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**TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AFTER THE
SYRIAN CIVIL WAR**

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Master's Thesis

Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Akif Bahadır KAYNAK

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DEDICATION

Through the grace of the Almighty GOD, I present my humble research that couldn't have been conducted without the guidance of my Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Akif Bahadır KAYNAK. Secondly, I'd like to give thanks to all my family members and friends who did not spare any effort to support me along the way.



ABSTRACT

TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AFTER THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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This thesis seeks to examine and make sense of the evolving nature of Turkish-Russian ties since 2011. Moreover, the thesis uses qualitative research design to explore and analyses Turkish-Russian relations in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War, through the utilization of document analysis and thematic analysis. Consequently, the thesis concluded that Turkish-Russian relations can benefit from different opportunities in the future. Nevertheless, there are still a number of obstacles that challenge the future of cooperation between Turkey and Russia.

Keywords: Economic Cooperation, Diplomatic Initiatives, Political Domain, Hegemony, Syrian Civil War, Turkish-Russian Relations.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EU	: European Union
FETO	: Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization
FSA	: Free Syrian Army
ISIS	: Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
MENA	: The Middle East and North Africa Region
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PKK	: Kurdish Workers' Party
SDF	: Syrian Democratic Forces
TAF	: Turkish Armed Forces
US	: The United States of America
USSR	: Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
YPG	: The People's Defence Units

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, a turning point in their historical dynamics, Turkish-Russian ties has seen considerable change and volatility. This era's geopolitical developments, regional crises, and shifting power balances have profoundly affected the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia. This thesis aims to investigate the development of Turkish-Russian ties since 2011, dissecting the elements that have influenced their exchanges and considering the results for both countries and the international community. It is essential to look at the historical backdrop and context of Turkish-Russian ties to grasp the dynamics of their relationship after 2011. Collaboration, rivalry, and war have all been hallmarks of the centuries-long relationship between Turkey and Russia. After the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, the two nations were able to rethink their bilateral connections and forge new, more productive patterns of economic and cultural collaboration. Certain issues with different countries; such as Armenia and Cyprus, were examples of past grudges that caused tension in their relationship (Çağan, 2013). The 2011 Arab Spring uprisings shook the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to its foundations. Turkey and Russia faced threats and possibilities as the wave of upheavals swept through the region. As a reflection of its ambitions for a more prominent role in regional affairs, Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, backed the Arab Spring protests and urged political reform. However, under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has taken a more cautious approach, emphasizing stability and backing current administrations (Russell, 2021).

Since it started in 2011, the crisis in Syria has been a major source of tension between Turkey and Russia. Seeing the crisis as a chance to extend its regional influence and assist the ambitions of the Syrian people, Turkey originally backed the opposition groups aiming to oust President Bashar al-Assad's administration. Conversely, Russia supported the Syrian government wholeheartedly because it saw it as an important partner and a stabilizing influence. Several major episodes, notably Turkey's shooting down of a Russian military aircraft in 2015, directly resulted from the increasing rivalry and competitiveness between Turkey and Russia throughout the Syrian crisis (Aslanli & Jafarov, 2020). Turkey and Russia have had strong commercial connections despite their competing geopolitical objectives. Turkey relies substantially on natural gas imports from Russia. Therefore, the two countries' collaboration in this area has been a lynchpin of their economic relationship.

Building large energy projects like the Turk Stream pipeline has further strengthened their economic dependency on one another (Austvik & Rzayeva, 2017).

An exhaustive study of both primary and secondary sources will be conducted for this study. Turkey and Russia's governments' official declarations, speeches, diplomatic correspondence, and reports from international organizations and regional entities will serve as primary sources. Articles, publications, and studies written by academics will serve as secondary sources, offering background information and academic perspectives on Turkish-Russian ties. This study will a Realist perspective on international affairs as its theoretical foundation; in order to shed light on Turkey and Russia's respective goals, actions, and strategic calculations in their bilateral relationship (Kelkitli, 2017).

The next chapters will examine the most significant events and developments in Turkish-Russian ties since 2011, after this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 will examine how the Arab Spring changed their relationship and how Turkey's desire for political reform contrasted with Russia's inclination for stability. The Syrian war will be the main topic of discussion in Chapter 3, which will analyze the differences in approaches taken by Turkey and Russia and their effects on the area. The economic relevance of energy cooperation and its effect on their overall dynamics will be examined in Chapter 4. The current trend of reconciliation and rapprochement between the two nations will be discussed in Chapter 5, along with an analysis of the causes that have led to this change and their effects on regional and global dynamics. Finally, recommendations for future studies and policy considerations will be provided, and the results will be summarized.

Changes in global power dynamics, regional wars, and geopolitical situations have impacted Turkish-Russian ties since 2011. This thesis aims to thoroughly examine these dynamics by looking at how the Arab Spring, the Syrian crisis, economic cooperation, and new tendencies of reconciliation have affected these areas. This study will help the international community better comprehend the emerging dynamics in the Middle East by studying the motives, methods, and consequences of Turkish-Russian ties.

1.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This thesis seeks to examine and make sense of the evolving nature of Turkish-Russian ties since 2011. The study's goals are:

- a. To evaluate how the Arab Spring has affected Turkish-Russian relations.
- b. To distinguish between the stances taken by Turkey and Russia in response to the unrest in the Middle East and North Africa.
- c. To investigate what prompted Turkey and Russia to become involved in the Syrian war and how that decision affected their ties with one another.
- d. To investigate the impact of economic cooperation between Turkey and Russia after 2011, focusing on the energy sector.
- e. To assess the consequences of their bilateral relationship and the larger regional dynamics and to study the reasons for the current trend of reconciliation and rapprochement between Turkey and Russia.

This thesis intends to give a complete knowledge of Turkish-Russian relations' dynamics, motives, and consequences after 2011 by addressing these research topics and fulfilling the stated goals.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a. How have Turkish-Russian relations changed after 2011?
- b. What factors have influenced the Turkish-Russian relationship in recent years?
- c. How has the Syrian civil war affected Turkish-Russian relations?
- d. What are the challenges and opportunities of the Turkish-Russian relationship?

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This thesis seeks to provide a detailed analysis and understanding of the development of Turkish-Russian ties after 2011. The Arab Spring, the Syrian crisis, and economic collaboration have all affected the relationship dynamics between the two nations.

However, a more thorough investigation of the forces that have molded these exchanges and their consequences for both nations and the international community must be conducted. In addition, there has been a recent tendency towards reconciliation and rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, which necessitates more investigation into the causes and effects of this development. Therefore, the issue is to explore the function of economic cooperation and assess the current trend of reconciliation between Turkey and Russia in light of the Arab Spring and the Syrian war. By examining this issue, this study hopes to contribute to the scholarly knowledge of the changing geopolitics in the Middle East and its larger consequences by providing vital insights into the dynamics of Turkish-Russian ties after 2011.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

This thesis posits that geopolitical developments, regional conflicts, and shifting power dynamics have altered the intricate interplay of cooperation, competitiveness, and strategic calculations in Turkish-Russian ties since 2011. Both nations understand the necessity of resolving their disagreements and working together on regional and global concerns, even though their varied interests and historical grudges have sometimes strained the relationship. As a result, there has been an uptick in diplomatic activity and collaboration on issues like the Astana process and the humanitarian situation in Syria's Idlib region. Additionally, stability and reliance between Turkey and Russia have been partly maintained because of economic collaboration, especially in the energy sector. After 2011, the theory suggests, Turkish-Russian ties have shown a complex and changing dynamic, marked by a mixture of collaboration, rivalry, and attempts to manage disagreements for mutual advantage.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

This study's importance rests in the fact that it provides a thorough examination of Turkish-Russian relations after 2011, illuminating the intricate dynamics at play between the two nations in terms of collaboration, competitiveness, and strategic calculations. This study aids policymakers, academics, and analysts by analyzing the results of the Arab Spring, various perspectives on the Syrian conflict, the dynamics of economic cooperation, and the current trend towards reconciliation. For policymakers to develop efficient regional

policies, alliances, and conflict resolution initiatives, they must have a firm grasp of the Middle East's geopolitical dynamics and power transitions. In addition, the study contributes to the scholarly knowledge of international relations by delving into the complexities of the connections between two major powers in the world; i.e. Turkey and Russia, as well as the effects on global power balances. Policymakers and analysts may learn more about the dangers and prospects of energy cooperation thanks to the study emphasizing the relevance of energy security and economic interdependence. The findings from this study are helpful for policymakers, academics, and analysts in international relations, regional studies, conflict resolution, and energy security by expanding their knowledge of the dynamic nature of Turkish-Russian relations.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore and analyses Turkish-Russian relations in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth examination of complex issues and the exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and opinions. This approach is particularly suitable for understanding the nuances and dynamics of diplomatic relations between two countries and their implications.

- i. Document Analysis: A comprehensive review of official documents, policy papers, diplomatic communique, and press releases related to Turkish-Russian relations after the Syrian Civil War will be undertaken. This includes official statements from the governments of Turkey and Russia, as well as reports from international organizations and think tanks.
- ii. Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis is selected as the qualitative instrument for the current study, using the Braun and Clarke (2013) format, through which data that is extracted from reputable media outlets is meant to be coded and categorized to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends in Turkish-Russian relations. The themes will be interpreted and compared with the existing literature to draw meaningful conclusions. Articles of such news outlets will be analyzed regarding bilateral relations in the post-Syrian Civil War period. This analysis will provide insights into how relations are portrayed from the political standpoint of each country.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory that is used in the current thesis is represented by Neorealism, whose argument stems from a Realist theoretical framework. Concepts such as power balance, self-interest, security, competitiveness, collaboration, anarchy, and self-help provide invaluable insights into the intricacies of Turkish-Russian interactions. Knowing how regional and global power dynamics affect the relationship between Turkey and Russia requires an appreciation of the importance of a stable power balance. It looks at their power calculations, alliance building, and competing interests as they try to keep or increase their standing in the world.

The concepts of self-interest and security provide insight into the two nations' goals and policies, illuminating how they seek national objectives and provide security. Competing interests and the desire to address shared threats fuel conflict and cooperation between Turkey and Russia. Both nations successfully negotiate the international anarchy by utilizing self-help measures to protect their interests and expand their spheres of influence.

Accordingly, Neorealism, as advanced by scholars like Kenneth Waltz, emphasizes the role of the international system in shaping state behavior. It asserts that in an anarchic system, states act rationally and with the goal of ensuring security.

In the context of Turkish-Russian relations, Neorealism provides insights into how each country perceives the other as a strategic partner or competitor in the region. For instance, Turkey's pursuit of security and influence in Syria, given its concern over Kurdish separatism, and Russia's interest in maintaining a foothold in the Middle East demonstrate their rational calculations to safeguard their national interests (Sahin Mencutek, 2023). This theory will be applied to analyze how power dynamics and strategic considerations influence their post-Syrian Civil War interactions.

2. TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN EARLY HISTORY

2.1 HISTORICAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN SLAVIC AND TURKIC NATIONS AND KINGDOMS

Slavic and Turkic peoples had been in contact with one another for hundreds of years, given the fact that trading activities and social interactions were always the most utilized procedures for the establishment of a multitude of relations amongst them. Moreover, the two nations happen to share several common characteristics including ethnic ancestry, cultural heritage, and geographical identity across the Eurasian region. Such commonalities are responsible for constructing some aspects of loyalty and allegiance to the concept of "Eurasianism" (Zubareva, 2021).

As a result, it is not unusual to explore and find similar habits and traditions amongst the Slavic and Turkic nations that had been practiced for years; including ritualistic practices, artistic approaches, astrological ideas, economic and social activities, agricultural and hunting methods, and common understanding of the geographical and ethnic distribution by which their regions are characterized (Petrov & Alekseeva, 2020).

These regions include the Volga-Kama area where Slavic, Turkic, and Finno-Ugric nations exchanged cultural and economic relations for centuries. Specifically speaking, one region in particular served as the center of ethnic, cultural, and economic interactions and was represented by Kazan, and it was considered a hub for interactions and relations and also a melting pot in which Slavic and Turkic people shared common traits and merged their identities sometimes (Shkalina & Gerasimov, 2018).

Accordingly, it can be indicated that the ethnic and cultural roots of modern day Russians date all the way back to a specific civilization named Kievan Rus' which modified the former system where Slavic chieftains used to rule over their respective clans and tribes. This nation was considered one of the earliest organized states that introduced lasting and basic social and political institutions and ideas, and whose citizens inhabited the northern part of Eurasia (Ward & Thompson, 2021).

Consequently, and for a number of years, economic and diplomatic relations had been established between these empires. However, the majority of the history between them,

and between Turkey and Russia in general, is characterized by confrontation, conflict, and struggle. To further elaborate, it can be indicated that both Seljuks and Rus' were determined to impose their hegemony and dominance over the Black Sea and the Caspian region, and this sense of determination ignited the first sparks that led to a series of clashes and battles between them (Gasanova, 2022).

Perhaps the most prominent example of such struggle is represented by the battle of Sudak that took place around 1221-1222 AD, when the Seljuk Sultan Alaa al-Din Kayqubad commissioned his Amir Husam al-Din Çoban to launch the first Rum-Seljuks' maritime campaign in order to reclaim the city of Sudak from the Rus' who invaded it after it had been incorporated by the Seljuks as an overseas protectorate for a few years. The campaign was a resounding success, as Husam al-Din Çoban was capable of defeating the Rus', terminate their resistance, leaving a number of Anatolian personnel and soldiers in Crimea in order to provide protection for the city and prevent any further invasions or retaliations, and taking a few nobilities as hostages (Nicola, 2015).

2.1.1 The Ottoman Empire and Grand Duchy of Moscow

The political sphere and the intentions of the Turkic people did not stagnate at a specific level. On the contrary, their aspirations and visions to transform their nation into a superpower in the region urged dynasties' and military/political figures to establish new empires.

The Ottoman Empire was the state that succeeded the Seljuk Empire. Founded in 1299, the Ottoman Empire lasted for more than six centuries and was powerful enough to span over three continents. The Ottomans continued to adopt Islam as the official religion of the state after the Seljuks, and their empire was considered the representative nation for Islam all over the world (Karakartal, 2021).

Accordingly, the late 1200s witnessed the rise of the Ottoman Empire whose leaders strived to expand the boundaries of the territories that they rule. As a result, Ottomans shifted their focus towards Europe in general and the Byzantine Empire in particular. Consequently, the year 1349 was the time when the battle of Kosovo took place between the Ottomans and the Serbs, where the Serbs lost to the ottomans and their ruler, Tzar Lazar, lost his life while battling against the Ottoman army (Milanovic, 2020).

Around the same era, the late 1200s also witnessed the rise of the Duchy of Moscow which sought independence from the Mongol rule. The Duchy was successful in consolidating its power around the early 14th and 15th century when Ivan III, also known as Ivan the Great, rose to power in 1462 and expanded the territorial area of the Duchy which transformed it into one of the most powerful and fearsome principalities in Rus'. Moreover, the principality was also considered the center of the Orthodox Church, as opposed to the Ottoman's position as the center for Islam at the time. Furthermore, in the 16th century, the Tsardom of Russia was established by Ivan IV, also known as Ivan the terrible, who managed to start a new chapter of the relations with the surrounding nations, kingdoms, and empires (Langer, 2016).

Eventually, the Ottoman Empire and the Tsardom of Russia found themselves in the throes of an inevitable clash that played a prominent role in reshaping the Eurasian region. Since the Ottomans were considered the guardians of Islam and the Russians as the guardians of Orthodox Christianity, the two kingdoms attempted to challenge each other for territorial supremacy as they both expanded towards one another to gain more areas and add them to their kingdoms, while backed by political, economic, and theological foundations (Listas, 2020).

2.1.2 The Fall of Constantinople

The Ottomans were motivated to interpret their political and territorial ambitions for expansion over Eurasia, Europe, and the Middle East by the end of the Byzantine Empire which finally collapsed when Constantinople fell in 1453 (Dauverd, 2015). The fall of Constantinople at the hands of Mehmed II, also known as Mehmed the Conqueror "Al-Fatih", brought about drastic changes that had an evident impact on the entirety of the European continent in general and the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and its surrounding nations and kingdoms in particular. On the one hand, the territorial force of the Ottomans were now more expansive and fearsome, in addition to the fact that it helped altering the dynamics of political relations with other Eastern European countries (Dewi et al., 2023).

More than a century later, the Great Duchy of Moscow finally transformed into the Tsardom of Russia as it was officially founded by Ivan IV the Terrible in 1564. In order to

achieve this, Ivan managed and succeeded to demolish all other Russian duchies and started to formulate political strategies, prepare for future military campaigns, and plan for conquests in order to aggressively expand the territories and borders of the new kingdom in order to transform it into a revered and great empire whose reputation could rival that of other empires (Kręcisz, 2018).

Consequently, the Tsardom of Russia grew stronger as the power of the Mongols lost their dominance over various Eurasians and Russian territories. This was accompanied by the dissolution and eradication of the Mongol Kipchak horde, also known as the Golden Horde, which took place internally and externally due to various causes; such as dynastic crises, the prevalence of plagues and especially Black Death, and the failure to centralize the Golden Horde. Therefore, it could be indicated that both the Ottomans and Russians had grand ambitions to display their militaristic powers and impose their dominance over the Black and Caspian seas (Miljković & Cojocar, 2014).

The collapse of the Byzantine Empire was accompanied by the fall of Constantinople and the termination of the Roman reign in the east. However, the absence of a nation of kingdom that could be considered the center of Christianity in the world allowed the Tsardom of Russia under Ivan IV to become the legitimate successor of the Eastern Roman Empire upon the fall of the Byzantines (Çiçek, 2015).

2.2 TURKISH-RUSSIAN ARMED CONFLICT

Upon the establishment of the Ottoman Empire and the Tsardom of Russia, both nations started to strive for achieving territorial expansion where the Black Sea served as a battle arena for their ambitious plans and campaigns. As a result, The Ottomans and Russian delved into a prolonged series of wars that can be outlined as follows:

2.2.1 Turkish-Russian Wars in the 16th Century

The 16th century was considered a time when Russia was determined to enhance its militaristic capabilities and expand its territorial grip by building more castles, invading more lands, capturing more vital cities, and enhancing its army. The Ottomans were beginning to sense the threatening force of the Russians as a nation against which a

number of wars must be waged for the sake of protecting and preserving of the Ottoman Empire (Karaca, Baban & Yüce, 2021).

Therefore, in 1532, the Ottoman Empire had already felt the gravity of the situation and the threatening disposition of Russia which led it to form an alliance along with Lithuania, Crimea, and Poland against Moscow (Maksimiec, 2015). When Tsar Ivan IV, aka Ivan the Terrible, decided to conquer Astrakhan he was determined to deprive the Ottoman Empire from its strategic advantage on Black Sea by having a similar waterway that rivals that of the Ottomans. Therefore, he launched an expedition to capture Astrakhan in 1569; which marked the first Turkish-Russian full-scale armed conflict ever recorded in History. Consequently, Russian soldiers, underneath the leadership and banner of Ivan and the Tsardom, were successful in capturing Astrakhan and blocking trading and pilgrimage roads from Turkistan. Needless to say, this move provoked the Ottomans and prompted them to wage their first war against the Russians (Karakuş, 2023).

Furthermore, citizens of both Astrakhan and Turkistan were extremely opposed to the idea of not being capable of exchanging goods and services due to the Russian invasion of Astrakhan. Accordingly, complaints to the Ottoman State were sent by those citizens who were heavily prosecuted by the Russians and prevented from going freely on pilgrimage. The Ottomans received such complaints from a more comprehensive approach as they could not overlook the exponentially increasing force of Russia as a new upcoming threat in the region which prompted them to act quickly to curb such threat before it exacerbates into a mortal enemy of the Empire. Therefore, it can be indicated that the Astrakhan campaigns were partially launched for theological and ideological reasons (Köse, 2020).

This is because Astrakhan was considered such a significant spot on the map for both the Ottoman Empire and the Tsardom of Russia due to its strategic aspects that link the Middle East with the North Caucasus through the Caspian sea. Additionally, the Ottomans thought of Astrakhan as a springboard that could give them the upper hand should any future wars against Iran commence. Therefore, it is safe to say that the first war between the Turkish and Russians was waged due to strategic, economic, and geopolitical reasons as well (Mustafina et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Turkish-Russian Wars in the 17th Century

Years later after the conflict that had erupted between the Ottoman Empire and the Russians, and in response to the increasing need for Europe to expel all the Turks from European territories, a new alliance, named the "Sacred Alliance", was formed between Moscow, Poland, and Austria against the Ottoman Empire this time. The alliance (Sizarev, 2021).

During the 17th century, the Tsardom of Russia shifted its political focus towards three main subjects, the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire was one of them. Moreover, Peter I, the Russian Emperor, was keen on disseminating an idea amongst the Russian public about the right for Russia to regain territories from the Ottoman Empire across the Black Sea. However, the true intentions of Peter I revolved around establishing a bigger empire by capturing more territories, and in order for him to accomplish this, Peter I sought to garner Christian support from citizens who live in the Ottoman Empire and all over Europe whom he attracted to migrate to Russia (Isoy, 2019).

It should be noted that Lithuania, Poland, Austria, and Moscow were fighting one another in a series of territorial disputes. However, the continuing problems that they were facing against the Ottomans forced them to unify and direct their attacks against the Turks instead. For instance, Russia kept supporting its campaigns against the Ottoman Empire's territories without success during the time from 1672-1681. As a result, the treaty of Bakhchisaray was signed and confirmed by the Ottoman Sultan which allowed Russia to secure the Left-Bank Kiev and Ukraine, while in return, it had to give up other Right-Bank lands and Chigirin (Kochegarov, 2020).

Upon establishing this European alliance, many wars were waged between the Ottomans and Russians including the 1672-1681 war, the 1686-1700 war, in addition to the Turkish and Russian campaigns including the Chigirin and Crimea campaigns. However, Turkish-Russian relations were meant to enter a new phase of peace due to the signing of the "Treaty of Constantinople" that ensured the neutrality of the Ottoman Empire towards any conflict that involves the Russians (Sizarev, 2021).

One year before that, another agreement was established at the tail end of the 17th century, which conclude the "Treaty of Karlowitz" which was signed to introduce new boundary

mapping structures that forced the Ottoman Empire to lose territories and completely altered its borders (Kurtaran, 2020).

Nevertheless, the Treaty of Constantinople concluded a 14-year war between the Ottoman Empire and the Russians. However, Peter I was trying to achieve diplomatic and political gains when he was determined to impose pressure on Sultan Mustafa II to elevate the level of protection that is granted to Orthodox Christian residents in the Ottoman Empire, in addition to convincing him to establish a Russian mission in Istanbul, which places the Russian Empire on a similar footing with Holland, Habsburg Empire, Venetia, and England (Brisku, 2019).

2.2.3 Turkish-Russian Wars in the 18th Century

The territorial ambitions of Peter I did not dissolve with the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz and/or the Treaty of Constantinople. In 1709, almost a decade after the conclusion of the Treaty of Constantinople, Peter I had already emerged victorious when he announced the end of the battle of Poltava against the Swedish Empire, and upon his triumph, he decided to enhance the militaristic, strategic, and intellectual capabilities of his troops which was achieved only to make Russia's army a true force to be reckoned with (Carrica, 2017).

Such preparation was always meant to be directed at the Ottoman Empire, something that Turkish Diplomats at the time were unable to comprehend and led them to underestimate the power of the newly-structured and upgraded Russian military. Only one year later after the battle of Poltava, the Ottoman Empire declared war on the Russian Empire over the Principality of Moldova when Peter I had entered it. Therefore, the Russians declared the commencement of the Pruth Campaign which marked the beginning of a brief military conflict between the two armies that lasted for one year, and specifically from 1710 to 1711 (Brisku, 2019).

Yet, the Turkish-Russian relations before that were not positive at all, and the causes of such conflict proved to be more complicated than it seemed. To further elaborate, mutual provocations from both sides were enough to prompt their leaders to wage a new war. From a Turkish standpoint, a war against Russia was necessary due to the violation of the Treaty of Constantinople when Russian troops launched the Chernivtsi raid in 1709. On the

other hand, Russians held the Ottoman Empire accountable for starting a new war against them when they allowed Charles XII, king of Sweden, to seek refuge in the Ottoman Empire after the end of the battle of Poltava. Eventually, the Turkish-Russian war in 1710-1713 broke out on Bukovynia as each side attempted to capture it due to its importance as a window to Europe for Russia, and as a fortified territory that includes a number of fortresses such as the Khotyn fortress for the Turks (Balukh, 2020).

In 1724, a new treaty was signed between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, named the "Treaty of Constantinople". The signing of this treaty was caused by a strategic/geopolitical issue that occurred when some Safavid lands were occupied by the Russians, and as a result, the Ottomans were upset of such invasion policy and demanded that it is required to be brought to a halt. Therefore, the two sides agreed on reorganizing the territories between each empire by giving Russia the Western strip of the Caspian sea and the rest of the South Caucasus to the Ottomans (Mammadli, 2020).

Furthermore, the Russian-Turkish conflict was far from over, as in 1735 a new war broke out and lasted for four years upon the unification of the Russian and the Austrian Empires. This unification was determined to be waged against the Ottoman Empire due to continuous raids by the Crimean Tatars against the Southern regions that belonged to the Russian Empire. However, the Russian Empire wanted to fight the Ottomans anyway as it needed a territorial spot that overlooks the Black Sea while capitalizing on the internal conflict in the Ottoman Empire due to the emergence of political disagreements. Eventually, the "Treaty of Belgrade" was signed in 1739 between the Ottomans and Russians where Russia was given total authority over the Sea of Azov, and in return, it had to abandon its fortresses and it was also forbidden for the Russian naval forces to deploy any fleets in the Black Sea. Having said that, the two Empires clashed again in yet another war that lasted from 1768 to 1774 (Chitadze, 2016).

Consequently, another treaty was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire, which is the "Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca" around 1774. The treaty marked the end of the Turkish-Russian war in 1768-1774. Moreover, the "Treaty of Jassy" was signed in 1791 to further consolidate the former treaty and confirm its articles without changes in terms of territories and rights for both Empires (Kidiriyazov, 2017).

Years later, the Turkish-Russian war of 1787-1792 broke out due to complicated relations between the Ottoman Empire, Austria, and Russia. Apparently, the Empress of Russia Catherine the Great was always keen on dissolving the Ottoman Empire and resurrecting the Byzantine Empire by reclaiming Constantinople and announcing her son, Duke Constantine Pavlovich, the new ruler of this Empire. These ambitions meant a new series of wars against the Turks, and they started when Catherine the Great demanded the Surrender of Ottoman Georgia. In 1787, only three years after the Ottoman Empire recognized the annexation of Crimea by the Russians. Accordingly, Sultan Abdulhamid I refused such demands, and he also demanded that the Russians give back the Crimea as well (Katz, 2016).

2.2.4 Turkish-Russian Wars in the 19th Century

In 1806, another war broke out between the Ottomans and Russians. To further elaborate, the Ottoman Empire decided to strategically side with France against Russia which addressed the dilemma of Russia as an Eastern threat. This is because the diplomatic relations between the Russian Empire and France were at an all-time low, and as a result, a war lasted for six years between the Ottoman Empire ended with a Peace treaty in 1812, named the "Bucharest Peace Treaty" (Agachi, 2014).

The "Adrianople Peace Treaty" was also signed in 1829 between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, and it placed both the North Caucasus and Trans-Kuban under the direct authority of the Russian Empire (Tovsultanov, Tovsultanov&Galieva, 2022). Moreover, in 1853, the Crimean war started between the Russian Empire and an alliance of France, Great Britain, and the Ottoman Empire. This war placed Russia in a negative position where its diplomatic relations with other countries across the globe began to deteriorate. For instance, the Japanese did not want to trust the Russians upon their defeat and were keen on establishing stringer agreements with the victorious alliance, especially Great Britain (Kovalchuk, 2015).

Three years later, the Russian Empire signed the "Paris Peace Treaty" upon its defeat to the Ottoman Empire and the rest of the aforementioned alliance. This war was successful in curbing the Russian Empire's intentions in controlling more territories and dominating the Balkan Peninsula, as Russians were determined to prepare for a bigger invasion towards

Central Europe from this spot. Russia then lost the entirety of the Danube Delta and all the islands that. However, the Ottoman Empire vouched for the Russians in order to help them maintain the lighthouse that the Russians had built on one of these islands back in 1837. Moving forward, in 1877, another war broke out between the Ottomans and Russians in which Romania gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire (Tanase, 2020).

Different countries and nations in the Balkan Peninsula and the Danube basin started to initiate a series of nationalistic movements that called for the establishment of total independence from the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, the Russian Empire realized that such opportunity is worth seizing in order to capitalize on the intensified approach amongst Eastern Europeans who demanded to break free from the Ottoman Empire and regain a foothold in the Balkan Peninsula and the Danube Delta. This war lasted for one year and ended with a Russian victory along with its alliance of Eastern European and Balkan states (Kopylov & Paur, 2020).

2.2.5 Turkish-Russian Wars in the First Two Decades of the 20th Century

During World War I, the Ottoman Empire Joined the Central Powers against the Russian Empire, and was destined to fight the Russians once again. This commenced as the "Battle of Sarykamysh" broke out between the Ottoman and Russian Empires in 1914. Apparently, the Russian Empire was fearful of the fact that the Ottoman troops might attempt to regain the fortress of Kars that Russia took from the Ottomans in 1877 in the midst of the war, and that made them place a lot of emphasis on the Caucasus Front and sought to secure it against any probable Turkish campaigns (Dietrich, 2015).

Consequently, the Ottoman Empire launched a number of campaigns against the Russian Empire and other regions in the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa at the time, some of which were successful while the others were unsuccessful. The most prominent of such campaigns included the unsuccessful Sarykamysh campaign to annihilate the Russian army in 1914-1915 (Erickson, 2021).

At the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire signed the "Treaty of Brest-Litovsk" where the Russian Empire had to withdraw from all the territories that it once had during the war. This meant that certain oblasts in the Caucasus region that centered around Kars was going to gain their independence (Ural, 2019).

This Treaty marked a new era of relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet Russia, which formed after the eruption of the Bolshevik revolution and the dissolution of the Tsardom in Russia. As World War 1 ended, Lenin; the leader of the newly formed Soviet Russia, began by enhancing the political sphere within which his new state is situated by establishing cooperative relations with the Ottoman Empire. However, Great Britain, whose leaders were highly interested in taking control over strategically vital territories that are rich in oil in the Caucasus, formed a new alliance that was called the "Caucasus Union" in order to tamper with, and hopefully break, the newly-established Ottoman-Soviet relations while they're still in their infancy (Turan, 2018).

2.3 TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

2.3.1 The Fall of the Ottoman Empire

In the wake of the end of World War 1, the Ottoman Empire was officially dissolved into separate regions and/or countries which in turn became new destinations of colonial powers, including Great Britain and France. Such powers deployed their troops over the Middle East, North Africa, and the Caucasus region to take over the remnants of a vast nation that spanned over centuries known as the Ottoman Empire (Jednaszewski& Procel, 2020).

Consequently, two treaties were signed with the once-mighty Ottoman Empire in order to finalize its dissolution. These treaties determined the borders of the modern day Turkey, the first of which was the "Treaty of Sèvres" in 1920 in France, which led to the commencement of Turkey's war of independence. The second treaty was agreed upon three years later in 1923 and is known as the "Treaty of Lausanne" which ended the war. Signed by the Great Britain, Italy, and France, this treaty allowed the Allies to take control over Arab nations and regions that were once under the reign of the Ottoman Empire; such as Palestine, Lebanon, Mesopotamia, and Syria among other territories (Gehlawat, 2021).

The fall of the Ottoman Empire occurred around the year 1922, and it is known that this Empire is considered one of the most prominent Islamic Empires that enjoyed the longest period of reign since 1299, ruling over more than 5.6 million kilometers and reaching its peak during the 16th century when it expanded to Vienna, the Mediterranean Sea, the Dan Eiver, and the Arabian Peninsula (Bogheiry, 2022).

Moreover, the following causes can be highlighted as the antecedents of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Kurt & Şehitoğlu, 2022):

1. The complicated political environment between authorities and figures in the Ottoman Empire.
2. The diminishing levels of capital and increasing financial challenges.
3. The inability to allocate enough raw material and resources especially iron and coal.
4. Discouraged investors and industries due to the lack of regulated protective tariffs.

Consequently, the Ottoman Empire was partitioned by the Countries with which the Turks were allied during World War I. As a result, the Turkish War of Independence broke out between the Turkish authorities which lasted from 1919 and finally ended in 1922. The end of this war led to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (Mather, 2014).

2.3.2 The Advent of the Turkish-Soviet Relations

In addition to Turkey, Russia was also going through a destructive civil war from 1917 to 1923 by the end of World War I and upon the Collapse of the Russian Empire, a civil war in which an armed insurrection was led by Vladimir Lenin who ignited the spark of the Bolshevik Revolution and caused the death of around seven million individuals in Russia. This reflects the fact that by the year 1923 both the Ottoman and Russian Empires ceased to exist, and new government were placed to take the lead. Eventually, Russia was transformed completely from an Orthodox Christian Empire to a Communist State that was later known as the Soviet Union (Canody, 2023). Soviet Russia was even the first nation to recognize the Grand National Assembly of Turkey that was headed by Mustapha Kemal Atatürk (Minasyan & Mkhoyan, 2022).

But that does not mean that both countries waited until 1923 for an agreement to be signed between one another, given the fact that 1921 the first ever "Turkish-Soviet Agreement" was formulated to mark the advent of diplomatic relations between the two countries. In the meantime, the Soviets decided to side with the Kemalists during their revolution in the early 1920s. This group was named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who led the revolution and later became the Republic's first President. Therefore, the Soviets provided a variety of

military and financial aid to the Kemalists, such as gold that was transported via the Black Sea to Anatolia (Akalin, 2023). Another agreement that was signed between Turkey and Soviet Russia is represented by the "Treaty of Moscow" in 1921, in which Turkey was given control over various regions that were previously considered Armenian; including Kars, Van, Ardahan, and Bitlis (Konak, 2020).

Furthermore, the year 1925 witnessed the signing of a new agreement that further consolidated the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Soviet Russia which was represented by the "Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality"; given the fact that in the mid 1930s both states were determined to revise the treaty as they found it to be a little bit inconsistent and vague in nature, which prompted them to initiate a series of negotiations in order to establish a more refined, binding, and contractual agreement (Isci, 2020).

Turkey and the Soviet Union signed a new non-aggression pact that was meant to last for 20 years. This pact interpreted the long-term friendship between the two states and shaped the approach of Turkey's foreign policy with the Soviets and even other countries in the West and the entire world (Kalkan, 2020).

In 1925 Moving forward, the maintenance of diplomatic relations with the Soviets was at the top of the Turkish government's priority, as the first official visit by the Soviet delegation was organized to Ankara in 1921, and Turkey itself was economically supported and financially backed by the Soviets after the global economic crisis in 1929 (Akalin, 2023).

Although Turkey and the Soviet Union adopted varying approaches towards the West, the two countries maintained the strength of their relations on political, economic, and cultural levels. For instance, when Turkey and Great Britain had their disagreement over the possession of the City of Mosul in Iraq in the mid 1920s Turkey immediately sought support from the Soviet Union, and when they were both excluded from the Locarno Conference they both decided to organize a response to that exclusion. Moreover, they decided to deepen their diplomatic and economic relations from 1929 and 1935. Soviets even helped Turkey achieve its first economic Five-Year Plan (Hirst, 2013).

In 1936, the Soviet Union, along with other countries, signed the "Montreux Convention" which sought to lift bans and restrictions that were once imposed on Turkey's authority over the Straits. Rendering the "Lausanne Convention" obsolete, the "Montreux Convention" provided Turkey with the responsibility to maintain the safety of merchant ships and military ships provided that they give Turkey further notice. Additionally, should Turkey feel threatened at any time, it can, according to the new Convention, close all straits at once (Dusinovic, 2023).

Accordingly, it can be indicated that the early years of the Turkish and Soviet states were characterized by common understanding between Atatürk and Lenin around the necessity to cooperate against the colonial powers that dominated several territories on the planet at the time. Moreover, both Turkey and Soviet Russia had a lot in common in terms of the surrounding countries, straits, and territories that they needed to keep away as much as possible from the hands of other countries like Great Britain and France (Tsvetkova, 2018).

2.3.3 Turkish-Soviet Relations During World War II

It is essential to understand the factors that led to the formulation of Turkey's new positive and productive approaches towards the West in addition to the partial abandonment of full-fledged relations with Soviet Russia during the 1930s-1940s. These factors revolved around Turkey's limited resource and its leaders' realization of the negative consequences of any future conflict against European colonial powers. Turkey's domestic culture and economy needed to be consolidated away from any conflict that could diminish its chances of becoming a strong and self-sufficient nation in the future. Therefore, Turkey decided to gravitate more towards the West (Yavuz, 2022).

Similarly, the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Stalin, was also determined to keep Russia out of harm's way by not taking anyone's side during World War II. However, the Soviet Union was still a bit cautious about the possibility of an attack from the Anglo-French Bloc, and that prompted Stalin to sign a treaty with Nazi Germany. In the midst of such relations, Stalin wanted to make sure that Turkey would remain neutral should any conflict between Russia and the Anglo-French Bloc commence. Accordingly, Russia decided to host bilateral talks with Turkey's Prime Minister at the time, Şükrü Saracoğlu, in Moscow, where Stalin proposed that Russia could deploy some troops around the

Turkish straits in order to secure the region against any potential attack from the Anglo-French Bloc. However, Turkey refused to do such thing, which marked one of the earliest disagreements between Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War II (Lika, 2015).

Turkey was considered a non-belligerent in World War II when it decided to form a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany and still kept the chrome trade with Germany intact. However, Turkey place emphasis on the threatening force of the Soviet Union which they though could organize an attack of Turkey at any time. Such threats always prompted Turkey to enhance their decision-making skills and formulate various scenarios for all parties that were involved in the War (Sengil & Küçükdeğirmenci, 2021).

Russia posed an even bigger threat towards Turkey in the wake of World War II by claiming that the military bases that were situated on the Turkish Straits in addition to other regions such as Ardahan and Kars all belonged to Russia and should be placed under the Soviet Union's authority. This threat prompted Turkey to review its relations with the Soviet Union as its leaders felt that the country's territorial integrity is in danger (Özkan, 2020).

2.3.4 Post-War Turkish-Soviet Relations

It is safe to say that the diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union began to sour because of the malicious intentions that the latter side adopted towards the former side. For instance, the Soviet Government proposed in 1946 that the "Montreux Convention" needs to be revised and re-written. Needless to say, the Turkish Government refused such revisions on the account of the fact that the Soviet proposition threatens to negate Turkey's sovereignty. Moreover the revisions revolved around the following principles (Tulun, 2020):

1. All countries must be granted free access, at anytime, to pass their merchant ships through the Straits.
2. All Black Sea Powers must be granted free access, at anytime, to pass their warships through the Straits.
3. No country outside the sphere of Black Sea Power shall be granted access to pass their warships through the straits unless exceptional permissions are granted.

4. Turkey along with Black Sea Powers are to organize an autonomous regime that leads and manages the sea passage from and to the Black Sea.
5. Turkey and the Soviet Union must organize joint endeavours to maintain the security of the Straits and prevent the emergence of hostility in the Straits as well.

The overall Turkish approach after the end of World War II shifted towards being more open to Western ideologies and economic practices. This approach was viable enough for the new Turkish Government because the leaders realized that spending years within an isolated country made Turkey more vulnerable and prone to any potential Soviet attacks and/or diplomatic threats. Therefore, Turkey decided to gravitate even more toward the West and break its close relations with the Soviets (Ross, 2021).

This gravitation towards the West and the United States of America led to a series of negotiations between Turkey and the United States which addressed the best methods that could be implemented to contain the Soviet Union's force and prevent the threat of Communism from reaching other countries all over the world. These negotiations were held in 1947 upon the release of the "Truman Doctrine"; in which the President of the United States announced that the country could not stand idly by anymore against the increasing threat of communism and the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the United States started to gather enough allies to support the "Truman Doctrine", and Turkey was considered one of the most important countries to join such alliance thanks to its prominent role as a political, economic, and strategic power in the Black Sea region and the Middle East (Ross, 2021).

2.3.5 Turkish-Russian Relations Upon Turkey Joining NATO

Upon the declaration of the "Truman Doctrine", the induction of Turkey in a Western-led alliance against the Soviets and Communism was prioritized by the United States. And as a result, this alliance took form when the "North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)" was formulated in 1949. Apparently, Turkey refused the conditions that were proposed by the Soviets regarding the revision of the "Montreux Convention", as the Soviet Union wanted to interfere in Turkey's sovereign decisions. This led to increasing convergence and rapprochement between the West and Turkey and the induction of Turkey in NATO (Dumlu, 2018, P. 1). Accordingly, NATO was established to deter the increasing

communist threat of the Soviet Union against Europe and the West in particular, and the world in general (Kaynar & Gökhan, 2017).

Consequently, in 1952, Turkey officially joined NATO, which is considered a prominent triumph for NATO members as they were successful in inducting a country with a promising economy at the time and a critical strategic advantage that allowed NATO members to gain access to maritime routes in the Black Sea without being under the pressure of the Soviet Union (Tursyn & Idrysheva, 2023).

On the other hand, the Soviet Union Formulated an opposing alliance that was meant to defend socialist ideologies and protect communism from being dissolved within the Soviet Union. This alliance was known as the "Warsaw Pact", and it served as a defense bloc against NATO. As a result, the two alliances were caught up in a series of intelligence-based skirmishes and were considered enemies to one another (Khan, 2016).

2.3.6 Turkish-Russian Tensions During the 1950s-1960s

Turkey's political transformation was initiated in the early 1950s and during the reign of the "Democratic Party" which took control over the governance system in Turkey and directed its focus towards establishing long-term relations with the United States. Moreover, when Turkey joined NATO in 1952, the Democratic Party made promises to the Turkish public that revolved around initiating new developmental plans that were meant to transform Turkey into a nation with an economic and political system that is on par with those of the United States. Turkey further shifted away from its former ties with the Soviet Union (Örnek & Üngör, 2013).

Five years later, another political predicament was responsible for deepening the level of repulsion between the Turkish and Soviet governments, this was known as the Syrian crisis in 1957. Due to overt Soviet intervention and cooperation with the Syrian government in the mid 1950s, and the signing of the "Technical-Economic Cooperation Agreement" between the Soviet Union and Syria, the Western Bloc grew anxious about such convergence, and started to think about the possibility of keeping Syria away from being a communist country or at least protect the allies of NATO and the Western Bloc from a sweeping communistic wave that could take over the entire Arab World (Kumral, 2016).

Upon realizing the Syria was being militaristically, financially, and technologically supported by the Soviet Union, Turkey presented a concise memorandum to the Western Bloc in 1956 in which Turkey outlined its intentions to launch an attack on the Soviet Union in case it continues to infiltrate Syria and turn it into a Soviet ally. Turkey also explained its worries regarding the fact that the Soviet aircrafts were flying over Turkey and it was also determined to turn Syria into a Soviet military base. As a result, the animosity between Turkey and the Soviet Union was intensifying (Karimova, 2023).

Before delving into the details of how the crisis began and ended, it should be noted that during the 1950s and 1960s, economic and cultural relations between the Turkish and Soviet governments were held in high regard as trade turnover between the two states reached around 8 million rubles in 1954, in addition to all other forms of cooperation in the healthcare, tourism, and social science domains (Shaidullina, 2015).

However, the Syrian crisis in 1957 was considered a time when Turkey and the Soviet Union were at the brink of war. To further elaborate, Turkey deployed its troops at the borders between Syria and Turkey and threatened that it would physically intervene into Syria in order to deter the Soviet prevalence in the region and so that Turkey does not become flanked by the Soviets from the north and Syria from the south. In response to this threat, the Soviet Union threatened to attack any Turkish troops in case they entered Syria in any way, shape, or form, then the United States warned the Soviet Union from doing this as it would support Turkey. Eventually, the crisis ended when Turkish and Syrian Troops decided to withdraw their troops from the borders of each country (Karimova, 2023).

Despite the increasing tensions between Turkey and the Soviet Union, the Turkish Government decided to re-evaluate its political doctrine and international relations with the Soviet Union. This disposition was viable due to the fact that, during the 1960s, Turkey had intentions to invade Cyprus but the United States did not approve of such move, and was opposed to the idea of committing such political/militaristic act. As a result, Turkey sought to rebuild the diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union as it began to realize that its pro-Western political affiliation had caused it to become isolated from the world community (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

Accordingly, Nicolai Podgorny, the Chairman of the USSR Supreme Council, decided to pay an official visit to Turkey in 1972. The Turkish Government and the Soviet Representatives discussed a few global political issues; such as the Cyprus Questions, the bilateral relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union, the security of the European Continent, and the Near and Middle East among other things. It could be indicated that this visit somehow enhanced the quality of the bilateral relations between the two states and eased the tension between them to a certain extent (Kornilov, 2013).

2.3.7 The Fall of the Soviet Union

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union gradually lost its competitive edge in the political, economic, and industrial domains, and could not maintain its militaristic authority or political control over many Eastern European countries that wanted to break away from the grips of communism. Eventually, the Soviet Union could not compete with the Western Bloc's technological status and the undeniable impact of capitalism on different regions around the world (Borges & Lucena, 2023).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of a power vacuum in Eastern Europe and the entire region where post-Soviet states are not left without leadership. Therefore, regions and nations began to cooperate on economic and political levels, whereas other major superpowers and strong nations, such as Turkey, the EU, and the United States, began to compete amongst one another for regional dominance and to take control over territories that were once part of the Soviet Union (Valiyev, 2015).

From a Turkish standpoint, taking over Central Asian Turkic States amid the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was of great importance to Turkey's foreign diplomacy and political status in the world. Turkey has always considered such states part of the Turkish World, and that prompted its leaders to take multiple initiatives towards the enhancement of these states' economic status by establishing different joint projects and organizations the most prominent of which is the "Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency", which capitalized on the collapse of the Soviet Union by helping such states transform from being communistic countries into nations that adopt advanced economic, social, and cultural strategies (Sençerman, 2023).

Accordingly, and upon the end of the Cold War, this new Turkish attitude has been accompanied by a new approach that replaced the Central Asian states' former ideology with a new political ideology represented by the concept of "Eurasianism" which in turn contributed in garnering interest and affinity from a number of thinkers, philosophers, theorists, and politicians in Turkey and these states alike (Erşen, 2022). It is indicated that Turkey was managing to replace Russia's former political hegemony in the region.

Due to the newly formed states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and due to the Turkish initiatives to establish new diplomatic relations and economic agreements with states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Russia was prompted to re-structure its political, economic, and cultural relations with Turkey regarding the manner through which they cooperate in the region to maintain each other's security, and regarding their new policies towards one another (İnaç & Hadji, 2022).

2.4 TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS BEFORE THE EMERGENCE OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

2.4.1 Turkish-Russian Relations During the 1990s

In the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, Russia was no longer Turkey's most threatening challenge in the region; due to the fact that they both did not share a border thanks to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and none of them was trying to regain or reclaim any territories in the Black Sea and the Caucasus. This paved the way for both Turkey and Russia to enhance their bilateral relations. However, Turkey's new pan-Turkish approach and the direction towards building the "Turkish World" were both enough to serve as potential elements that could cause any further conflict between Turkey and Russia to ignite over hegemony in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Aktürk, 2014).

Accordingly, the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia were on their way to re-establish their bilateral relations by organizing an official visit to Moscow in 1992 by the Turkish Prime Minister. Although the visit itself was considered successful and fruitful, both sides could not help but disagree on critical aspects regarding border disputes. Moreover, Turkey and Russia found themselves again on a crossroads where Turkey had to show its support to the "European Union (EU)" whereas Russia did not direct its support to the same body (Ahmed, 2023).

Some of the main issues regarding which both Turkey and Russia could not reach an agreement included the following (Çelikpala, 2018):

1. The Kurds; whom are supported by the Russians and not supported by Turkey.
2. The Cyprus Problem; where Turkey recognize Northern Cyprus, while Russians direct their support more towards Greek Cypriots in Cyprus.
3. The Armenian Problem, whom are supported by the Russians and not supported by Turkey.
4. NATO; given the fact that Turkey is a very important member of NATO, whereas Russia is not part or a major supporter of NATO.
5. The European Union (EU); given the fact that Turkey is an ally of the European Union while Russia is not.

Nonetheless, Turkey and Russia resumed their economic, social, and commercial relations on a very positive level, as both countries began to initiative joint economic initiatives and projects, in addition to the trade agreements that they both signed based on mutual trust and strong social relations between one another (Özbay, 2015).

2.4.2 Turkish-Russian Relations During the 2000s

The 2000s represent a new chapter in the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Russia. To further elaborate, it can be indicated that the win-lose approach that had been adopted by both countries' leaders during the Cold War was replaced by a win-win approach that ensures the development for both countries in accordance with the principles and standards of various strategic and economic initiatives, agreements, and/or projects between Turkey and Russia. Such initiatives and agreements has taken the form of cooperation agreements regarding the nuclear domain and energy sector, in addition to increasing trade volumes and top-level visits between the two countries' leaders (Özbay, 2011).

Since the Turkish Government took office in 2002, it began to work on re-structuring its diplomatic relations with Russia by focusing of increasing the volume of trade between the two countries by depending on the energy sector to be exact. As for Russia, its Government was determined to enhance the country's relations with Turkey to further

encourage it to break away from the Western Bloc as much as possible and become open for more expansive economic relations in the future (Flanagan, 2013).

The level of political rapprochement between Turkey and Russia continued to reach further frontiers. In 2004, President Vladimir Putin was the first Russian Head of the State to ever pay a visit to Turkey in 32 years. Additionally, this visit proved to be successful on different levels as both Turkey and Russia decided to enhance their bilateral relations, multidimensional partnership, and form new economic agreements that led to an increase in the volume of trade between them, which made Russia the second-largest trade partner to Turkey after Germany. Furthermore, the energy sector was rejuvenated between the two countries when they initiated economic and diplomatic talks regarding the expansion of the "Blue Stream Pipeline", and the signing of agreements about several joint initiatives and projects with the energy conglomerate "Gazprom" (Erşen, 2013).

Both countries were striving for further cooperation on economic, strategic, and diplomatic levels. Since the year 2000, Russia was keen on maintaining positive diplomatic relations with all post-Soviet States that surrounds its borders, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, while Turkey decided to enhance its economic status with its neighbouring countries. Furthermore, both Turkey and Russia enhanced their international affairs and relations with the West and the United States, especially in support for all initiatives led by the United States against global terrorism (Balta, 2019).

However, and by 2008-2010, Turkey and Russia were both dissatisfied with their relations with the West especially the EU and NATO. Firstly, Turkey became fed up with the prolonged talks regarding its accession to the EU, to the point that the Turkish Government was on the brink of losing its hops completely. On the other hand, Russia was totally upset with the EU's and NATO's approaches towards post-Soviet states; when the West allegedly supported certain revolutions that had erupted in Eastern Europe especially Georgia, and when NATO also began to initiate direct lines of communication with both Georgia and Ukraine to discuss their high chances of being part of NATO. Such movements prompted Turkey and Russia to enhance their economic, strategic, and even militaristic cooperation a little bit away from the West (Balta, 2019).

One can even notice a few similarities by which both Turkey and Russia were characterized on political, economic, and strategic levels. For instance, both countries were capable of consolidating their national and regional power in 2004 and 2007 for both Russia and Turkey respectively. Moreover, they instilled the principles of nationalism and conservatism, and their ties were also deteriorating with the West since the mid-2000s onwards. On the other hand, Turkey's tools for establishing economic hegemony and leadership in the 2000s has taken the form of the signing of free trade agreements, attracting business actors and foreign investors, and gaining economic incentives, whereas Russia tools mainly revolved around becoming a hub for the production of natural gas (Köstem, 2018).

Nevertheless, the Turkish-Russian relations continued to improve over the years, and in 2010 the two countries agreed to establish and operate Turkey's first ever nuclear plant in Akkuyu, Mersin (Tekbiyik, 2015). This is when Russia decided to help Turkey establish its first source of energy that could help provide its nation with a powerful tool with which the Turkish Government becomes capable of achieving all of its strategic objectives and developmental plans. However, this could also allow Russia to interfere in Turkey's energy capabilities and make Turkey more dependent on Russia's energy supplies, maintenance, and any further improvements on the plan which might cause a problem between Turkey and Russia in the future (Telli, 2016).

It should also be noted that even though the 2000s was considered a time where both Turkey and Russia were attempting to re-structure their diplomatic relations based on their approach towards reaching "zero-problems" towards one another and towards the entire regions, there was also a sense of disagreement that arose between them regarding certain subjects; such as the situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Karabakh region, Chechnya, and even Syria (Ekinci, 2017).

Therefore, it could be concluded that relations in the 2000s between Turkey and Russia revolved mainly around strengthening each other's economy through the utilization of their diplomatic relations. Therefore, the following facts elaborate such economic cooperation (Özel & Uçar, 2019):

1. The volume of trade between the two countries reached \$38 billion until 2008. This number started to dwindle a bit when the international economic crisis affected the entire world in 2008-2010.
2. Foreign direct investment rates were growing in Turkey by Russian businessmen and business conglomerates until it reached \$3.6 billion in 2006.
3. Russian tourist arrivals to Turkey increased from less than one million tourists in 2000 to more than three million tourists in 2010.
4. Turkey's natural gas imports from Russia increased in 2010 by 44.20%.



3. TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

3.1 THE IMPACT OF THE ARAB SPRING ON THE SYRIAN CRISIS

3.1.1 Turkish-Russian Relations Amid the Syrian Crisis

As part of the Arab Spring that had begun in Tunisia at the end of 2010, violence broke out in Syria in March 2011. After a month of protest, opposition organizations faced strict measures from the Assad administration, even though the protests had first begun as a nonviolent demonstration for democratic and cultural rights and greater freedom and welfare. The central government became more frustrated as the number of civilian casualties rose, and the opposition continued to put up resistance. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) was formed as the opposition began to organize. Over time, it amassed enough support and territory to become Syria's only legal armed resistance. The majority of the funding for the FSA-led resistance came from the United States (U.S.) for at least two years. The U.S. even ran an equip-train programme to help the FSA's combat forces at the time (Al-Saleh& White, 2013).

In 2014, the trajectory of the Syrian conflict changed significantly for the first time. The region formerly won by the FSA fell under the hands of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). It coincided with the United States shifting its backing to the YPG, the Syrian affiliate of the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party). The second change occurred a year later, when Russia decided to join the battle on the side of the Assad government. The Assad government was forgiven because of its role in the conflict. After that, Tehran stepped up its support for Assad. With the help of Russia and Iran, the Syrian Army troops were able to make a breakthrough against the opposition and ISIS. However, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) stalled out as it battled ISIS, the YPG/PKK, and government troops supported by Russia and Iran. When Turkey launched the Euphrates Shield Operation (ESO) in 2016, the conflict in Syria took a new direction. As a result, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) breathed a sigh of relief and retook territory in northwestern Syria (along the Azez, Jarablus, and El Bab lines). Although the operation was launched to counter ISIS and the PKK's terrorism, it has prompted Moscow to question the strength of its links to the PKK in the Western Euphrates area. Additionally, it feared that the TAF-

supported Free Syrian Army would overthrow Assad's administration. Turkey and Russia struck a ceasefire deal on December 20, 2016. Following this, Turkey, Russia, and Iran established the so-called Astana trio/mechanism and declared four de-escalation zones (Aljazeera, 2017). After normalisation (Moscow, 2015), this initial collaboration emerged despite the competing interests in the sector.

Idlib was added to the list of de-escalation zones established by the Astana Mechanism. This led to Turkey acting as a protector for Idlib's rebel organisations and sending troops there. Similarly, despite widespread opposition from Russia and its partner, the Assad government, it went through. To ensure the safety of the Afrin area, Turkey launched a follow-up operation over a year later. As the operation was dubbed, Olive Branch focused mostly on regions under PKK control that Russia supported. As the PKK has been reluctant to leave the Western Euphrates, the Turkish operation has been a chance to remove the PKK and the U.S.'s presence in the region. Together, these operations allowed Turkey to increase its border security, eliminate the ISIS threat near its borders and within its territory, and thwart the PKK's plans to gain control of Northern Syria (Balanche, 2016). After the most recent operation, Turkey and Russia once again had to deal with the problem of Idlib. After establishing confidence, the two nations agreed to stabilize Idlib. Turkey undertook the operations against opposition from the Russian-Assad government. However, the two sides nonetheless managed to sign the Sochi deal over Idlib and work together to defeat ISIS. The second occurrence of collaboration was the conjuncture that emerged following the Olive Branch Operation.

The Turkish Peace Spring Operation in October 2019 brought about yet another change in the dynamics of the Syrian conflict. On the one hand, it was necessary due to concerns for Turkey's national interest and security (Hale, 2019). On the other hand, the withdrawal of American forces to the south and the surrender of territorial authority were not counter to Russian objectives. In addition, it was seen as a potential for destabilisation. The Russian capital saw an opening to bypass northeastern Syria as well. Ultimately, Russia, not the United States, participated in the operation. A memorandum of agreement between Turkey and Russia was signed on October 22 in Sochi. This was a positive sign of strengthening ties and increased collaboration between the two countries in the Syrian arena. However, after the nations worked together, they clashed on the battlefield. This is why, at the start

of 2020, the assaults on Idlib and Aleppo were ramped up by government troops supported by Russian air forces and Iranian militias. The artillery barrage over the area continued, and now it seemed aimed towards the TAF (Lavrov, 2018).

Consequently, seventeen military personnel died between February 3 and February 26. As fighting heated up in February, the TAF strengthened its defences. A new paradigm was established when Russia and the Assad government attacked Turkey from the air on February 27, killing 36 Turkish troops. As a result, the situation in Idlib became more problematic, and the Turkish government launched yet another operation known as the Spring Shield Operation. There was a direct battle between the two nations in addition to the indirect and numerous additional smaller-scale engagements via their proxies. The mission was successful, and a follow-up protocol to the agreement on stabilising the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone was signed to mark the occasion. Two nations would not often work together while at odds in the military. They were both headed in the same general direction(Ipek & Güler, 2021).

There has been a definite historical trend of conflict and collaboration in Turkey-Russia ties. On the one hand, geopolitical conflicts over the straits, Central Asia, and the Caucasus existed alongside Soviet aid for Turkey. Turkey's heavy industry improved thanks to Soviet investments, trade agreements, and economic cooperation (Hirst&Isci, 2020). Despite the underlying geopolitical issues, engagement has continued between the two nations. When trying to make sense of the present dynamics of bilateral relations, the legacies of the past are crucial. Conflict over Syria is only one area in which U.S. and Russian objectives diverge, and the two countries' longstanding strategic cooperation, interdependence, economic and industrial investments, mutual interests, and defined policies all play important roles in keeping their bilateral relationship from collapsing. Even though Turkey-Russia interactions and the boundaries of their geopolitical alignments in Syria are discussed in the existing literature (Köstem, 2020), the primary drivers of their tactics and how they conflict and collaborate are not well explored. This article provides the most comprehensive analysis of the roles played by both nations in Syria so far.

The broad concept of compartmentalization has been used to expound on Turkey-Russia ties. Öniş and Yılmaz (2015) conceived the ideas and later (Öniş &Yılmaz, 2015, p. 2)

refined them. The authors of an analysis of bilateral ties write, "A strategic partnership will be difficult to forge and consolidate as long as significant differences persist in the geopolitical orientations and political outlooks of the individual states." In this context, compartmentalization is seen as a tactic that "enables the coexistence of political tensions with deepening economic ties" (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2015, p. 2). This is the environment in which the Syrian instance is examined; despite their hostile relations, neither country has allowed its problems with the other to dampen its economic ties. A similar approach is taken when discussing Turkey's politics regarding Ukraine and Crimea, with the authors arguing that "the opposing positions of Turkey and Russia in the context of the Syrian and Ukrainian crises aptly illustrate... although such conflicts exist, and while they hamper political relations, they do not significantly undermine the seemingly robust economic relationship built thus far" (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2015, p. 17). Moreover, it is conceptualized like this: "One important strategy that has emerged in this period is the tendency to compartmentalize economic issues and geopolitical rivalries to avoid the negative spillover of certain disagreements into areas of bilateral cooperation." However, compartmentalization is said to have been hampered by growing security concerns, such as in Syria.

According to Orhan (2014), asymmetries in economic and political ties in Turkey-Russia relations preclude the compartmentalization of conflicts. They argue that such a segmented approach is constrained by the disparity in exit costs and power imbalances between the different parts of the system. "Under conditions of asymmetric interdependence, compartmentalization is not a stable equilibrium; the stronger party can always threaten to cease compartmentalizing and inflict unequal harm to achieve a desired outcome." It has been argued that although Russia may choose to compartmentalize, Turkey must ignore the exit costs of doing otherwise. Turkey's role in Syria, the Idlib issue, and ties between Turkey and Russia in Syria are all areas of inquiry. It was conceived in light of diplomatic and tactical difficulties, but it has yet to be analyzed in light of the compartmentalization strategy (Orhan, 2014).

This piece applies the method of compartmentalization proposed by Öniş and Yılmaz (2015) to the specific context of Syria. This study challenges conventional wisdom by arguing that Russia and Turkey have succeeded in compartmentalizing their

disagreements, even though they have led to direct military clashes on the field and increased security concerns. This tactic helps keep the two countries from breaking up their collaboration in Syria. Despite their adversarial positions, the success of their cooperation in Syria is often attributed to this tactic. The Astana trio/mechanism, the May 2017 agreement on de-escalation zones, the September 2018 and October 2019 Sochi agreements, and the March 2020 Idlib agreement are all thought of as examples of cooperation that have been achieved in Syria thanks to the adoption of a compartmentalizing strategy. Disagreements stem partly from Turkey's actions in Syria, which have been labelled the Euphrates Shield Operation, the Olive Branch Operation, the Peace Spring Operation, and the Spring Shield Operation.

3.1.2 U.S. Involvement in the Syrian Crisis

There have been several phases and policy approaches to the U.S. engagement in the Syrian conflict, making it a complicated and divisive topic. As part of the larger Arab Spring movement, the Syrian crisis started in 2011 with nonviolent demonstrations calling for democratic reforms. However, the Syrian government's violent crackdown on dissent in response to the situation's escalation into a full-fledged civil war resulted in widespread bloodshed and the eviction of people (Kuzmin, 2015). Diplomatic initiatives were one of the first ways that the U.S. became involved. The Syrian government's use of violence in reaction to protests was denounced by the U.S., which also demanded that President Bashar al-Assad resign. In addition, the U.S. supported opposition organizations working for political reform in Syria. However, when jihadist organizations rose to prominence among the opposition, the situation swiftly changed, raising worries about the spread of extremism in the area (Blanchard, 2012).

The U.S. changed its strategy and increased its military involvement as the battle intensified. The United States began a military operation against the terrorist organization known as the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014. ISIS has used the unrest in Syria and Iraq to construct a self-declared caliphate. In order to carry out airstrikes and help regional troops battling ISIS, the United States oversaw a coalition of worldwide allies (Hassan, 2017). To combat both ISIS and the Assad government, the U.S. simultaneously supported some opposition organizations in Syria. Fighting ISIS while supporting moderate rebels was a difficult and controversial dual approach. Some said that U.S. support for rebels

unintentionally helped extremist groups, while others thought the only important goal should be to combat ISIS (Barrett, 2018).

Using economic tactics like sanctions to pressure the Assad administration further developed the U.S. role in the Syrian issue. Sanctions were put in place to restrict the Syrian government's access to resources and rein in its actions by focusing on the people, organizations, and industries associated with it. There have been disagreements on the viability of such actions and how they would affect the Syrian populace (Taylor, 2019). The U.S. had challenges and trade-offs in its strategy throughout the crisis. On the one hand, there was a desire to aid Syrians fighting for democracy and human rights. Conversely, there were worries regarding the dangers of escalation, the possibility of unintended effects, and the challenge of locating trustworthy partners locally (Hof, 2018).

The U.S. has scaled back its direct military operations in Syria in recent years, but it still supports regional allies and has a presence there to fight ISIS. Finding a comprehensive and long-lasting solution has proven difficult due to the conflict's complexity and fluidity (Ryan, 2020). The U.S. has taken several approaches to the Syrian problem, including political, military, and economic ones. As it works to confront security challenges, advance democratic ideals, and lessen the conflict's humanitarian cost, the U.S. is faced with difficult choices and trade-offs. The international community faces difficulties finding a lasting solution to the Syrian situation.

3.1.3 Evolution of Turkish-Russo Relations in the Context of the Syrian Crisis

Due to their disparate interests and levels of engagement in the conflict, the ties between Russia and Turkey in the Syrian crisis have been complicated and tense. Russia and Turkey have become major players in the area due to the Syrian crisis, which started in 2011, and have a lot riding on how the conflict turns out (Larrabee, 2017). Turkey originally backed the opposition groups aiming to depose President Bashar al-Assad at the commencement of the Syrian conflict, while Russia solidly supported the Syrian government. Their differing opinions became a point of contention between the two nations (Balci, 2016). Russia, a long-time friend of the Assad government, saw that backing as essential for preserving access to its naval facility in Tartus, Syria, and its strategic interests in the Middle East (Laruelle, 2018). However, Turkey, Syria's neighbor,

was worried about the conflict's spillover consequences, notably the flood of refugees and the emergence of Kurdish organizations in northern Syria (Khatib, 2018).

Turkish-Russo ties significantly worsened when the Turkish military shot down a Russian fighter plane in 2015, further escalating the conflict (BBC News, 2015). However, both nations understood that communication and engagement were essential to stop further escalation and handle their concerns in Syria. Russia and Turkey developed a system to coordinate military measures and reduce tensions on the ground through diplomatic initiatives. In order to lessen violence and provide humanitarian access, this culminated in the creation of "de-escalation zones" in Syria (Tsurkov, 2017). Russia, Turkey, and Iran collaborated to organise the Astana peace talks in 2017 as an alternate venue for the Geneva negotiations. These talks were held to establish a truce and a political solution to the Syrian conflict (Hinnebusch, 2018). The interests of Russia and Turkey in Syria have not always coincided, despite their collaboration in some areas. Turkish military action in northern Syria was directed towards Kurdish-led forces that the U.S. supported but which Turkey considered a danger (RagpSoylu, 2020). Conversely, Russia continued to cooperate with the Kurdish troops, which added to the complexity of their ties.

Russia and Turkey have also clashed over the situation in Idlib, one of the few areas of Syria still controlled by rebels. In 2018, the two nations agreed to a ceasefire to create a demilitarized zone. However, difficulties with the agreement's execution resulted in intermittent increases in violence (Al Jazeera, 2021). Russia and Turkey have shown a pragmatic approach to handling their relations in the context of the Syrian crisis, despite their disagreements and sporadic conflicts. Both nations know how crucial communication and collaboration are to stopping further escalation and safeguarding their regional interests. In the context of the Syrian crisis, Russian and Turkish relations have been complicated, tense, and occasionally cooperative. Even though both nations' interests in Syria frequently conflict, they have cooperated and taken diplomatic measures to resolve their worries and stop an escalation. The dynamics of Russian-Turkish ties continue to play a significant role in determining the regional environment as the Syrian war develops.

3.2 TURKISH-RUSSO RAPPROCHEMENT

3.2.1 U.S. Interference and the Emergence of Turkish-Russo Rapprochement

The Syrian crisis and U.S. meddling in the region have significantly influenced the dynamics between Russia and Turkey, forming a Turkish-Russo reconciliation in some areas. Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the U.S. has actively supported several opposition organisations working to depose President Bashar al-Assad. The U.S. supported a political transition to install a more democratic and inclusive administration in Syria because it saw Assad's leadership as oppressive and culpable for human rights abuses (Wehrey et al., 2019). The U.S.'s strategy, however, put it at odds with Russia's position, which supported the Syrian government's fight against what it viewed as terrorist organisations there.

There were increased tensions between the U.S. and Russia over how they handled the Syrian issue and strained ties between the U.S. and Turkey. Turkey, a founding member of NATO and a steadfast friend of the U.S., voiced displeasure over American assistance for Kurdish-led troops in Syria, which it saw as a continuation of the PKK. This group has been recognized as a terrorist organization (Altunşık, 2018). The U.S. and Turkey's differences in goals and backing for Kurdish troops in Syria became a major source of friction. The issue was made more difficult by the U.S. decision to support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a group led by Kurds, with military assistance in their battle against the Islamic State. Turkey was concerned about the possibility of Kurdish separatism spreading into Turkey due to the formation of a Kurdish-led autonomous entity along its border (Bulut, 2017).

Amid these tensions, Russia aimed to strengthen ties with Turkey by taking advantage of the widening gulf between Turkey and the U.S. Russia participated in diplomatic attempts to de-escalate tensions and establish common ground with Turkey since it recognized Turkey's crucial role in the Syrian conflict and its worries about the Kurdish troops (Cagaptay, 2018). The downing of a Russian fighter plane by Turkey in 2015 gave both nations a chance to reevaluate their relationship and look for opportunities for collaboration. Russia and Turkey developed a system to handle their interests in Syria through diplomatic channels and military cooperation. As an alternative to the Geneva

negotiations, the two nations worked together to organize the Astana peace talks with Iran. These negotiations aimed to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis and establish a ceasefire (Lynch, 2018).

Additionally, rather than completely backing Kurdish autonomy, Russia maintained a working relationship with some Kurdish factions, which Turkey saw favourably as a way of demonstrating sensitivity to its security concerns (Gorenburg, 2018). The cooperative military actions in Syria, such as the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations, which targeted Kurdish-led troops along Turkey's border, furthered the reconciliation between Russia and Turkey (Lobell&Mauslein, 2019). In an increasingly linked and complicated global world, common interests and pragmatic collaboration have emerged as key factors in international relations among countries.

3.2.2 Diplomatic Efforts and the Astana Process

In the context of the Syrian crisis, diplomatic efforts and the Astana Process have provided a forum for communication and collaboration among significant regional and global parties. A diplomatic effort to find a political resolution to the Syrian crisis is the Astana Process, often known as the Astana Talks or Astana framework. It was established as a substitute for the Geneva peace negotiations in January 2017 and is supported by the guarantor nations of Turkey, Russia, and Iran. Due to its capacity to bring together the Syrian government and opposition parties for in-person conversations, promoting direct contact and de-escalation efforts, the process has acquired relevance (Babones, 2020). A major goal of the Astana Process is to create de-escalation and ceasefire zones in Syria. These initiatives have resulted in short-term cessations of hostilities and reduced hostilities in particular areas, bringing much-needed humanitarian aid to populations caught in the crossfire (Ragazzi, 2018).

The Astana Process played a role in forming the Syrian Constitutional Committee. The Astana discussions made it easier for the Constitutional Committee to establish itself, which is a crucial part of the UN-led Geneva peace process. To write a new constitution for Syria as a first step towards a political settlement, the group comprises representatives from the Syrian government, the opposition, and civil society (Haid, 2021). The three guarantor nations, Iran, Turkey, and Russia, are now more closely coordinated due to

diplomatic efforts under the Astana Process. These nations have shown a readiness to work together and establish common ground in search of a political solution, despite their divergent interests and allegiances in the Syrian war. According to Lund (2017), the process has offered a forum for open discussion and talks that have resulted in agreements on de-escalation zones, humanitarian aid, and prisoner swaps.

The Astana Process has also supported the UN-led Geneva peace negotiations by giving the peace process an extra pace. The Astana Process has focused on particular confidence-building measures and de-escalation initiatives on the ground, leading to a climate favourable to peace discussions, in contrast to the Geneva Talks, which concentrate on more general political debates (Vasudevan, 2019). The Astana Process, however, also has limitations and difficulties. Negotiations and the execution of agreements may be made more difficult by the presence of several armed factions in the Syrian war and their allegiance to diverse international parties. Additionally, for the process to be successful, both parties must be prepared to abide by the agreed terms and establish common ground in resolving the conflict's primary concerns (Gerges, 2021).

3.2.3 U.S. Withdrawal and the Sochi Agreement

Two key developments in the Syrian issue are the U.S. departure and the Sochi Agreement, both of which have ramifications for local dynamics and regional and international relations. Former President Donald Trump's announcement of the y-mediated departure from Syria in December 2018 signaled a significant change in American policy towards the area. There was support for and opposition to the U.S. decision to pull out its soldiers from Syria. The U.S. administration's main justification for the departure was that ISIS had been substantially vanquished, and it was now time for other nations to play a more significant role in maintaining the region's peace (BBC News, 2018).

However, friends and Kurdish-led forces fighting with American soldiers against ISIL expressed alarm about the U.S. plan to depart. the SDF commanded by Kurds, were vital to the overall U.S. strategy in Syria and played a key role in the conflict against ISIL (Axios, 2018). When the U.S. withdrew, a power vacuum was left in some parts of Syria, notably in the SDF-controlled northeastern territories. Other players, like Turkey, Russia, and the Syrian government, were able to expand their influence and dominance in this space. The

pullout was considered a major setback for the Kurdish-led troops, who had to deal with Turkish military operations after the United States left the region (Al Jazeera, 2019).

The Memorandum on Stabilization of the Situation in the Idlib De-escalation Area, commonly known as the Sochi Agreement, was concluded between Russia and Turkey on September 17, 2018. In order to stop the Syrian government and its supporters from launching a full-scale military onslaught, an agreement to create a demilitarized zone in the northwest Syrian province of Idlib was made (Reuters, 2018), and as part of the Sochi Agreement, Turkey and Russia, had varying approaches towards the Assad leadership, agreed to create a demilitarized zone stretching 15-20 kilometers along the frontline in Idlib. Heavy weapons had to be taken from this area, and radical jihadist organizations had to leave (The Washington Post, 2018). Given the presence of millions of civilians in Idlib, the Sochi Agreement was considered a practical step to avoid a major military conflict that may have caused a humanitarian disaster. It offered a short-term fix to prevent a confrontation between Turkish and Russian soldiers and purchased more time for talks (Al Jazeera, 2018).

The Sochi Agreement, however, had difficulties being put into practice. Parts of the demilitarized zone were still under the control of militant organizations, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which was originally linked to al-Qaeda, and assaults against Russian and Syrian government forces persisted (Middle et al., 2019). Furthermore, notwithstanding the agreement, there were worries about violations committed by the armed opposition and the Syrian government. There were ongoing reports of airstrikes and shelling, which led to the displacement and death of civilians (Human et al., 2019). Two significant events that have influenced the course of the Syrian crisis are the U.S. withdrawal from Syria and the Sochi Agreement.

On the one hand, the U.S. withdrawal left a power vacuum that had implications for the Kurdish-led forces and regional stability. On the other hand, the Sochi Agreement was intended to prevent a large-scale military offensive in Idlib and establish an indefinite demilitarized zone. However, difficulties in implementation and violations by various parties have made it difficult to fully implement.

3.3 INTERVENTION AND INTERESTS OF TURKEY AND RUSSIA IN THE MIDST OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

3.3.1 Turkish-Russo Conflict and Cooperation Over Syria

There have been several instances of conflict between the two nations. First, problems arose when Russian troops stood between the Turkish Air Force and the YPG/PKK forces during Turkey's Euphrates Shield Operation. However, the regime troops opposed the TAF expanding their field control in coordination with the FSA. Furthermore, disagreements between Ankara and Moscow arose when Moscow insisted that Assad be allowed to enter safe zones established by Turkey. Russia also sent troops to the Tal Rifaat area during Turkey's Olive Branch Operation, blocking TAF advances in the sector. In addition, Moscow meddled in Turkey's Eastern Euphrates (Peace Spring Operation) operation. Moscow persuaded Turkey to call off the military operation and establish a ceasefire (Yeşiltaş et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, Russia has used the leadership vacuum to position its soldiers while the YPG/PKK withdrawal commitments remain unfulfilled. Moscow's anxiety about Turkey's military achievements against regime troops and its protection of the PKK's continued existence both found expression in this incident. The repeated pattern of competing interests significantly impacts Turkey's security worries. In addition, the most recent conflict, which occurred in March 2020, was an instance of the two nations slashing each other's throats. Despite the signed accords and ceasefires meant to bring peace and stability to Idlib, this event nonetheless took place. They have been indirectly battling one another via proxies on the ground and blocking each other's offensive progress. However, in the Idlib situation, Russian and Assad regime aircraft directly attacked the TAF. As the deadliest incident that led to another Turkish operation, its significance cannot be overstated. An agreement was reached between Turkey and Russia after the Spring Shield Operation, in which the Turkish Armed Troops (TAF) and Free Syrian Army (FSA/SNA) battled against government troops. There has always been some diplomatic mechanism or ceasefire agreement between Ankara and Moscow whenever they have fought or whenever Turkey has begun an operation against a Russian ally and Moscow's regional interests (Aktürk, 2019).

In reality, several binding agreements and negotiating processes are now defining the situation or status quo due to Russian-Turkish collaboration in Syria. The most important agreements in the course of the Syrian conflict include (Ipek & Güler, 2021):

1. The Astana trio/mechanism agreement from January 24, 2017;
2. The May 2017 agreement on the construction of de-escalation zones;
3. The September 2018 and October 2019 agreements from Sochi; and
4. The March 2020 deal on Idlib.

Initially, a structure was developed to maintain and monitor the ceasefire due to the discussions conducted in Astana between Turkey, Russia, and Iran. As the need for diplomatic measures has been more widely acknowledged, the Astana process has emerged as one of the region's most significant diplomatic endeavours. It is a meeting place for peace talks that provide an alternative to the Western-led discussions in Geneva. Russia, Turkey, and Iran, as the guarantors of the ceasefire regime in Syria, came up with the idea for the Astana process, while the United Nations started the Geneva platform. The focus is on a different, non-Western way of looking at a possible resolution. Trilateral talks held in Moscow on December 20 provided the groundwork for the procedure (Cooper & Cornut, 2018). Within the Astana framework, the four de-escalation zones in Syria were formed. After relying heavily on military measures to change the events in Assad's favour, Moscow has accepted the need for diplomacy in crisis resolution via the Astana process and trilateral meetings.

Second, there is the May 4, 2017, agreement establishing de-escalation zones in Syria. A memorandum on the establishment of de-escalation zones in Syria was signed by Russia, Turkey, and Iran in their roles as guarantors of the truce in Syria (Romanova, 2016). The goal of the memorandum was to end violence, improve the humanitarian situation and set the stage for a political settlement of the conflict by establishing de-escalation zones in Idlib province, Homs, eastern Ghouta, and Southern Syria (Deraa and Al-Quneitra). These security and de-escalation zones were established for a trial period of six months. The pact also obligated the three guarantor governments to keep fighting ISIS, Nusra Front, and Al

Qaeda affiliates within and beyond the de-escalation zones. Damascus gained control of the land of three of the original de-escalation zones in 2018: Ghouta, Homs, and Deraa.

Thirdly, on September 17, 2018, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar signed the memorandum of understanding on the stabilization of the situation in the de-escalation zone of Idlib, also known as the Sochi Agreement (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The Sochi Agreement was based on the agreement on establishing de-escalation zones in Syria, signed on May 4, 2017. There were several steps that both Russia and Turkey agreed were necessary to stabilize the situation in Idlib. The two leaders agreed to keep Turkey's surveillance outposts in Idlib. Russia would take precautions to prevent assaults and keep things as they are in the province. In addition, the parties agreed on a 15-20 km deep demilitarized zone inside the de-escalation zone. In addition, by October 15, all terrorist formations were supposed to be out of the demilitarized zone under the terms of the agreement. In addition, the agreement stipulated that all heavy weaponry be removed from the demilitarized zone by October 10. Within the confines of a demilitarized zone, the Turkish Armed Forces and the military police of the Russian Armed Forces would perform synchronised patrols. The Sochi Agreement called for the M4 and M5 roads to reopen to transit traffic by the end of 2018.

In a fourth development, Turkey and Russia struck an agreement on Syria on October 22, 2019. Official Internet Resources of the Russian President, 2019, reports that the parties agreed to protect Turkey's security while maintaining Syria's political unity and territorial integrity. The two sides agreed to maintain the status quo in the 32-kilometre-long region between Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn that was the focus of Operation Peace Spring. The significance of the Adana Agreement was reaffirmed by Ankara and Moscow, with Russia assuming leadership for its execution. To further remove and disarm PKK/YPG militants, the agreement allowed for the entrance of Russian military police and Syrian border guards along the Syrian side of the Syrian-Turkish border (outside the region of the Peace Spring Operation). In addition, the Peace Spring Operation region would see combined Russian and Turkish patrols in both the West and the East. The parties agreed to remove all YPG forces from Manbij and Tal Rifaat (Lechner, 2021).

Erdogan's trip to Moscow amid the most recent escalation in Idlib led to the signing of an extra document to the memorandum on stabilising the circumstances in the Idlib de-

escalation area on March 5, 2020 (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The protocol is rooted in the May 4, 2017 memorandum and the Sochi Accord of September 28, 2018. The M4 motorway serves as the northern boundary of the Idlib de-escalation zone. On March 5, Turkey and Russia agreed to build a security corridor extending 6 kilometres north and south of the highway. The treaty also called for coordinated patrols along the M4 motorway between Turkey and Russia, commencing on March 15, 2020. Heavy government attacks on Idlib since December 2019 led to the protocol's conclusion.

3.3.2 Turkey's and Russia's Strategies in Syria

After the start of the Arab Spring, Turkey took the stance of mediating between the Assad government and the opposition in Syria and championing the democratic demands of the Syrian people. The international coalition's main objective, and Turkey's, was toppling the Assad government. Turkey was certain that the opposition would eventually topple the Assad administration because of its immense strength and influence at the time (Öniş, 2012).

However, the release of terrorists who had fought with Al Qaida in Afghanistan from jails in Iraq and Syria changed the trajectory of the Syrian civil war. These terrorists operated under Syrian al-Qaida's banner before becoming the more well-known Islamic State group. After ISIS's rapid expansion and subsequent territory grab, the international coalition shifted its focus away from toppling the Assad government and towards containing ISIS. The FSA-led opposition troops began to suffer a decline in supplies as ISIS raised territorial gains. Meanwhile, Assad was cornered and urged Russian troops to intervene, which changed the trajectory of the Syrian conflict again. A diplomatic crisis erupted when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter plane a few months after Russia became involved. The departure of the Patriot missiles left Turkey without an effective air defence missile system. Ankara was compelled to become more pragmatic after experiencing a rift in bilateral ties and a shift in U.S. attitude during the Syrian crisis (Lemmon, 2021).

The PKK and ISIS stepped up their assaults within Turkey, while the FETO (Fethullah Terrorist Organisation) attempted to stage a failed coup. In addition, Turkey's interests in the Syrian civil war shifted drastically as the United States increased support for the PKK's Syrian offshoot, the YPG. The danger that Turkey sees has changed as a result of these

reasons. After 2016, Turkey stopped caring about toppling Assad's government and instead focused on eliminating terrorist groups. In Turkey's eyes, the United States' policies and actions in areas such as the economy, the PKK, FETO, and the Eastern Mediterranean, among others, threatened Turkey's national security and economic interests. However, Russia has emerged as a counterweight and a major option for working together. Ankara's flight to Moscow in response to what it saw as a particularly ominous confluence of events helped to ease tensions after the plane crisis. Examples of such a shift in foreign policy include the 2016 signing of the TurkStream project, the acquisition of S-400 air defence systems, and the reactivation of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant Project (Lazăr, 2021).

On August 24, 2016, the Turkish government launched the Euphrates Shield Operation in response to the YPG/PKK's rapid takeover of Membij in northern Syria on August 12. The rise in ISIS activity and assaults inside Turkish territory has also prompted the government to adopt tougher measures to ensure the safety of its citizens. For these reasons, the operation was carried out: to protect Syria's borders, to aid coalition forces in their fight against ISIS, to stop other terrorist groups like the YPG/PKK from seizing territory from ISIS, to preserve Syria's territorial integrity, and, finally, to provide a haven for refugees. Analysing the Euphrates Shield Operation may provide light on Turkey's safe zone, counterterrorism, and preventative measures policies. This action demonstrated that Turkey would not ignore a serious national danger, such as terrorist assaults on Turkish soil by ISIS. Second, it proved it could prevent terrorist groups from executing their plans. Thirdly, this operation completed the commitments to the overall anti-ISIS coalition structure. Fourth, the conquest of Al-Bab allowed opposition troops to push on towards Aleppo, increasing the pressure on the Assad regime. With the Azez-Jarablus line under control, Turkey has more power to maintain security at its borders. In clearing out ISIS, Turkey protects its borders and those of its NATO allies. This operation pushed ISIS fighters 40 kilometers from the Turkish border. Second, it showed that the YPG and PKK were not alone in their struggle against ISIS, which boosted the credibility of resistance groups supported by Turkey (Ipek&Güler, 2021).

Thirdly, to maintain national security, eliminate the YPG/PKK danger from borders in the northern part of Syria, and establish a safe zone along borders, the TAF conducted an operation with the FSA/SNA forces. This gave Syrian refugees who wanted to return to

their country the chance to do so (Tok et al., 2019). The Tal Abyad and Rasulayn district centres and an area of 4,160 km² were freed from terrorist control due to the Peace Spring Operation. After agreeing with the United States on establishing a safe zone, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan travelled to Moscow to meet with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. The meeting resulted in the signing of a memorandum concluding the operation between the two nations. As a result, TAF and FSA/SNA troops stayed in the territories they had previously conquered. At the same time, in areas beyond the line of Tal Abyad-Rasulayn, Russia pledged to oversee the evacuation of YPG and PKK components to 30 kilometers from the Turkish border. To that end, it was decided to establish combined patrols in all locations within 10 kilometers of the Turkish border outside of Qamishli proper. Consequently, Turkey learned much about hybrid warfare throughout the Euphrates Shield Operation, the Olive Branch Operation, and the Peace Spring Operation.

Finally, Idlib has been one of Turkey's top targets because of its large population and potential to generate a new wave of refugees, just as it has been for the Assad administration and its supporters as the final bastion of the opposition forces. As a result, this is one of the areas that has been subject to stepped-up assaults by the Assad administration and its supporters. Particularly on May 6, 2019, several Syrian civilians were killed or wounded due to a series of strikes by the government troops and their supporters. Even though almost 1.5 million people in Idlib were displaced, they did not relocate to the areas where Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch were carried out. Despite signed agreements and ceasefires announced by the three guarantor governments to keep calm in Idlib, Iran and Russia, two of the Astana process' three guarantor states, have maintained to adopt a confrontational approach towards Idlib and surrounding territories. As a result, on February 27, 2020, the TAF's men were attacked by the air force of the Assad regime, which is supported by Russia, and 36 soldiers died as a result. This violated the memoranda of understanding. On the same day that Turkish troops were killed, the TAF launched the Spring Shield Operation to secure Turkey's observation sites and avoid worsening the humanitarian disaster. As a result, the TAF and FSA/SNA seized control of 3,394 square kilometers of land. An annex protocol to the pact on stabilization in the Idlib de-escalation zone was signed by Turkey and Russia on March 5, 2020 (Cooper & Cornut, 2018). Turkey and Russia conducted nine ground patrols along the M-4 in the following years. Although the whole province of Idlib could not be held, a large portion of the

territory became a haven through which a fresh surge of refugees, threatening Turkey and Continental Europe, was averted.

When it comes to Russia, it also employed counter-containment strategies to counterbalance U.S. dominance in the area. Furthermore, it was essential for Russia to show its position in the international arena by resisting U.S. actions. Russia understands that countering American influence is necessary to end American dominance. As such, Moscow needs to shield its longstanding ally Syria from the actions of the United States. The war on terror and containing or eradicating the terrorist threat beyond its borders is a second area of focus under the geopolitical axis. Moscow officials have been worried about the growth of terrorist groups inside the country. They worry about the radical organisations operating in Syria and make connections between them and the Muslims in Russia (Freedman, 2010). The rest of the Middle East and Central Asia might learn a lot from these worries. Times Magazine (2019) estimates that between 15 and 20 million Russians identify as Muslims.

Russia has supported Damascus from the outset of the Syrian conflict for the reasons above. This incident marks the first time the Russian Armed Forces have intervened outside the former Soviet territory. "Russian resurgence in the Middle East" (Melamedov, 2018, pp. 1-9) is another name for this phenomenon. As mentioned above, Russian engagement has factors ranging from Primakov's legacy to geopolitical goals, even if protecting an ally in the area is the primary motivation. The conflict accelerated and intensified the Russian and Syrian involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Keeping the Assad family in power has strengthened Russia's military footprint in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. In other words, the civil conflict facilitated Russia's return to the nation. War and involvement had substantially sped the process, but it would be erroneous to suppose that Russia would not have reclaimed its strongholds in Tartus and Latakia. To provide further context, previous to the conflict, naval cooperation between the two countries was revived and expanded.

Consequently, construction has continued on an extension of a modest naval supply centre in Tartus since 2009. Russia's sole naval base outside the former Soviet Union is still at Tartus. ISIS directly threatened Russia's regional interests as the Arab Spring turned into winter and the group's presence and strength grew. Threatening its military strongholds in

the Eastern Mediterranean meant losing its final bastion in Syria. Hmeymim airfield in Latakia was built thanks largely to direct military meddling, which allowed for the consolidation of prior purchases. Russia's role in Syria was strengthened two years after the invasion. In 2017, treaties were signed that would ensure Russia's continued presence in the Eastern Mediterranean by keeping the bases at Tartus and Hmeymim in Russian hands for the next 49 years, with the option to extend for a further 25 years at no additional cost (Suriye Gündemi, 2020). Moscow's anxiety about the continuation of the existing system stems partly from the fact that the accords' continued legitimacy depends on the government's continued existence. In conclusion, Russia's policy in the Syrian crisis has not only an economic and political but primarily strategic character due to Syria's relative distance from the West, the secular character of its governance, and a rich history of cooperation with Soviet Russia, which granted the latter access to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Since early 2012, Russia has provided military aid to the Syrian government in Damascus. The struggle turned in the government's favour until the former directly engaged in military action; without Moscow's support, the regime would not have survived. Several provinces have fallen under opposition control, including Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa, DeirEz-Zor, Deraa, and Quneitra (Galpin, 2012). Controlling the area surrounding Damascus, Hama, and Homs has proven particularly challenging for the capital. At the time of Moscow's initial military participation in September 2015, Damascus had around 25% of Syrian territory under its control after four years of political mayhem. With the exception of the area south of the Euphrates and the residual Idlib de-escalation zone, the Syrian government has been able to reclaim the majority of the country thanks to Russian military assistance.

After the 2015 meddling, Moscow realised that restoring territory and ensuring post-war Syrian domestic stability would need more than military aid. After the conflict, the security of the present government and the stability of postwar Syria depended critically on the success of reforming the regime's military. The Russian MoD had implemented a variety of short- and medium-term actions to bolster the regime's armed forces. Initial steps included providing high-level leadership training and establishing the 4th and 5th Army Corps (Öniş, 2019). As a result, by 2017, top Russian military specialists had made their

way into almost every SAA unit. Long-term reform of the regime forces is seen as unlikely due to a lack of institutionalisation, politicisation, sectorization, and ideology, according to the Russian Ministry of Defence (Selby et al., 2017). Moscow recognised that the Syrian security agencies, in addition to the military forces, needed significant changes. Unless internal tensions are resolved in post-war Syria, the nation risks slipping back into a vicious cycle fueled partly by the rivalry between the many existing security groups.

Russia has faced several problems since interfering in Syria, despite successfully changing the tide of events favouring Damascus. The price tag for direct military intervention was far higher than anticipated since it took years rather than months to complete. Russia's hopes for a swift triumph within three to four months (Wood & Kathman, 2015) were unrealistic when it intervened in the Syrian Civil War in September 2015. Russia's current physical presence in Syria is expected to cost the latter something in the neighborhood of \$5 billion a year. Changes in dynamics and purchases made since participation are consistent with the goal.

4. ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

4.1 DATA PREPARATION

The following series of news articles that are extracted from a number of reputable Turkish and Russian media outlets serve in the current thesis as the body of work from which the methodological dataset is meant to be collated. In order to conduct such procedure, the researcher gathers prominent news articles that are relevant to the subject of the research; i.e. the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia amid the post-Syrian crisis. Consequently, thematic analysis commences as the main analytical tool through which the dataset is meant to be analyzed.

Table 4.1: Original Dataset.

Title	Source	Year	Place of Origin
"Idlib Enjoys Relative Peace as Turkey, Russia Mostly Agree on Cease-Fire Terms"	Daily Sabah	2020	Turkey
"Syria War and Turkish-Russian Relations"	Daily Sabah	2015	Turkey
"Türkiye's Security Concerns in Syria Legitimate: Moscow"	Hürriyet Daily News	2022	Turkey
"Astana Partners Meet for Ankara-Damascus Normalization Process"	Hürriyet Daily News	2023	Turkey
"Sochi Hosts 10 th Round of Syrian Astana Peace Process"	TRT World	2018	Turkey
"The Value Added of Astana Talks on Syria"	Daily Sabah	2017	Turkey
"Türkiye in Talks with Russia, S. Korea and China for Nuclear Plant Construction"	Anadolu Agency	2023	Turkey
"Turkey, Russia Agree Ceasefire in Syria's Idlib"	The Moscow Times	2020	Russia
"Turkey, Russia Strike Deal to Remove Syrian Kurdish YPG, Launch Joint Patrols"	The Moscow Times	2019	Russia
"First S-400 Missile System Parts Land in Turkey, Russia Confirms"	The Moscow Times	2019	Russia
"Erdogan's Diplomacy with Russia Alarms West"	Russia Today	2022	Russia
"Russia, Turkey See 10 Ceasefire Breaches in Syria in Past 24 Hours"	Interfax	2017	Russia

Table 4.1: Original Dataset " Tables Continued ".

"Al-Nusra Militants Actually Holding Eastern Aleppo Residents Hostage - Lavrov"	Interfax	2016	Russia
"The New Axis: Russia, Turkey and Iran Take Over Syria"	The Moscow Times	2016	Russia

Accordingly, the researcher decided to select the Braun and Clarke (2013) format for thematic analysis; due to the popularity of such format as one of the most comprehensive analytical constructs within the qualitative research sphere. This popularity stems from the easy-to-conduct procedural stages around which the format revolves and the provision of highly accurate findings. The Braun and Clarke format also allows for a better understanding of the connotations and deep meanings of texts without the need to analyze each word/sentence on its own through analyzing themes that reflect the gist of such texts.

Thanks to the previously mentioned characteristics, the Braun and Clarke format is considered the most suitable format for the current thesis. Furthermore, this format represents an analytical procedure that is inclusive of six stages starting with the "familiarization of data" stage, in which the researcher is supposed to read all news articles in an attentive manner and go through all major and minor details that they contain. This allows for a better understanding of the entire gist of the dataset, and makes the researcher mindful of the information that he is about to analyze throughout the process.

The second stage revolves around the creation of initial codes, where the dataset is collated and categorized into separate bodies of text; in order to extract all significant meanings and connotations from each body, given the fact that all each meaning/connotation is recorded as a code that reflects the gist of each text in a compendious yet concise manner. Similarly, the third stage is about upgrading and categorizing all codes that are similar to one another, in terms of meanings and connotations they reflect, into themes. Such themes are meant to be reflective of each group of codes that share conceptual and contextual commonalities.

Although the third stage revolves around the creation of initial themes, it does not provide the finalized structure of themes though. This is because certain themes can turn out to be sub-themes or can even be excluded for irrelevance altogether, and that is where the fourth stage comes into play. Known as the "reviewing themes" step, the fourth stage allows

researchers to review initial themes and rearrange them in terms of their hierarchical characteristics and relevance to the original subject.

Then, the fifth stage is responsible for assigning labels to and providing a definition for each theme, given the fact that this is also the stage where the finalized structure and version of themes is outlined. Moreover, each theme is further elaborated on by linking it to a direct quotation from the dataset; in order to prove the reliability and validity of themes and relevance to the original raw bodies of text. By now, the researcher should be capable of reaching a position where he is mindful enough of the information that can be used to represent the study findings.

Finally, the sixth stage revolves around the creation of a report that provides an overview for all stages that have been conducted, and conclude the methodological effort that has been exerted by the researcher during the data-analysis procedure. Upon creating the final report, the researcher can then list and elaborate on the findings of the data-analysis procedure so that research objectives can be achieved.

4.2 DATA-ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Based on the aforementioned articles, the researcher is capable of using the Braun and Clarke (2013) thematic analysis format to extract the meanings and connotations from them. Moreover, it should be noted that the current methodological procedure is meant to reinforce the theoretical facet of the research within which the history and evolution of Turkish-Russian relations were both outlined in detail using literature review and document analysis. All articles have been chosen to reflect cooperation between Turkey and Russia, in addition to the extent to which bilateral relations between the two countries was outlined within the Turkish and Russian media. Therefore, thematic analysis commences as follows:

Firstly: Familiarization with the Data: Upon reading the previously listed articles, the researcher was capable of taking the following notes:

1. Some articles mention the post Syrian civil war Turkish-Russian relations in one body of text, while the rest of each one of these articles discusses other aspects that have

nothing to do with the Syrian conflict. Such bodies of texts are meant to be highlighted during the coding phase, while the rest of the articles can be discarded.

2. All articles on both sides maintain high levels of constructive journalism and professionalism regarding the manner through which they publish the news about any agreement between Turkey and Russia.
3. Political agreements regarding the management of the situation in Syria was on top of Turkey's and Russia's priorities, followed by energy-related agreements and high levels of economic and strategic rapprochement.
4. Turkey and Russia both interact and cooperate to establish productive conferences and talks that focus on the provision of cease-fire agreements, and such talks are normally praised by the media on both sides.
5. News coverage that address Turkish-Russian bilateral relations amid and after the Syrian civil war is accompanied by political analysis that is not biased per se, but rather provided from a one-sided perspective that relate to either the Turkish or the Russian side.

Secondly: Creating Initial Codes: In this phase, the selected articles are going to be organized and thoroughly reviewed in order to extract codes that reflect the meanings that they conclude:

Table 4.2: Creating Initial Codes.

Dataset (i.e., Articles)	Codes
"Idlib Enjoys Relative Peace as Turkey, Russia Mostly Agree on Cease-Fire Terms"	Cooperation is established in accordance to specific terms Truce-seeking agreement Ending people's suffering Cooperation to end war on a partial level

Table 4.2: Creating Initial Codes " Tables Continued ".

"Syria War and Turkish-Russian Relations"	Turkey's positive intentions towards Russia's interests A rich history of bilateral relations Previous cooperation overcomes any negative incidents Cooperation against terrorism must be prioritized
"Türkiye's Security Concerns in Syria Legitimate: Moscow"	Russian reliance with Turkey to overcome sanctions Economic-based cooperation Strategic agreements about resource-based deals Energy-based agreements and cooperation
"Astana Partners Meet for Ankara-Damascus Normalization Process"	Putting an end to the Syrian civil war Discussing further political cooperation Establishing long-term peace
"Sochi Hosts 10 th Round of Syrian Astana Peace Process"	Creating de-escalation zones Cooperation to support refugees Supporting displaced individuals
"The Value Added of Astana Talks on Syria"	Reinforcing previously-established agreements Lack of coordination with the US led to Turkish-Russian rapprochement
"Türkiye in Talks with Russia, S. Korea and China for Nuclear Plant Construction"	Agreements held for future economic cooperation Energy-based agreements and cooperation
"Turkey, Russia Agree Ceasefire in Syria's Idlib"	Attempting to end Syrian civilians' suffering Cooperating to eliminate further conflict Establishing cease-fire agreements Making it easier for future political cooperation to take place
"Turkey, Russia Strike Deal to Remove Syrian Kurdish YPG, Launch Joint Patrols"	Cooperation in Northeast Syria to limit the influence of the YPG Joint border-patrol campaigns Long-term political cooperation Maintaining peace in Syria
"First S-400 Missile System Parts Land in Turkey, Russia Confirms"	Militaristic cooperation through air defense weapon-deals Political and strategic rapprochement

Table 4.2: Creating Initial Codes " Tables Continued ".

"Erdogan's Diplomacy with Russia Alarms West"	Economic cooperation through reinforced trade agreements Exchanging peace talks Political and economic relations are worrisome to the West
"Russia, Turkey See 10 Ceasefire Breaches in Syria in Past 24 Hours"	Joint operations to detect ceasefire violations Security-based cooperation Maintaining peace in Syria
"Al-Nusra Militants Actually Holding Eastern Aleppo Residents Hostage - Lavrov"	Cooperating against terrorism Maintaining peace in Syria Establishing long-term stable political relations
"The New Axis: Russia, Turkey and Iran Take Over Syria"	Placing each other's interests into consideration Formulating strategic agreements to organize hegemony over Syrian territories Establishing peace talks and political agreements

Thirdly: Creating initial Themes: The current phase follows the previous step by utilizing all extracted codes and using them to generate the themes that are meant to reflect the meanings and connotations that are in turn concluded within the articles. Moreover, reoccurring themes are supposed to be outlined by collating similar codes into one category which is then represented by one theme that corresponds to the common meaning shared by these codes:

Table 4.3: Creating Initial Themes.

Common Codes	Themes
Cooperation is established in accordance to specific terms Cooperation to end war on a partial level	Conditional cooperation
Truce-seeking agreement Putting an end to the Syrian civil war Creating de-escalation zones Cooperating to eliminate further conflict Establishing cease-fire agreements Joint operations to detect ceasefire violations Security-based cooperation Formulating strategic agreements to organize hegemony over Syrian territories	Strategic cooperation
Turkey's positive intentions towards Russia's interests Previous cooperation overcomes any negative incidents Lack of coordination with the US led to Turkish-Russian rapprochement Political and economic relations are worrisome to the West Placing each other's interests into consideration A rich history of bilateral relations Russian reliance with Turkey to overcome sanctions	Willingness to compromise
Cooperation against terrorism must be prioritized Cooperating against terrorism	Overcoming insurgency
Economic-based cooperation Agreements held for future economic cooperation Economic cooperation through reinforced trade agreements	Economic cooperation
Agreements about resource-based deals Energy-based agreements and cooperation Energy-based agreements and cooperation	Natural-resource deals

Table 4.3: Creating Initial Themes " Tables Continued ".

Discussing further political cooperation Reinforcing previously-established agreements Making it easier for future political cooperation to take place Long-term political cooperation Political and strategic rapprochement Exchanging peace talks Establishing long-term stable political relations Establishing peace talks and political agreements	Political agreements
Ending people's suffering Supporting displaced individuals Cooperation to support refugees Attempting to end Syrian civilians' suffering Establishing long-term peace Maintaining peace in Syria Maintaining peace in Syria Maintaining peace in Syria	Humanitarian effort
Cooperation in Northeast Syria to limit the influence of the YPG Joint border-patrol campaigns Militaristic cooperation through air defense weapon-deals	Militaristic cooperation

Fourthly: Reviewing Themes: The current phase addresses the status of themes in terms of their levels of inclusivity. To further elaborate, some themes could be main themes that cannot be disposed of, whereas other themes might in fact turn out to be sub-themes that are included by main themes. Moreover, a few themes could be removed from the list altogether in order to eliminate any sense of redundancy that could arise among themes. For instance, all types of cooperation between the two countries were inclusive of the economic, trade-based, strategic, and militaristic facets. Therefore, these themes can be demoted to sub-themes while being all included by a main theme that could be initiated. On the other hand, it seems that both Turkey and Russia are both cooperating with one another in accordance with some limitations.

That is to say that decision-makers in each country are fully mindful of the other country's interests and have no intention in doing anything that could affect these interests in a negative manner. Furthermore, both countries also understand very well that in order for either of them to achieve any objectives they aspire to gain they must reach an understanding about allowing the other party to achieve their objectives as well.

This notion reflects Turkey's and Russia's realistic perspective towards events in Syria, and complete understanding about the needs, objectives, weaknesses, and strengths of one another. Accordingly, this perspective bounds their cooperation to a number of conditions, and dictates the manner through which they boot conduct their political agreements. Consequently, the willingness to compromise, political agreements, and conditional cooperation themes are also demoted to sub-themes while being all included by a main theme that could be initiated.

Additionally, Turkish-Russian cooperation to stabilize the political situation in Syria and facilitate the achievement of future plans for prosperity reflects their intention to cultivate peace in Syria and within the Middle East. This is why the overcoming insurgency and humanitarian effort themes are demoted to sub-themes while being all included by a main theme that could be initiated.

Fifthly: Naming and Defining Themes: This phase aims to creating the finalized version of themes that is supposed to help extract the meanings of all articles in a compendious and concise manner in order to respond to the research questions. Moreover, and according to the previously conducted phase, the main themes can be outlined as follows:

Multifaceted Relations: This main theme is inclusive of the following sub-themes:

1. Military cooperation.
2. Economic cooperation.
3. Natural-resource deals.
4. Strategic cooperation.

Neorealism: This main theme is inclusive of the following sub-themes:

1. Political agreements.
2. Willingness to compromise.
3. Conditional cooperation.

Peaceful Approach: This main theme is inclusive of the following sub-themes:

1. Humanitarian effort.
2. Overcoming insurgency.

Now that the themes have been named, it is time for the researcher to define each theme and support its relevance to the subject by linking it to a direct quotation from all respective articles:

Multifaceted Relations: This theme is defined as the extent to which Turkey and Russia engage in a series of agreements and talks in order to benefit from one another on all levels, in the sense that they establish joint-projects that aim to (a) secure their strategic situation within certain vital territories for them in Syria, (b) increase rates of trade exchange and construct promising economic deals, and (c) utilize their experience in the weapon-development domain; in order to enhance their militaristic capabilities and enrich their arsenals.

This definition corresponds to the original dataset through the following direct quotations that can serve as evidence for the validity of the theme and its relevance to the subject:

The Daily Sabah stated the following "The minister on Wednesday, the second day of the talks, called the ongoing talks in Ankara with Russian officials on conducting joint patrols and upholding the existing cease-fire in northwestern Syria "positive and constructive".

Russia Today stated the following "Following a four-hour meeting with Putin on Friday, Erdogan welcomed Russia's role in building a nuclear power plant in Turkey. The two nations aim for bilateral trade turnover of \$100 billion, and are cooperating against terrorism and toward peace in Libya and Syria".

The Moscow Times stated the following "Russia's Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation confirmed on Friday it had started delivering the S-400s to Turkey and that the deliveries would continue as per an agreed schedule, the state-run RIA news agency reported".

Neorealism: This theme is defined as the sense of practical understanding of both Turkey and Russia towards each other's interests and the willingness of each party to compromise regarding specific issues that could not be solved unless both countries formed some sort of cooperation. Moreover, this cooperation is meant to be dictated by certain conditions and terms that ensure each party that their interests are not going to be affected and that no one would commit any kind of unorthodox actions that could harm the sensible understanding that they both reached.

This definition corresponds to the original dataset through the following direct quotations that can serve as evidence for the validity of the theme and its relevance to the subject:

The Moscow Times stated the following "The new Syrian cessation of hostilities agreement – fashioned yesterday by Russia and Turkey, after two months of secret talks in Ankara with the main rebel factions – is a very significant development that may help end the war. It reflects a new stage in the conflict, where the external allies of the warring parties have decided to impose a political solution that reflects the front-line realities. It also reflects a paradigm shift in the geopolitics of the Middle East, where the newly minted Russia-Turkey-Iran axis replaces the U.S. as the indispensable power broker".

Hürriyet Daily News Stated the following "The fact that Russia is under heavy sanctions from the West, its economic and trade ties with Türkiye have become much more important because Ankara has rejected to implement these sanctions".

The Daily Sabah stated the following "Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said Thursday that meetings with the Russian military delegation continue and an agreement on the Idlib cease-fire was reached to a large extent but warned that Turkey would retaliate in the case of a violation of the cease-fire".

Peaceful Approach: This theme is defined as Turkey's and Russia's tendency to establish stability and prosperity for Syrian people who suffered the most since the eruption of the

Syrian civil war and were considered the only losing party in the equation of power between all adversarial nations that attempted to achieve their agendas by tampering with the country's political sphere. Turkey and Russia gravitated towards establishing truces and ceasefire-agreements that they monitored and patrolled to help protect Syrian right to life and freedom from fear and want as much as possible.

This definition corresponds to the original dataset through the following direct quotations that can serve as evidence for the validity of the theme and its relevance to the subject:

TRT World stated the following "Idlib is set to be a top issue during the Sochi meeting, as the Turkish delegation is expected to stress the importance of maintaining the ceasefire in the region. Separately, Russia during the meeting is expected for the first time to bring up the issue of the return of refugees and displaced persons. Russian officials have recently visited Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, which host the majority of Syria's refugees".

The Moscow Times stated the following "Putin told a joint press conference after the talks that the agreement would "serve as a good basis for ending fighting" in Idlib and for "stopping the suffering of the civilian population." "The object is to avoid the humanitarian crisis getting worse," Erdogan said, though he added that Turkey reserved the right to "retaliate with all its strength against any attack" by Damascus".

Interfax stated the following "Moscow continues working on the Syria crisis settlement together with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said".

Sixthly: Report: The data-analysis procedure that served as the methodological facet of the current thesis started with attentive reading of the events that are included within all selected articles; in order to become mindful of the approach of each article and the overall sentiment of the writers towards the events that they address.

Codes were then extracted from each article with emphasis on the segments that addressed that Turkish-Russian relation within Syria and their cooperative stance after the eruption of the Syrian civil war. Such codes represented the meanings and connotations of each article. These codes were then re-categorized in accordance with the commonalities that every grouped of codes share in order to link each group of codes to a specific theme that

represents each set of similar codes; given the fact that the word "similar" refers to the same meaning that every code in each set denotes.

Themes were then reviewed in order to find which one is a main theme and which are considered sub-themes, and it turned out that out of 9 themes the finalized form of themes only comprises 3 main themes, whereas the rest were deployed as sub-themes. The first main theme included 4 sub-themes, the second included 3, and the third included 2. Moreover, each theme was given a label and thoroughly defined by expounding upon its conceptual notion and relevance to the original dataset of articles.



5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned literature review, document analysis, and thematic analysis, it can be concluded that the Turkish-Russian relations after the Syrian civil war revolved around the reconstruction of the Syrian environment through joint projects, agreements, and understanding of each country's interests on political, strategic, and economic levels. However, such relations were not smooth all the time, and faced serious challenges that could have led to the dissolution of such agreements and mutual understanding.

To further elaborate, it can be indicated that since 2011, Turkish-Russian relations have undergone notable changes. First of all, the Syrian conflict played a significant role in shaping Turkish-Russian relations. Turkey supported opposition groups aiming to overthrow Assad, while Russia backed the Syrian regime. This resulted in tensions and occasional clashes between the two countries.

In November 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian military aircraft near the Turkish-Syrian border, alleging airspace violation. This incident strained bilateral relations, leading Russia to impose economic sanctions and suspend many ties with Turkey. Following the jet incident, both countries took steps towards reconciliation. Turkey expressed regret and condolences, and Russia gradually lifted economic sanctions. They started cooperating in Syria to reduce tensions and seek a political resolution.

Nevertheless, Turkey and Russia have deepened their energy ties through significant projects like the TurkStream gas pipeline and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant. These endeavors have enhanced energy cooperation and economic interdependence. Turkish-Russian economic relations have also rebounded since the crisis, with notable increases in trade volume and tourism numbers. Russia has become a major source of tourists for Turkey, contributing to its tourism industry.

Moreover, Turkey and Russia have collaborated on regional issues such as the Astana peace process for Syria, acting as guarantors alongside Iran for ceasefires and political negotiations. They have also coordinated efforts on matters concerning Libya and the South Caucasus. Although challenges and differences persist, Turkish-Russian relations

have experienced a combination of tensions and cooperation since 2011. Both countries recognize the importance of maintaining a functional relationship.

The Turkish-Russian relationship has been significantly influenced by the Syrian conflict. Initially, both countries supported opposing sides in the conflict, leading to tensions and occasional clashes. However, they have recognized the necessity of cooperation to address the situation and find a political resolution. Economic ties have also grown in importance between Turkey and Russia. They have actively pursued economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector, through projects like the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant.

Additionally, trade volume and tourism have played a role in strengthening their economic interdependence. Furthermore, Turkey and Russia have collaborated on several regional initiatives, including the Astana peace process for Syria. In this process, along with Iran, they have acted as guarantors for ceasefires and engaged in political negotiations. To summarize, the Syrian conflict has had a profound impact on Turkish-Russian relations, leading to recognition of the need for cooperation. Economic ties, regional initiatives, and shared responsibilities in promoting peace have all contributed to shaping their relationship.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Turkish-Russian relationship has been significantly influenced by the Syrian civil war. At first, Turkey and Russia supported opposing sides, leading to tensions and occasional clashes. However, both countries later acknowledged the necessity of cooperation to handle the situation and find a political resolution. The crisis in Syria prompted Turkey and Russia to engage in diplomatic initiatives and negotiations. They collaborated on regional efforts, including the Astana peace process alongside Iran, to facilitate ceasefire agreements and political discussions. This cooperation has established a framework for dialogue among the conflicting parties. Moreover, the Syrian conflict underscored the importance of economic ties between Turkey and Russia. Both nations have pursued economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector.

Economic-based projects have strengthened their economic interdependence. Reconciliation efforts have also played a role in improving Turkish-Russian relations. Following the 2015 incident of a Russian jet being downed by Turkey, both countries

made efforts to mend their relationship. Expressions of regret, condolences, and the lifting of economic sanctions by Russia have contributed to the restoration of ties.

It should be noted also that while the Syrian civil war initially strained Turkish-Russian relations, it also provided an opportunity for both countries to recognize their shared interests and engage in collaborative efforts. The conflict has resulted in a more nuanced and multifaceted relationship between Turkey and Russia, characterized by cooperation and mutual understanding.

These findings can be expounded upon using Neorealism. In other words, Turkey understands that Russia is interested in maintaining the authority of the Assad regime given the fact that Syria under Assad represents one of the biggest strategic allies to Russia in the Middle East, and giving it up that easily to the West could diminish Russia's influence in the region and harm its national security. Turkey on the other hand, attempted to topple the Assad regime, but since Russia was there to Assad's rescue, Turkey quickly realized that it could not clash with a prominent partner and waste probable economic agreements with a prominent ally like Russia. Turkey had to compromise and work with Russia to keep and normalize relations with Assad's Syria.

On the other hand, Russia also realized that a conflict with Turkey in Syria would not be helpful to the Russian economy, nor would it be decisive since Turkey is a strong nation, on both economic and militaristic levels, after all, not to mention the fact that alienating Turkey would make it gravitate more towards the West, something that Russia does not like to see. Eventually, Russia had to think realistically and weight its options about maintaining positive relations with Turkey. For instance, when Russia was facing sanctions from the West upon the Ukrainian crisis in 2014-2015, Turkey did not take part in such sanctions and was considered an economic savior for Russia.

So it becomes evidently clear that Turkish-Russian relations are constructed, first and foremost, upon mutual understanding and placing each other's interests in consideration, while thinking in a practical manner about the aspects that could be compromised and the elements that could not be negotiated. Turkey for example was eager to finalize the S-400 deal and establish the Nuclear Plant deal in Akkuyu, whereas Russia was determined to win Turkey over and prevent it from becoming more cooperative with the West, and utilize

its economic influence in the world to help enhance Russia's national economy. Thus, both countries decided to overlook any incidents that led to the downing or killing of fighter jets or soldiers in Syria and focus on the economic and strategic level of cooperation.

Moving forward, the opportunities that await the Turkish-Russian relations in the future can be summarized into the following aspect, in light of the situation after the eruption of the Syrian civil war:

1. **Economic Collaboration:** The conflict in Syria has underscored the significance of economic ties between Turkey and Russia. Both countries have actively pursued economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector. Projects like the TurkStream gas pipeline and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant have strengthened their economic interdependence. By expanding collaborations and investments across various sectors, their economic relationship can be further fortified.
2. **Tourism and Cultural Exchanges:** The Turkish-Russian relationship can benefit from an increase in tourism and cultural exchanges. Historically, both countries have attracted tourists from one another, and efforts to promote tourism can further enhance connections between their people. Encouraging cultural exchanges, educational programs, and tourism promotion can foster better mutual understanding and strengthen bilateral ties.
3. **Diplomatic and Political Engagement:** The Syrian conflict has necessitated extensive diplomatic engagement between Turkey and Russia. This experience can serve as a foundation for continued collaboration in addressing regional issues, such as the situation in Syria, as well as in broader international forums. Sustaining open channels of communication and dialogue can facilitate cooperation on various political fronts.
4. **Trade and Investment:** The Syrian conflict has created prospects for increased trade and investment between Turkey and Russia. As the situation stabilizes, there is potential for expanding bilateral trade, exploring new markets, and fostering business partnerships. Diversifying their trade relations beyond energy and embracing investment opportunities in different sectors can be mutually beneficial.

5. **Regional Stability and Conflict Resolution:** The cooperation between Turkey and Russia in managing the Syrian conflict can serve as a foundation for enhanced collaboration in regional stability and conflict resolution efforts. Their joint initiatives, such as the Astana peace process, have demonstrated the potential for working together to address regional challenges and promote peace throughout the broader Middle East region.

However, there are still some hurdles and obstacles that threaten the utilization of such opportunities by both countries, the most prominent of which can be indicated as follows:

Turkey and Russia possess distinct interests and priorities in the region, which may result in tensions and disagreements. Their differing approaches to conflicts like Syria and Libya can strain their relationship and hinder cooperation on regional matters.

1. Turkey and Russia have historically competed for influence and power in the region, leading to geopolitical competition. This rivalry can take various forms, including conflicting interests in the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and the Eastern Mediterranean. These geopolitical tensions can complicate their relationship and impede cooperation.
2. Despite some collaboration during the Syrian conflict, Turkey and Russia hold contrasting views on certain aspects, such as the role of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and the future of the country. Disagreements regarding Syria can strain their relationship and hinder progress in other areas.
3. Security concerns, including the presence of armed groups in Syria and the potential for terrorist activities, can impact the Turkish-Russian relationship. Their differing approaches to counterterrorism and varying perceptions of security threats can pose challenges and strain cooperation.
4. Historical and cultural differences between Turkey and Russia occasionally contribute to tensions and misunderstandings. These disparities can affect various aspects of their relationship, including public opinion, societal attitudes, and cultural exchanges.

5. Both Turkey and Russia have relationships with other countries and alliances that can influence their bilateral relations. External pressures, such as those from NATO or other regional powers, can complicate their relationship and limit the extent of cooperation.



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