkiye-abd-gerginliginde-yeni-cephe-s-400>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>74</sup> Talha Köse, 'S-400 Krizinde Diplomasi ve Asimetrik İlişkiler (Diplomacy and asymmetric relationships in the S-400 crisis)' *Kriter Dergi*, 1 July 2019, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/s-400-krizinde-diplomasi-ve-asimetrik-iliskiler>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

During the same period, although Turkey and Russia found themselves in rival camps in the Libyan crisis,<sup>75</sup> they nevertheless managed to coordinate their steps in another crisis, that of the Karabakh war. From September 27 until November 10, 2020, for 44 days the Azerbaijani and Armenian forces clashed in the Karabakh region for the second time in their history. In this Second Karabakh War, Turkey sided with Azerbaijan, which with the military support offered by Ankara managed to gain control of large parts of Karabakh. On November 10, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia and the Prime Minister of Armenia signed an agreement on the cessation of hostilities. The agreement was based on the diplomatic understanding between Russia and Turkey and included three main points: the return of control over several regions adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan; the deployment of Russian peacekeepers into the region; the exchange of prisoners and the return of refugees. This agreement was praised by President Erdoğan as a historic development that benefited all parties, with Russia and Turkey taking the lead.<sup>76</sup> In the same vein, ‘Kriter’ evaluated the agreement as a ‘win-win’ result. The Turkey-Azerbaijan front came out of the war with significant territorial, military, and diplomatic gains, whilst Russia secured a ceasefire that considers her own interests in the area.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Emrah Kekilli, 'Libya'ya Neden Asker Gönderiliyor? (Why Are Troops Being Sent to Libya?)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 42, 1 January 2020, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-turkiyenin-libya-hamlesi/libyaya-neden-asker-gonderiliyor>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>76</sup> “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’dan Ortak Barış Gücü Açıklaması ( President Erdoğan’s Statement on Joint Peacekeeping Force)” *TRT Haber*, 11 November 2020, Available at <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-ortak-baris-gucu-aciklamasi-530122.html>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>77</sup> Mehmet Çağatay Güler, 'Karabağ'da Değişen Jeopolitik Denklem (Changing Geopolitical Equation in Karabakh)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 52, 1 December 2020, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-azerbaycanin-ermenistan-zaferi/karabagda-degisen-jeopolitik-denklemler>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

As for the most recent war in the Black Sea area, that of Ukraine, the magazine approached Russia's objectives with a favorable eye contrary to the condemning stance taken by the rest of the NATO allies. Indeed, the 'Kriter' expressed its understanding for the Russian positions in the Ukrainian crisis since '(f)or Russia, the Black Sea basin is vital. Pipelines and energy transfer, national security and trade volume in the region make Black Sea indispensable for Russia. The competition in the region, the increase of Western or Atlantic influence, is clearly seen (in Moscow) as a security threat.'<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, Ankara joined the rest of the western countries in sending military assistance to Kiev, although she did not succumb to the pressures for condemning Russia's military acts. Following the steps of Turkish diplomacy, 'Kriter' opted for a cautious stance. On the one hand, it underlined Turkey's attachment to NATO, which is siding with Kiev,<sup>79</sup> and on the other hand it reiterated that the multidimensional cooperation with Russia will continue despite the escalating crisis in Ukraine. For the magazine, a series of elements dictated Ankara's cautious stance:

Since the beginning of the crisis and occupation, Turkey has set itself apart from all other parties with its distinctive approach and has produced tangible outcomes that no other state has been able to. There are four elements that determine Turkey's response to the Ukraine crisis: the Black Sea, the separate

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<sup>78</sup> Mehmet Çağatay Güler, 'Rusya'nın Karadeniz Politikası (Russia's Black Sea Policy)' *Kriter Dergi*, no. 57, 1 May 2021, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya-karadenizin-jeopolitigi/rusyanin-karadeniz-politikasi>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

<sup>79</sup> Burhanettin Duran, 'Ukrayna Krizinin Geleceği ve Türkiye (please provide translation)' *Kriter Dergi*, 1 February 2022, available at <https://kriterdergi.com/cerceve/ukrayna-krizinin-gelecegi-ve-turkiye>. (Last accessed 1 August 2022).

bilateral ties with Russia and Ukraine, the crucial Black Sea straits, and Turkey's NATO membership.<sup>80</sup>

The magazine's reference to the straits is consistent with the statements of the Turkish officials regarding the war in Ukraine. On one hand, at the beginning of the war, in response to Ukraine's request for Turkey to close the straits, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated that the Montreux Convention on the Straits 'clearly regulates the passage of warships of littoral and non-littoral countries through the Straits and their stay in the Black Sea, as well as the duration and limit'. Çavuşoğlu added that "(w)e will undoubtedly use the Montreux Convention. In the case of a war in which Turkey is not a party, Turkey has the right to block access to the Strait for the ships of the warring nations. The Montreux Convention's Article 19 is explicit.'<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, President Erdoğan underlined his country's 'neutrality' as a strategic choice that brings gains for all sides. In mid-2022, at the height of hostilities in Ukraine, whilst he was announcing the 'wheat corridor', Erdoğan made reference to the significance of communication and collaboration with the combatants of the battle in Ukraine. Describing the approval of Ukraine and Russia for the shipment of Ukrainian wheat with the mediation of Turkey and

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<sup>80</sup> Ferhat Pirinççi, 'Türkiye'nin Ukrayna Politikası: Dengeli Aktivizm (Turkey's Ukraine Policy: Balanced Activism)'.  
<sup>81</sup> Anadolu Agency, "Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu: Montrö Sözleşmesi'nin Bütün Hükümlerini Şeffaf Bir Şekilde Uygulayacağız (Foreign Minister Cavusoglu: We Will Transparently Implement All Provisions of the Montreux Convention)' 27 February 2022, available at

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/disisleri-bakani-cavusoglu-montro-sozlesmesinin-butun-hukumlerini-seffaf-bir-sekilde-uygulayacagiz/2517057>. (Last accessed 30 August 2022).

UN's assistance as a 'diplomatic success', Erdoğan emphasized his nation's leadership considering its decision to remain neutral in the Ukraine war.<sup>82</sup>

Lastly, to conclude the factors that contribute to the Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation we must mention the authoritarian personalities of Presidents Erdoğan and Putin, which deeply affect both the domestic developments, and the making of the foreign policies of the two countries. As underlined by Jégo, the leadership styles of the two nations' leaders, who have come under fire from the global public opinion for demonstrating authoritarian tendencies and pursuing unilateral, assertive foreign policies, are crucial for the construction of the Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation.<sup>83</sup> This particular aspect of Russian-Turkish relations is absent from the analyses of 'Kriter'. This is despite the fact that in a related analysis, the 'Anadolu Agency', places the personal relations and choices of the two countries' presidents at the heart of the new strategic partnership that Moscow and Ankara have been building in recent years.<sup>84</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Turkish-Russian conflictual cooperation has potential**

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<sup>82</sup> 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Tahıl Koridoru Açıklaması: Diplomatik Başarıdır ( Grain Corridor Statement by President Erdoğan: Diplomatic Success)' *CNN TÜRK*, 1 August 2022, Available at <https://www.cnnturk.com/video/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-tahil-koridoru-aciklamasi-diplomatik-basaridir>. (Last accessed 30 August 2022).

<sup>83</sup> Marie Jégo, 'For Putin and Erdogan, Friendly Cooperation Keeps Business Booming' *Le Monde*, 23 September 2022, available at [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/09/23/for-putin-and-erdogan-friendly-cooperation-keeps-business-booming\\_5997966\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/09/23/for-putin-and-erdogan-friendly-cooperation-keeps-business-booming_5997966_4.html). (Last accessed 30 August 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Mitat Çelikpala, 'Yeni Yüzyılda Stratejik Ortaklık: Türkiye ve Rusya (Strategic Partnership in the New Century: Turkey and Russia)' *Anadolu Agency*, 4 October 2017, available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/yeni-yuzyilda-stratejik-ortaklik-turkiye-ve-rusya/926673>. (Last accessed 30 August 2022).

The efforts made by Turkey and Russia to coordinate their contradictory agendas on multiple fronts are at the heart of this study. As the articles of 'Kriter' mention, the cooperation initiated by the two countries in recent years is anything but harmonious. The nature of the Turkish-Russian partnership over the last six years displays a conflictual cooperation.

The historical lack of trust in bilateral relations has fueled the two countries' disagreements on several issues such as the Kurdish issue in conjunction with developments in Syria, the control of the Eastern Mediterranean with emphasis to the energy-related developments, the Libyan crisis, the competition in Africa, Russia's moves in the Black Sea, and most recently the war in Ukraine.

Despite these disagreements, over the past six years, 'Kriter' identified and recorded areas of common interest where Turkish-Russian cooperation flourished. According to the magazine, these fields were the following: first, the common Turkish-Russian suspicion of the West's intentions. Second, the effort to address the challenges in Syria together. Third, the cooperation on the economy, tourism, and energy fronts. Fourth, the new Turkish-Russian cooperation in the field of defense. Finally, the understanding in the Caucasus region. As for the latest crisis in Ukraine, 'Kriter' clearly argues that the war does not overshadow the multi-level cooperation between Turkey and Russia, whilst at the same time it does not obstruct Ankara's cooperation with Kiev.

According to the magazine's columnists, in the 21st century, Russia and Turkey show an increased interest for cooperation in a series of fields that primarily bring profits to both sides. The fields of energy, tourism, and economy, offer new opportunities for deepening bilateral cooperation that are proven very lucrative.

At the same time, both countries share a lack of understanding with the West, and especially the USA. This pushes the two countries into searching for alternative partnerships. In other words, as ‘Kriter’ maintains, the conflictual cooperation between Turkey and Russia is far from over.

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