

BAKU DIALOGUES

POLICY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SILK ROAD REGION

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Turkey's Changing Posture on Russia and America

Implications for the Silk Road Region

Hasan Ünal

As of this writing, tensions between Russia and Ukraine appeared to continue unabated, despite the Putin-Biden online meeting and the exchange of several messages between Washington and Moscow aimed at reducing them. The crisis has kept almost everyone guessing as to where all this is heading: will they subside or spiral out of control? Will Russia invade Ukraine? If it does, how will America and its allies respond?

As things stand at present, it sure seems as though Russia and the U.S. and its allies have gridlocked themselves into a crisis without any sensible way out. The former was emboldened by the feckless handling of the crisis by the Biden Administration such that Moscow now wants to dictate terms to

America and NATO that amount to something like this: “give us proper, preferably written assurances that Ukraine and Georgia will not be admitted to NATO.” Team Biden, which has inadvisably goaded Ukraine against Russia for a second time in less than a year with its much-hyped ‘America is back’ slogan cannot simply comply with the request. At the same time, America cannot stand up to Russia militarily in that part of the world. Moreover, neither the United States nor its NATO allies that have considerable military clout are prepared to make a promise to Ukraine regarding admission to NATO. Indeed, just as this edition of Baku Dialogues was going to press, the hectic diplomacy between NATO and Russia on the one hand and the U.S. and Russia on the other, climaxing in the latest meetings of

Hasan Ünal is Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations of Maltepe University. The views expressed in this essay are his own.

11-12 January 2022, broke up with no agreement. This has given rise to further concern that the ongoing conflict is going to perpetuate.

From Turkey's perspective, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has turned insoluble—akin in not unimportant ways to the Turkish-Greek dispute, with its clusters of psychologically combustible elements freely circulating across the board. Should Russia invade Ukraine, it would presumably trigger a harsh package of sanctions by both the EU and the U.S.; this would likely hurt Moscow considerably, albeit hardly enough to budge it from staying the course. Should the U.S. and NATO simply give in to Russia's ultimatum, then this would amount to a complete surrender of the Western powers—particularly after the disastrous U.S. debacle in Afghanistan. At the same time, the likelihood that Russia will step back entirely from its position—that, in other words, it will calmly accept the prospect of the admission of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO—is close to zero. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the con-

flict between Russia and Ukraine on the one hand, and the U.S.-led West and Russia on the other, will perpetuate.

Discernable Nuance on Russia

What posture, then, should Turkey take up? A cursory look at what Ankara seems to be doing and saying with regard to the rising tension between its two northern neighbors indicates a noticeable Turkish reticence.

We can recall that back in 2014, Ankara was quick to condemn the Russian takeover of Crimea—a position Turkey persisted in maintaining until quite recently. For instance, it did not allow any direct civilian flights from Turkey to Crimea, nor did it permit Turkish educational institutions to cultivate ties with their counterparts there and engage in exchanges, joint programs, training, and the like. In addition, the Turkish Foreign Ministry had been quite consistent

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in seizing upon any opportunity to reiterate that Ankara regarded Crimea as part of Ukraine. Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu even attended a meeting of something called the Crimea Platform, organized by Ukraine to raise awareness about the Russian takeover of that precious peninsula. At this meeting, he found himself quite unusually sitting together with the representative of the Southern Cyprus Greek Administration, together with other Western officials—something Turkish diplomats would normally avoid. More importantly, the Turkish Foreign Ministry even went so far as to declare the Duma elections in Crimea as being null and void as late as September 2021. Also, during the first round of the latest Russia-Ukraine standoff, which took place in April 2021, Turkey's attitude was certainly more pro-Ukraine than in the latest phase of the conflict.

International news agencies have reported that Ankara has been lately quite careful with its wording in terms of its handling of the crisis. This does not mean, however, that Turkey's official position has changed formally: it still opposes Russia's takeover of Crimea—that is to say, it does not recognize Moscow's takeover. But a discernable nuance seems to be arising of late: Ankara now offers medi-

ation to the two capitals instead of opposing Russia head-on diplomatically. And after some initial hesitation, the Kremlin welcomed Ankara's role of mediation, saying that Moscow would appreciate the use of Ankara's clout with Kyiv—although, of course, Russia knows that there is very little Turkey can do in terms of real mediation. But Ankara's new posture is more about making its position clear to Moscow rather than demonstrating a concrete ability to actually get anything done.

This discernable nuance in Ankara's stance does not seem to have gone unnoticed by Moscow. For instance, in an early December 2021 interview with ANT1, a Greek television channel, the Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov lashed out at Athens' policy of turning itself into an American garrison to take on Russia in the Black Sea, stating that the Greek posture could not be justified on the grounds that it must act thusly on account of its NATO membership. Having dismissed altogether such Greek arguments, Peskov then went a step or two further. He explicitly contrasted the Greek posture with that of Turkey. He underlined that the latter is also a NATO member and, in fact, is a NATO member with greater and more sophisticated military capabilities, and yet it pursues

a national policy more in line with its interests. He even made a direct ratings comparison concerning the two countries' respective policies towards Moscow. According to him, Greece gets a six out of ten while Turkey gets a seven out of ten. It is certainly important to mention that this interview was broadcast on the very day that Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited Putin in Sochi, where, it seems, he did not receive the warmest reception possible.

Thus, one can plausibly conclude that all this amounts to an indication of some changes in Turkish-Russian relations. Close scrutiny suggests that the turning point is traceable back to a one-on-one meeting between presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in late September 2021 in Sochi, at which not even their closest aides were present. Since then, some noticeable improvement in Ankara-Moscow relations has been seen. For instance, tensions have subsided in Syria's Idlib province, where Turkey and Russia are pitted against each other, although the di-

vergent approaches by the two countries to the Syrian crisis are still afloat. And Turkey's rhetoric regarding Russia has undergone some changes, as Ankara seems to have softened the sonority of its stance, if not exactly its substance.

American Turkophobia

While Ankara's relations with Russia have been trending upwards, its relations with the West, and the United States in particular, seem to be going through some tough times. It is safe to say that Turkey and Washington do not seem to see eye to eye on any matter of importance to Ankara since the end of the Cold War. In fact, the smoldering tension between the two capitals has come into the open sharply under the Biden Administration, who is regarded, rightly, as an incorrigible Turkophobe.

The latest improvement in Turkish-Russian relations can be traced back to a one-on-one meeting between Putin and Erdoğan in late September 2021 in Sochi, at which not even their closest aides were present.

The American policy of carving out a Kurdistan in the Middle East has been a constant irritant to Turkey since the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Washington's open military support for the PYD—a

Syrian offshoot of the PKK—under the pretext of fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has taken anti-American feelings to new heights across the country, where anti-Americanism still regularly polls between 85 to 95 percent. It has also brought relations between the two capitals almost to the brink of collapse on more than one occasion. Ankara perceives Washington's moves as nothing other than marks of hostility towards Turkey, for in a multipolar world order, an otherwise valuable ally like Turkey—with its large and effective armed forces, second only to the U.S. in NATO that are equipped with sophisticated capabilities of its own production—could be cast aside by Washington in favor of a terrorist organization.

The Kurdish issue is not the only serious bone of contention between Ankara and Washington. Senior members of Team Biden began to express its opposition to a two-state solution in Cyprus way before it took over the White House from the Trump Administration; since taking office, the incumbent president has made it clear that the U.S. would not

condone any such solution. But this flies in the face of facts and realities: it is now conveniently forgotten that Erdoğan came to power in 2002 with a vow to resolve the Cyprus conflict and that he even backed the 2004 pro-EU one-state solution known colloquially as the Annan

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Plan—a plan that was rejected by the island's Greek community. This rejection caused Turkey to adopt a position that the only sensible proposal for the solution of the Cyprus question must involve the recognition of two Cypriot states—two states that have for all practical purposes existed on the divided Mediterranean island since the mid-1960s, and officially existed there since 1974.

In addition to the fact that the Greeks in Cyprus have consistently rejected all the peace plans proposed by the international community throughout the duration of the conflict, there is also the charge of double standards: in all other similar postcolonial disputes, the West has generally agreed, in principle, to a two-state solution. The primary example is, of course, Palestine. In other words, the U.S. policy of championing the unification of the island without exerting

much pressure on Greece and the Greek Cypriots is both futile and unrealistic. Given the reality of a multipolar world order, such a one-sided American position is totally unacceptable for Turkey. This is the context in which the Biden Administration's efforts to prop up Greece—ostensibly against Russia in the Black Sea—is viewed. The bottom line is that this has given further cause for concern in Ankara that the United States is, in actual fact, bolstering Greece to the detriment of Turkey.

Biden's irresponsible use of the term "genocide" to describe the events that took place in a crumbling wartime Ottoman Empire in 1915 has also contributed to anti-Americanism across Turkey. Indeed, he employed the taboo term in his 24 April 2021 statement that every American president had studiously and prudently avoided using up to that point. Why Biden rushed to include this incendiary word in the annual presidential statement about the Armenian question remains an enigma: it did not go unnoticed that this statement came in the wake of both Azerbaijan's historic victory in the Second Karabakh War and the subsequent proposals to Yerevan by Erdoğan and his Azerbaijani colleague, President İlham Aliyev, to establish a regional cooperation platform that

would put an end to Armenia's self-imposed isolation. The use of this term simply served no constructive geopolitical purpose.

Indeed, as the latest flurry of diplomatic meetings in the region demonstrated, Biden's attitude does not promote American interests in that part of the world; on the contrary, it has turned Washington into a second fiddle power in the South Caucasus, left with little leverage to influence events. A few examples will suffice. First, Azerbaijan and Armenia have taken sensible steps to normalize their relations. Second, Turkey and Armenia have appointed special envoys entrusted with the task of looking into ways to establish formal diplomatic ties. Third, Turkey has indicated on multiple occasions a willingness to open its border with Armenia for trade and transportation, with Armenia responding positively. All of this happened without any active American involvement or even serious encouragement.

In broader terms, there is now a much greater prospect for peace and reconciliation in the South Caucasus in general and between Ankara and Yerevan in particular. And where is Team Biden? Standing far behind Turkey and Russia, which seem to be coordinating all these efforts on their own.

The Montreux Dispute

Turkey and the United States are also sharply divided over the interpretation of the Montreux Convention (1936), which regulates civilian and military use of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits. Montreux was a revision (in Ankara's favor) of the terms of those parts of the Lausanne Treaty (1923) dealing with these waterways, which had limited Turkey's sovereignty by imposing a regime of demilitarization over what was called the Straits Region (i.e., the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and a narrow strip of land on both shores of the Marmara Sea). Montreux, in other words, fully integrated the Straits Region into Turkey's sovereign constitutional order and gave Ankara indisputable rights over the region in terms of militarization and beyond. This convention offers freighters unhindered passage through the area whilst restricting the movements of warships belonging to non-Black Sea riparian states—concretely, it provided for an upper limit of three weeks to more than three ships belonging to states with no outlets to the Black Sea to wander in its waters.

Turkey considers the Montreux Convention to be vital for ensuring both the stability of the Straits and the security of the Black Sea,

which is why it has always strictly upheld the document's provisions despite constant rumblings from Washington. Over the past few decades, the United States has frequently remonstrated Turkey on this matter. Ankara has consistently refrained from giving its consent to American demands on the grounds that these would violate the terms of the Montreux Convention, which has caused Washington commentators to vent in anger against their NATO ally.

By way of illustration, we can refer to reports from the period of tense negotiations between Ankara and Washington on the eve of the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003. As is known, Washington had expected to use Turkish territory to open a northern front against Saddam Hussein's government and had apparently asked Ankara for the use of the port of Trabzon, located on the Black Sea coast, in order to be able to provide logistical support for its invasion. This, of course, would have violated the Montreux Convention in a major way, and so Ankara turned down the request.

A few years later, Washington asked Ankara to permit U.S. naval vessels to pass through the Bosphorus into the Black Sea to engage in a show of force against Russia during the August 2008 Russo-Georgian

war; but again, Ankara strictly abided by the Montreux regulations and declined the American request.

Since the Russian takeover of Crimea in 2014, this issue has become a renewed focus of debate. High-ranking American civilian and military officials sometimes openly refer to the Black Sea as a 'Black Hole' whilst their Turkish counterparts dismiss the American remonstrations on the sensible grounds that violating the Montreux Convention would not advance peace and security in the region.

In policy terms, what all this boils down to is that the United States wants Turkey either to dump the Montreux Convention altogether or to turn a blind eye to blatant American violations of the same treaty. Either way, this would effectually amount to a nullification of the historic agreement.

Turkey, on the other hand, having a diametrically opposite position, expects its ally to recognize that Turkey views the Montreux Convention dearly and will not allow it to be simply dismissed or

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discarded. Indeed, from Ankara's perspective, the strict application of the provisions of the Montreux Convention has been a main pillar of ensuring peace and security from the

Cold War onwards. Moreover, the Turkish position has been that the acceptance of two additional Black Sea riparian states into NATO (Bulgaria and Romania) ought to make it easier, not harder, to handle security questions in that part of the world.

All in all, what divides Turkey and the United States on this issue is that while America wishes to use the Black Sea without almost any hindrance to confront Russia head-on militarily as and when it wishes, Turkey seems to regard the additional militarization of the Black Sea, which would amount to an escalation of the American conflict with Russia, as provocative—something Ankara always studiously has avoided enabling.

Prospects

It seems unlikely that all the outstanding issues keeping Ankara and Washington apart will be resolved once Team Biden gives

way to the next U.S. administration—whether in January 2025 or January 2029. We have the experience of the Trump period as a reference point, when tensions between the two countries eased somewhat because Trump in many ways defied the U.S. security establishment’s policies concerning the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. Still, the U.S. establishment managed to get around Trump often enough, so bilateral tension did not disappear; this in turn made it easier for Team Biden to ratchet everything back up when it took over the reins of power in January 2021.

It would, therefore, be an uphill task to try predicting whether a post-Biden America would be capable of resetting relations with Turkey, notwithstanding the realities of a multipolar world order. But the odds don’t appear to be good.

On the other hand, we have witnessed an unprecedented improvement in bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey. Despite certain disagreements over Syria and occasionally over Libya, Erdoğan and Putin have managed to figure out a way to work together

well enough (and Turkey has managed to do so while remaining a reliable NATO member). Almost forgotten are the days when the Turkish Air Force shot down a Russian fighter jet because it violated Turkish airspace for some 10 to 20 seconds. Of much greater importance in understanding the course of the Ankara-Moscow relationship is the fact that—as the Turkish leadership has pointed out several times—the rapprochement between Russia and Turkey was key to Azerbaijan’s successful war against Armenia for the liberation of its occupied territories in the 2020 Second Karabakh War.

Historically speaking, Turkish-Russian friendship has as long a track record as Turkish-Russian enmity. It is true that Tsarist Russia was a constant threat to the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire: the former helped to push the latter out of the north of the Black Sea, the Crimean Peninsula, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. Paradoxically, however, it was Bolshevik Russia that offered enormous military, political, and diplomatic support to the Turkish War of Independence from 1919 to 1922 and beyond. Ankara and Moscow

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placed their bilateral relations on solid ground with the signing of the Friendship and Cooperation Agreement (1925). This remained the status quo until Stalin made notorious demands on Turkey at the end of World War II—an untoward action that pushed Turkey to search for security in a U.S.-led Western alliance.

The first ten years of Turkey’s NATO membership marked increased tension in Ankara-Moscow relations although Stalin, who had wrecked the historic rapprochement, died only a year after Turkey’s admission to the Western alliance. But the infamous letter U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson wrote to Turkish Prime Minister Ismet İnönü in June 1964, which gave a stark warning to Turkey against military action in Cyprus to protect the Cypriot Turks from slaughter at the hands of the Greek Cypriot forces, caused an upheaval in Ankara. The American epistle turned almost everything upside down between the two NATO allies, and Turkey immediately began to revise its policy towards the Soviet Union. Moscow too judged that warmer relations were in its interest. Thus, the two countries forged a qualitatively stronger relationship by which Turkey, albeit remaining in NATO, managed to receive quite a considerable

amount of commercial, economic, and financial assistance and support from the Soviet Union for its industrialization drive—something the U.S. always somehow chose not to provide.

The end of the Cold War saw an intensification of these trade and economic relations. This soon expanded into cooperation on political and even military matters. For instance, Moscow was helpful during the 2016 attempted military coup organized by members of Fethullah Gülen’s terrorist group, which is suspected of having close ties with U.S. security and intelligence services. Russia apparently notified the Turkish government of what might be going on just prior to its onset; Moscow also condemned the coup attempt and the plotters immediately after they got into action, whereas it took the Obama Administration quite a few hours to make a statement expressing its support for the elected government of Turkey. It was not, therefore, for nothing that Ankara-Moscow relations flourished in an unprecedented manner after this attempted coup, assuming a military-strategic dimension.

The two countries, together with Iran, set up what they called the Astana Platform to bring peace to Syria, while Ankara purchased the

sophisticated S-400 air defense systems from Moscow. Though there remained disagreements between Ankara and Moscow over Syria and Libya, Erdoğan and Putin learned to smoothly iron them out, in one way or the other. As things now stand, it appears that Turkey feels closer to a Putin-led Russia than to a Biden-led United States.

It is possible that Ankara now seeks a new deal with Moscow over all the issues that keep them apart. It is more likely than not that the Russian side will be interested. For instance, there is no good reason why Erdoğan and Putin should not strike a deal, after some haggling, over the Cyprus question and the war in Syria. Russia's Cyprus policy, which ostensibly advocates for the unification of the island, hardly serves Moscow's real interest, for in such an eventuality the whole island would become EU territory and, by implication, a full-on NATO beachhead. And it is difficult to see what advantage, if any, Russia would gain out of the territorial aggrandizement of the EU and NATO, given its stance on Ukraine and Georgia and so on. After all, Cyprus is only about one hundred kilometers away

from Russia's precious naval and air bases in Syria.

Whereas a change in Russia's Cyprus policy in favor of a two-state solution would incur no serious risk for Moscow, it would cement Turkey-Russia friendship, and perhaps even lead to a deal on Syria between the two countries. Indeed, just as Russia's Cyprus policy needs revising, so does Turkey's adventurous Syrian policy: truth be told, the latter does not serve any genuinely attainable Turkish purpose. Three examples can be provided. First, Turkish forces have gotten totally bogged down on the ground in the neighboring country in the past few years. Second, the PYD has consolidated its position in northeast Syria in the same period, thanks to American wherewithal. Lastly, Turkey's persistent and failed effort to unseat Bashar Al-Assad has also indirectly helped the PYD as well as its main sponsor.

Should Turkey normalize its relations with Damascus through Russian mediation, it would likely make important gains: it could sign a memorandum with Syria over the return of Syrian refugees—which apparently number around four

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million—whose continued presence in Turkey at a time when the country is grappling with a deteriorating financial crisis has become totally untenable in the eyes of the Turkish people.

There is no reason why Turkey could not renew the 1998 Adana Memorandum with Syria, which at the time brought tensions between Ankara and Damascus to an abrupt end, normalized relations, and even stipulated joint action against the PKK. As part of a new deal with Syria, Turkey could also get Damascus to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC); in exchange, Turkey could transfer all the Syrian territory currently under its control back to the Assad government. Russia, in turn, could allow direct flights to TRNC and open a trade office there, which would function as many foreign legations do in, say, Taiwan (this is not to imply that Taiwan and TRNC are similar in other respects). In return, Turkey would allow direct flights to Crimea and permit various Turkish institutions, including universities, to reestablish ties with their counterparts there directly—of course without any mention of recognition of the Russian takeover.

But this last would hardly be a dealbreaker, for indications are

that Moscow does not seek any official recognition by a third party over the status of Crimea since Russia considers the territory an integral part of its sovereign territory and has made it very clear that the issue is an entirely internal matter.

From the Turkish perspective, Moscow would play a valuable part in all such arrangements: the deal the two countries could strike would be a clear win-win. There is also more to such a deal than meets the eye. Ankara's close ties with Moscow do seem to also contribute positively to the foreign policy postures of Central Asia's Turkic states as well as to Azerbaijan's relations with Russia. In broader terms, closer ties between Turkey and Russia always impact positively on members of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), particularly on those that came out of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is remarkable that when Turkey shot down the Russian fighter in 2016, it was Kazakhstan and its founding leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who took the lead in bringing the two countries together. With Russia seeking observer status in the OTS, Ankara may have to think twice in confronting Russia politically, diplomatically, and otherwise.

All this does not mean, however, that Turkey is putting all its eggs into one basket and that it does not attach much importance to Ukraine—to come back to the issue with which we began this essay. If anything, it has cultivated good ties with Ukraine since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and bilateral trade and economic relations have developed accordingly. There is also some additional potential for military cooperation between Ankara and Kyiv, by which Turkey seeks to purchase certain engines for its defense productions, including its tanks, because Ukraine has one of the largest engine production facilities in the former Soviet Union. And Ukraine has recently purchased from Turkey some of its latest high-tech drones, which have performed rather well in Syria, Libya, and, particularly, in the Second Karabakh War.

Both politically and diplomatically, Ankara has made its position quite clear on the issue of the Russian takeover of Crimea. Turkey's official position remains unchanged: Crimea is a part of Ukraine. It is likely that Ankara will maintain this position, particularly within the context of NATO, although it might further tone down its expression of opposition to the Russian annexation.

No More Tightrope Acrobatics?

It would be useful to recapitulate the main threads of this essay. What we have maintained throughout is that Turkey's attitude towards the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv over Crimea and other parts of Ukraine has developed over the years. Whereas Ankara had been more vociferous in its opposition to Russia's 2014 political and military moves in Ukraine, there is a discernable change in its posture lately, manifested by various forms of reticence. When Russia took over Crimea, Turkey strongly denounced Moscow's actions and persisted in its attitude until recently: at the time, Ankara was sparing no efforts in its bid to unseat the Assad government while Moscow backed it in all respects. Turkey was then still trying to coordinate its Syria policy with Washington, though there soon emerged some differences between the two NATO allies in their respective approaches to the crisis, and Moscow's strong backing of Damascus was a constant source of concern and frustration to Ankara.

Leaving aside the debate over whether its involvement in the war in Syria on such a large scale actually served Turkish national inter-

ests—after all, Ankara tried to overthrow a government in Damascus that had been on the best possible terms with Turkey for more than a decade—Turkey had every reason to oppose Russia in both Syria and Ukraine. Indeed, the two countries were on a rapid collision course: the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by the Turkish Air Force really did almost bring the two countries to the brink of war. Fortunately, such a war was avoided, perhaps thanks more to the extreme caution and prudence exercised by the Kremlin. The ensuing crisis persisted for about seven months and gradually both sides became convinced they should bury the proverbial hatchet and come to their senses. And so they did.

No sooner had the two capitals initiated serious efforts to mend their bilateral relations, an attempted coup occurred in Turkey, which gave further impetus to the genuine rapprochement already taking place between Ankara and Moscow. Still, this did not result in immediate and sweeping changes to Turkey's policy in areas of importance to Russia—neither on Syria nor particularly over Crimea, because the Ankara-Washington axis was still being managed properly enough under Trump, despite outstanding disagreements. Hence, Turkey's

tightrope acrobatics went on for some years: keeping Russia on board on a range of issues from Syria and Karabakh through to the purchase of S-400 air defense systems while at the same time cultivating good economic and even defense industry cooperation with Ukraine.

But all this gradually reached a point whereby Turkey had to make some changes in its foreign policy. Some dormant wedge issues between Ankara and Washington came into the open with the arrival of Team Biden (e.g., the Armenian question), but the glass simply could not take any more drops of water on other critical issues like the U.S. project for the establishment of some sort of Kurdistan that threatens the territorial integrity of Middle Eastern countries, including Turkey, and serious disagreement over the Cyprus question.

Meanwhile, Ankara and Moscow came closer to each other. The Erdoğan-Putin tête-à-tête in late September 2021 has reduced tensions between the two countries over Syria. Speculation is growing that two leaders may have even struck a deal covering all outstanding issues: Cyprus, Syria, cooperation in the South Caucasus and even Central Asia, and closer military cooperation. The less am-

bitious version of this chatter is that they sounded each other out in a frank and forthright manner over all these issues, each presenting his respective redlines, without necessarily having reached mutually acceptable accommodations or an overall agreement—but with the expectation that some sort of understanding will soon be forthcoming.

When coupled with the hesitation of the West in general and the United States in particular to leap to the defense of Ukraine against Russia, Turkey seems to have implicitly adopted a new policy that can be summarized with the following formulation, made famous not so long ago by the legendary James Baker: “we have no dog in the fight.” ^{BD}

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