

## *Chapter Fourteen*

# **The Repercussions of the Ankara-Moscow Rapprochement on Turkey's Transatlantic Relations: The American Perspective**

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Russian President Vladimir Putin praised the recent high level of cooperation between Russia and Turkey in a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on June 23, 2017. “We are developing projects with Turkey the way these projects are not developing with many other partners,” President Putin said from a pipe-laying ship involved in the construction of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline (“Partners” is a frequent Putin euphemism for the United States and NATO). “When it takes us years to have administrative approval with the others,” President Putin told the Turkish leader, “we do this within several months with Turkey and this certainly comes due to your direct personal support.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the speed with which bilateral relations have recovered from their low point in 2015 has been stunning. Only two years ago did Turkish pilots shoot down a Russian warplane and the two countries appeared on the verge of war. The sides showed some restraint and resorted only to insults and sanctions, but Moscow suspended visa-free travel to Russia for Turkish citizens, restricted imports of Turkish products, and discouraged tour operators from selling Turkish holiday packages.

Since then, tensions have ebbed, and a regional realignment has occurred. In June 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan apologized for the shoot down. Two weeks later, Russia's president Vladimir Putin rushed to condemn a violent coup attempt against Turkey's government. The two countries subsequently signed a large gas pipeline deal, agreed to resume work on a nuclear plant in southern Turkey worth billions of dollars and pledged to increase bilateral trade by more than fivefold, to 100 billion dollars a year.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Putin praises level of cooperation with Turkey.” *Tass Russian News Agency*. June 23, 2017. <http://tass.com/politics/953035>.

<sup>2</sup> “Turkey's snuggling up to Russia is likely to hurt it.” *The Economist*. July 27, 2017.

## Competition and Cooperation

Turkey and Russia have four areas of overlapping interests, which need to be carefully managed but provide potential for substantive cooperation:

- The Russian geopolitical retreat in the 1990s opened up the Balkans to competition from Turkey for influence.<sup>3</sup> Romania, Bulgaria, and a majority of the lands of the former Yugoslavia are all former Ottoman possessions and in their day formed the most advanced portion of the Ottoman economy;
- Turkey is a major source of Russia's consumer imports;
- Energy relations between the two countries are close. Russia is Turkey's primary trading partner, with energy accounting for the bulk of the trade volume between the two countries. Turkey depends on Russia for 65 percent of its natural gas and 40 percent of its oil imports;<sup>4</sup>
- Turkey and Russia have mutual but competing interests in the Caucasus. The Azerbaijanis, for example, do not consider themselves simply Turkic, like the Central Asians, but actually Turkish. Armenia remains both pro-Russia and vehemently anti-Turkey. Armenia and Azerbaijan are at loggerheads over Nagorno-Karabakh, a disputed territory, internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but most of the region is governed by the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, a *de facto* independent state with Armenian ethnic majority.<sup>5</sup>

Turkish-Russian relations, which were hostile during the 1990s, have generally improved in recent years, despite the dip in 2015. Formerly divisive issues such as Chechnya receded in importance. The two countries' positions converged on Iran. Trade, tourism and energy ties between the two countries grew closer. Even divisive issues after the Arab Spring such as Russia's and Turkey's divergent stance towards Syria and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) based in Turkey and Iraq generally were not an obstacle for these two countries in developing their bilateral relationship in a pragmatic way.

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<https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717080-putin-and-erdogan-expect-different-and-contradictory-things-their-relationship-turkeys>.

<sup>3</sup> Bhalla, Reva, Lauren Goodrich, and Peter Zeihan. "Turkey and Russia on the Rise." Stratfor, March 17, 2009. Accessed July 12, 2017. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/turkey-and-russia-rise>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## Differing Expectations

The recent rapprochement between Turkey and Russia benefits both sides. For Russia, having ties with a strategically-located NATO country such as Turkey allows the Kremlin to advance three key foreign policy goals:

- First, it can undermine the Western alliance by raising questions about Turkish loyalties. (Ankara is considering, for example, the purchase of a Russian air- and missile defense system);
- Second, Russia hopes to use Turkey as a transit point for energy exports to markets in Europe, thereby increasing its market share in Turkey<sup>6</sup> and avoiding shipping product across a now-hostile Ukraine, which has weaned itself away from Gazprom and its pipelines. To this end, Moscow has placed great expectations and money in the Turkish Stream, the gas pipeline that would allow Russia to extend its grip over Turkey's and Europe's energy markets. Turkstream will run from the southern Russian region of Krasnodar, across the Black Sea to Kırıkköy on the Turkey's coast;
- Finally, Moscow wants to use Turkey to help Russia project power in the Middle East.

For Turkey, Russia remains a useful alternative to Europe and the United States, who are often critical of Ankara's human rights record and have been reluctant to fully integrate Turkey into Western economic and political structures. After Turkey shot down the Russian plane in 2015, President Putin cut Turkey off from the Middle East. Russian fighter jets bombed Turkey's proxies inside Syria, including its ethnic cousins, the Turkmen, with impunity. Russia's missile defenses denied Turkey access to the airspace over Syria. Russian sanctions cost Turkey at least 10 billion dollars in tourism and trade revenue.<sup>7</sup> President Erdoğan's decision to improve relations again with President Putin was in part because having Russia as an enemy was so painful.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Turkey already depends on Russia for 55 percent of its natural gas imports.

<sup>7</sup> "Turkey's snuggling up to Russia is likely to hurt it." *The Economist*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717080-putin-and-erdogan-expect-different-and-contradictory-things-their-relationship-turkeys>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Whenever relations with the West turn sour, Turkish officials place the issue of joining alternative regional organizations on the agenda. They sometimes argue that the government should hold a referendum on Turkey joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Both are initiatives where Russia plays a dominant role. This has happened again in recent months. First, long-standing differences between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh make a rapprochement between Ankara and Yerevan, and thus Turkey's accession into the EAEU, unlikely. Second, Turkey has imposed sanctions on to Armenia due to the "genocide" claims by Yerevan. And third, Armenia, which became a member of the EAEU last year, would likely oppose Turkey's accession to the organization. If Turkey becomes a member of the EAEU, a customs union aimed at eliminating trade barriers, Ankara would have to lift sanctions, thereby accepting Armenia's argument on the "genocide" question and its position on Nagorno Karabakh. This might also jeopardize Turkey's special relationship with Azerbaijan.

### Partners in Syria

In the Middle East, President Erdoğan has come to see Russia's geopolitical agenda as closer to his own than that of his nominal Western allies. The Turkey–Russia relationship serves as a balance against Western dominance in the Middle East following the Arab uprisings. This weakens Turkey's traditional Euro-Atlantic commitment, replacing it instead with greater autonomy to pursue its regional foreign policy interests.<sup>9</sup>

Nowhere in the region are Turkey's partnerships more complicated than in Syria, where the need to align with a power such as Russia, which can satisfy its domestic political and security needs, drives an inconsistent Turkish policy.<sup>10</sup> Turkey's persistent fear of Kurdish autonomy and the ability of AK Party (Justice and Development Party) to mobilize nationalist fury among its electorate on this issue have been shaped its approach to the Syrian conflict. For Turkey, Russia is indispensable in keeping a check on Kurdish autonomy and shoring up a suffering economy. Meanwhile,

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<sup>9</sup> Turkey's Turn Toward Russia." *Carnegie Endowment*. May 16, 2017. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/69981>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

by not taking a clear stance on the Kurdish issue, Moscow is able to keep Turkish behavior in check.

Despite longstanding and often close relations, President Vladimir Putin's views of Moscow and Ankara at first diverged on Syria. In September 2011, six months after peaceful protests against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad were harshly repressed, Ankara cut the Syrian regime loose and began to back select opposition groups. In 2013, NATO deployed Patriot missile defense batteries in southern Turkey to protect it against possible Syrian attacks. But Syria and Russia accused Turkey of allowing arms and oil trafficking to flourish with jihadist elements in Syria and Iraq, both of which share borders with Turkey.

When Russia entered the war in September 2015 to prevent the defeat of the Assad government, it did so to secure its own military and economic interests, particularly natural gas pipelines passing through Syria.<sup>11</sup> At the height of their dispute, President Vladimir Putin and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were even accusing each other of supporting the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).<sup>12</sup>

In a major policy turnaround in August 2016, Turkey abandoned its absolutist position on the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. By the following January, Turkey's deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Şimşek stated at the World Economic Forum in Davos that Turkey could no longer "insist on a settlement without Assad."<sup>13</sup> In exchange, Russia has allowed Turkey's army to set up a buffer zone inside Syria. Turkey also seized the chance to push ISIS back from its last border strongholds and stem the advance of American-allied Kurdish insurgents, known as the People's Protection Units (YPG). Today, Moscow and Ankara are coordinating airstrikes against it in Syria. The warming of relations continued despite the assassination of the Russian envoy to Ankara by a Turkish policeman at the end of 2016.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Russia's Syria Intervention is Not All About Gas." *Carnegie Endowment*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/62036>.

<sup>12</sup> "Turkey's snuggling up to Russia is likely to hurt it." *The Economist*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717080-putin-and-erdogan-expect-different-and-contradictory-things-their-relationship-turkeys>.

<sup>13</sup> "Turkey's Turn Toward Russia." *Carnegie Endowment*. May 16, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> "Turkey's snuggling up to Russia is likely to hurt it." *The Economist*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717080-putin-and-erdogan-expect-different-and-contradictory-things-their-relationship-turkeys>.

These developments opened up possibilities for Turkey to coordinate with Russia and Iran on a diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis.<sup>15</sup> The start of peace talks in Astana in January 2017 was significant because these three new partners were leading the process, with the United States only observing it. As European and American diplomats watched from the sidelines, in December 2016 Turkey and Russia brokered a ceasefire in Aleppo and the following month agreed on a plan to stop the fighting in the rest of Syria. Notably absent from the talks was the Syrian Kurdish PYD, which Turkey opposed for its links to the PKK. However, despite three rounds of talks, there has been little success. The fact that the Syrian opposition boycotted the third round of talks in March, allegedly under Turkish instruction, illustrates the extent to which the negotiations are yet another arena to protect respective national interests.<sup>16</sup>

On the Kurdish issue, however, the Turkey-Russia cooperation has been rocky. Turkey has told Russia it expects the closure of the PKK/PYD office in Moscow. Ankara was displeased by photos showing Russian soldiers with PKK/PYD terrorists together in Syria and the discovery of a Russian-made air defense missile found during PKK operations in Turkey. Russia, moreover, still does not recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization.

### **Fraying Ties with Washington**

Ties between the U.S. and Turkey, nominal allies, experienced ups and downs since the AK Party won national elections 14 years ago. The Bush administration viewed the AK Party as a powerful and “moderate” Islamist voice in the Muslim world following the 9/11 attacks, but the relationship became complicated after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Despite the Turkish parliament’s rejection of the U.S. request to use its territory for a ground deployment to invade Iraq, President Bush maintained strong relations with Turkey under the AK Party’s leadership. President Bush supported President Erdoğan’s efforts to contain Kurdish rebels who used northern Iraq as a base to stage attacks on Turkish targets. He called the

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<sup>15</sup> Turkey’s Turn Toward Russia.” *Carnegie Endowment*. May 16, 2017. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/69981>

<sup>16</sup> “Russian-backed Syria talks derailed as rebels boycott.” *Reuters*. Accessed July 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-talks-idUSKBN16L0VT>.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) "an enemy of Turkey, a free Iraq and the United States."<sup>17</sup>

President Obama voiced his support for the AK Party government during the coup attempt, but the overall response from the U.S. establishment was mute.<sup>18</sup> Washington's ambivalence was expressed by the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass,<sup>19</sup> who told *The New York Times* that the coup attempt "presents a dilemma to the United States and European governments: Do you support a nondemocratic coup," or an "increasingly nondemocratic leader?"<sup>20</sup>

Ties with the U.S. are further strained by several other longstanding issues:

**Gülen's Fate.** President Erdoğan blamed the 2016 coup on Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen, who lives in the U.S. state of Pennsylvania. The Turkish leader has pressed the U.S. to extradite the cleric, but so far to no avail. Turkey has carried out widespread purges of the civil service to get rid of Gülen supporters.<sup>21</sup>

**Armenia.** In April 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump termed the massacre of Armenians in 1915 "one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century." He did not qualify it as genocide however, though that did not prevent Turkey from sharply criticizing what it called "misinformation" and "false definitions." President Obama had said during his 2008 campaign that he would recognize the massacres as genocide, but he never used the term once he had won election.<sup>22</sup>

**Human Rights.** In April 2016, President Obama criticized a "troubling" path that President Erdoğan might be putting Turkey on with

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<sup>17</sup> "US, Turkey, step up work against PKK terrorists." *Hurriyet Daily News*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-turkey-step-up-work-against-pkk-terrorists.aspx?>

<sup>18</sup> "Turkey coup attempt: Reaction from around the world." *Reuters*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-reaction-world-160715215141043.html>.

<sup>19</sup> "Russian-backed Syria talks derailed as rebels boycott." *Reuters*. Accessed July 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-talks-idUSKBN16L0VT>.

<sup>20</sup> Sanger, David E. "U.S. Finds Itself on Shakier Ground as Erdogan Confronts Mutiny." *The New York Times*. July 15, 2016. [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/16/world/europe/erdogan-turkey-coup-us-fear.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/16/world/europe/erdogan-turkey-coup-us-fear.html?_r=1).

<sup>21</sup> "Turkey and the US: Strained Relations." *AFP*. May 14, 2016. <https://sports.yahoo.com/news/turkey-us-strained-relations-185907786.html>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

respect to freedom of the press, a day after the two leaders met in Washington. Turkish authorities were accused of being authoritarian and of repressing the media and opposition members.<sup>23</sup>

**Iraq.** In 2003, relations deteriorated between Turkey and the U.S. when Ankara refused to allow its territory to be used during the U.S. invasion of neighboring Iraq. Turkish officials did, however, allow U.S. aircrafts to fly over the country during the subsequent fighting, and helped with supply operations and U.S. troop rotations.<sup>24</sup>

### **Ankara, Washington, Damascus ... and Moscow**

In August 2015, Turkey joined a U.S.-led coalition to fight ISIS after being hit by a deadly suicide attack near its border in July. President Erdoğan declared a “war on terrorism” aimed at the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to the same extent, if not more so, than on ISIS. In August 2016, Turkey launched operation Euphrates Shield in northern Syria, targeting ISIS fighters but also Kurdish Peoples’ Protection Units (YPG). Ankara claimed the YPG was linked to PKK separatists inside Turkey, who have waged an insurgency since 1984 that has killed more than 40,000 people. But Washington backed the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of which the YPG makes up roughly half, and which has been effective in fighting the ISIS group. In April 2017, Turkish warplanes struck YPG headquarters in Syria and also a pro-Kurdish militia force in Iraq. On May 9, Washington said it will authorize the arming of the YPG, a decision Turkey called “unacceptable.”<sup>25</sup>

The anti-Western sentiments that swept through Turkey in the wake of the coup dimmed in early 2017, as President Erdoğan had hopes that the Trump administration would play a stronger role in the region. Ankara expected U.S. President Donald Trump to extradite the presumed mastermind of July’s coup, Fethullah Gülen, and to sever links with the Kurdish YPG, which the Obama administration considered an effective force against ISIS, but which Turkey considers a terrorist group. Mike Pompeo, the CIA’s new chief, was in Ankara to discuss these issues on February 9, 2017.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “Turkey and the US: Strained Relations.” *AFP*. May 14, 2016. <https://sports.yahoo.com/news/turkey-us-strained-relations-185907786.html>.

<sup>26</sup> “Turkey’s snuggling up to Russia is likely to hurt it.” *The Economist*. Accessed July 27, 2017.

President Trump congratulated President Erdoğan for his victory in the April referendum, but warned of the need to protect the “fundamental rights and freedoms” of all Turks, “regardless of their vote.”<sup>27</sup> This lukewarm reception of President Erdoğan’s victory mirrored the West’s weak condemnation of Turkey’s coup attempt in July 2016. Then, as now, it was President Putin who enthusiastically supported President Erdoğan, noting that the referendum was “exclusively an internal matter” of the Turkish republic.<sup>28</sup> This succinct support for state sovereignty illustrates the growing understanding between President Putin and President Erdoğan, whose regional ambitions, and aversion to interference in their internal affairs by a foreign power make them uncomfortable, if necessary, bedfellows.

The May 9 announcement by the Trump administration that the United States would arm fighters of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) in preparation for an advance on the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa in Syria resulted in an angry response from Turkey.<sup>29</sup> Demanding a policy reversal, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu noted ominously that any arms obtained by the YPG were a direct threat to Turkey—strong words from one NATO ally to another.<sup>30</sup> For Turkey, U.S. support for the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria and its armed wings, the YPG and the Women’s Protection Units (YPJ), is framed domestically as a deliberate effort to strengthen Turkey’s perceived internal enemy, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). This fallout with the United States benefits Russia.<sup>31</sup>

After the Assad government launched a chemical attack on Khan Sheikhoun on April 4, 2017, the international outcry gave Turkey another opportunity to reformulate its Syria policy. President Erdoğan’s response—

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<https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717080-putin-and-erdogan-expect-different-and-contradictory-things-their-relationship-turkeys>.

<sup>27</sup> Landler, Mark. “Trump Congratulates Erdogan on Turkey Vote Cementing His Rule.” *The New York Times*. April 17, 2017. <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/us/politics/trump-erdogan-turkey-referendum.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Peskov, Dmitry. “Putin commented on the referendum in Turkey.” *World.24-my.info*. April 18, 2017. <http://world.24-my.info/putin-commented-on-the-referendum-in-turkey-2/>

<sup>29</sup> Michael R. Gordon And Eric Schmitt. “Trump to Arm Syrian Kurds, Even as Turkey Strongly Objects.” *The New York Times*. May 9, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/us/politics/trump-kurds-syria-army.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/us/politics/trump-kurds-syria-army.html?_r=0).

<sup>30</sup> “Turkey furious at US decision to arm Syrian Kurdish group.” *Hurriyet Daily News*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-furious-at-us-decision-to-arm-syrian-kurdish-group.aspx?pageID=238&nID=112955&NewsCatID=510>.

<sup>31</sup> “Despite tensions over Syria, Turkey is increasingly turning to Russia to secure its foreign and domestic policy needs.” *Carnegie Endowment*. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/69981>

now referring to Assad as a “murderer”—was decided both by moral outrage and his need to heighten nationalist sentiment leading up to the referendum.<sup>32</sup> Even though the U.S. response to the attack was similar, the two countries’ responses did not usher in realignment of Turkey’s foreign policy back toward Washington. Unilateral Turkish airstrikes on Kurdish YPG forces in Derik on April 25, moreover, dispelled possibilities of Turkish cooperation with the United States, even as the YPG forces moved toward closer collaboration with the U.S. military to secure the border and prevent further attacks on Syrian Kurdish coalition allies.<sup>33</sup>

President Putin has been stepping in to capitalize on the worsening Turkey-U.S. relationship by expanding Russia’s role in the Middle East. Moscow also needs Turkey to speed up the political process in Syria by bringing anti-regime forces to the negotiating table. Turkey in turn, wants Russian tourists, gas supplies, and help in rebuilding ties with President Assad. But when another crisis strikes, President Putin is likely to push the wedge between Turkey and NATO even deeper.<sup>34</sup>

## Strains with Europe

Turkey’s relations with Europe, meanwhile, are also faltering, in part due to Ankara’s improved ties to Moscow. The European response to the coup attempt a few months later paled in comparison with the EU’s expressions of concern over the human rights abuses that followed, leading Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Cavuşoğlu to say, “Unfortunately the EU is making some serious mistakes. They have failed the test following the coup attempt.”<sup>35</sup>

The April 16 constitutional referendum establishing an executive presidency was widely criticized by European election monitors. European

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<sup>32</sup> “Erdogan blames ‘murderer Assad’ for suspected Syria chemical attack.” *AFP via Yahoo News*. April 5, 2017. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/erdogan-blames-murderer-assad-suspected-syria-chemical-attack-145849082.html>.

<sup>33</sup> “Despite tensions over Syria, Turkey is increasingly turning to Russia to secure its foreign and domestic policy needs.” *Carnegie Endowment*. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/69981>.

<sup>34</sup> “Turkey’s snuggling up to Russia is likely to hurt it.” *The Economist*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717080-putin-and-erdogan-expect-different-and-contradictory-things-their-relationship-turkeys>.

<sup>35</sup> “Turkey warns EU it is making ‘serious mistakes’ over failed coup.” *Reuters*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-turkey-europe-minister-idUSKCN10LOS9>.

leaders emphasized the need to safeguard Turkish democracy.<sup>36</sup> In response to rising criticism from Europe, anti-Europe rhetoric has in Turkey.<sup>37</sup> In an attempt to shore up nationalist sentiment, the AK Party's deeply unpopular Syria policy has found scapegoat in the refugee return deal the EU signed with Turkey in March 2016.<sup>38</sup> Despite Turkey's efforts to stem the tide of refugees to Europe, the EU has not lifted its visa requirements as promised. Unsurprisingly, for now at least, Turkey's long obsession with seeking EU membership has largely faded to a passing interest.

## Turkey and NATO

Turkey is unlikely to trade NATO membership for an alliance with Russia. But Turkey's reliability as a Western partner looks increasingly in doubt. Even as Turkish and Western officials pay lip service to the importance of their partnership, Turks are feeding a steady stream of hatred and conspiracy theories toward the West in general and NATO in particular. On June 25, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened the U.S. over its arming of Kurdish forces in Syria, calling for a review of the NATO military alliance in response.<sup>39</sup> "At one side, we will be together in NATO, but on the other side you will act together with terror organizations," he said in reference to the U.S.-led coalition support to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is dominated by the Kurdish People's Protection Forces (YPG) Turkey considers terrorists. "Those so-called friends don't see any issue walking along with terror organizations who want to divide Turkey," the Turkish president added. In April, Turkey and Russia held joint naval exercises. Rumors persist in Turkey about the Kremlin's desire to establish a naval base in Mersin, where there is a growing Russian presence, according to Turkish military officials.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Lack of equal opportunities, one-sided media coverage and limitations on fundamental freedoms created unlevel playing field in Turkey's constitutional referendum, international observers say." *OSCE*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/311726>.

<sup>37</sup> "Turkey's Impending Eastern Turn." *Carnegie Endowment*. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64358>.

<sup>38</sup> Photo Essay: Syrian Refugees Choose Turkey." *Carnegie Endowment*. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68698?lang=en>.

<sup>39</sup> "Turkey's Erdogan calls for review of NATO over US arming of Kurds fighting Isil in Syria." *The Telegraph*. June 26, 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/26/turkeys-erdogan-calls-review-nato-us-arming-kurds-fighting-isil/>

<sup>40</sup> Rubin, Michael. "Turkey Turn toward Russia." *National Review*. April 25, 2017.

Rumors abound that some of President Erdoğan's associates inside the ruling AK Party favor renegeing on some NATO commitments. The same goes for the army. The sweeping purges that followed the July 2017 coup were ostensibly directed towards followers of the Gülen movement, an Islamic sect suspected of leading the mutiny. But they have also claimed the careers of thousands of pro-Western officers, clearing the way for those more sympathetic to Russia. Kerim Has of Moscow State University points to the growing influence inside the army of a group inspired by Doğu Perinçek, an ultranationalist ideologue. Perinçek, who also heads a small political party, insists there is no room for any political divisions in the armed forces. But he rejoices that the purges have weakened Western influence. He believes a "large share of America's power in the military and the police has been crushed."<sup>41</sup>

## Prospects

President Erdoğan is playing a risky game for Turkey's future: Whereas the United States sees allies as partners, Russia sees them as client states. While President Erdoğan may believe that he can outmaneuver Russian President Putin, he is a novice compared to Russia's KGB-trained leader. As a former Turkish president put it, "building relations with big states is like getting into bed with a bear." When that bear is Russia, it is best to stay wide awake."<sup>42</sup>

The West can complain and wring its hands about the decline in democracy in Turkey, legitimate as those concerns may be, far more dangerous for Europe and the United States are the changes now underway in Turkey's foreign policy orientation. However, Washington has not yet given up its attempts to improve ties. Speaking to Turkey-based American diplomats in Istanbul on July 10, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson acknowledged severe strains in U.S.-Turkey relations, though he said he is hopeful of mending relations with the NATO ally and partner in the anti-Islamic State coalition.<sup>43</sup> He also said he hoped that the U.S. and

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<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/447009/turkey-russia-alliance-develops-erdogan-spurns-west>.

<sup>41</sup> "Turkey's snuggling up to Russia is likely to hurt it." *The Economist*. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21717080-putin-and-erdogan-expect-different-and-contradictory-things-their-relationship-turkeys>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> "Remarks to the Staff of the U.S. Consulate General Istanbul." U.S. Department of State.

Turkey could replicate an agreement reached recently between the U.S., Russia, and Jordan for a ceasefire in southwestern Syria in the north of the country.

Tillerson claimed the two countries are beginning to restore mutual trust that had been lost over the course of the last several years. He said that since becoming secretary of state, he had met three times with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and that each time the tone of the conversation had improved.<sup>44</sup> While challenges remain, Tillerson said, he believed the first steps to re-establishing relations “on the proper basis” have been taken. One pillar of that improvement would be an amelioration of Turkey’s human rights record— in early July, the State Department rebuked Ankara for its most recent round of arbitrary arrests.

But those steps could also be grounded upon greater economic and energy cooperation. Although overall trade between Turkey and the United States has increased in recent years, it remains modest compared to its potential. Expansion of the work of mechanisms such as the Framework for Strategic Economic and Commercial Cooperation, the High-Level Committee and the Economic Partnership Commission can be key to expanding ties.

On energy, the prospects for the Moscow-backed Turkish Stream pipeline are uncertain. If the current bill on additional U.S. sanctions on Russia and Iran is passed and made law, Moscow’s major European pipeline projects (Turkish Stream and Nordstream 2) could slow down considerably or even come to a complete halt, according to a prospectus on a Gazprom Eurobond issue.<sup>45</sup> The bill would give the U.S. president the right to impose sanctions on persons and companies investing in the construction of Russian gas export pipelines at a level of 1 million dollars for a one-time investment or 5 million dollars for an annual investment. Other sanctions would forbid providing equipment, technology, and services to those projects. Earlier, Gazprom had announced that additional sanctions should not interfere with Turkish Stream, but some experts believe that there are real risks if the law is passed. For example, Allseas, which is laying the pipe

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July 10, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/07/272454.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> “Tillerson hopes to mend strained US-Turkey ties.” *The Associated Press* via ABC News. July 10, 2017. <http://abcnews.go.com/amp/International/wireStory/tillerson-hopes-mend-strained-us-turkey-ties-48540514>.

<sup>45</sup> “Американские санкции могут поставить крест на проектах «Газпрома» [American sanctions can put an end to the projects of Gazprom].” *Vedomosti*. July 11, 2017. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2017/07/11/718593-sanktsii-krest-gazproma>.

in the Turkish Stream project, could pull out and it is doubtful that other contractors would take its place. This would provide the U.S. with an opening to meet some of Turkey's energy needs.