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# The Impact of Global Drivers on the Future of EU-Turkey Security Relations

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## Abstract

This paper examines whether global security dynamics will act as either centripetal forces to the Turkey-EU relations on threat perceptions and security concerns, keeping the relationship aligned, or whether they will act as centrifugal forces pushing Turkey and the EU further apart on security. More precisely, the paper surveys the roles of (i) the US and NATO, (ii) Russia, and (iii) global security shifts as well as new (in-)security trends in this context. The paper argues that these three groups of global security dynamics will push Turkey-EU relations in a more conflictual direction, if cooperation—often more out of necessity than want—will continue to keep the relationship away from the brink, resulting in a form of conflictual cooperation. The paper concludes with a few initial recommendations.

## Özet

*Bu makalede, bir yandan küresel güvenlik dinamiklerinin, tehdit algıları ve güvenlik kaygıları üzerinden Türkiye-AB ilişkilerine merkezci güçler olarak etki edip etmeyeceği ve bu şekilde ilişkiyi uyumlu hale getirip getirmediği inceleniyor. Diğer yandan aynı dinamiklerin Türkiye ve AB'nin güvenlik konusunda işbirliğini daha da zorlaştıran merkezkaç güçler olarak hareket edip etmeyeceği irdeleniyor. Daha netleştirirsek, bu belge (i) ABD ve NATO, (ii) Rusya ve (iii) küresel güvenlik değişimlerinin yanı sıra yeni güven(siz)lik eğilimlerinin de bu bağlamdaki rollerini araştırıyor. Çalışmada, bu üç küresel güvenlik dinamiği grubunun Türkiye-AB ilişkilerini daha ihtilafli bir doğrultuda zorlayacağı öngörülüyor. Gene de istekten çok ihtiyaca dayalı bir işbirliğinin ilişkiyi uçurum kenarında tutmaya devam edeceği ve bunun sonucunda ihtilafli bir işbirliği modelinin oluşacağını öngörüyor. Makale birkaç öneriyle sonuçlanmaktadır.*



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## 1. Introduction and analytical framework<sup>1</sup>

“To the Brink – and Back?” This is the title of the February 2018 Munich Security Conference (MSC) Report (Munich Security Conference, 2018). Having voiced concerns about rising uncertainty and the waning international liberal order in all three of the previous iterations of the yearly MSC Report (Munich Security Conference 2015, 2016, 2017), these alleged dire straits of world affairs have allegedly brought the world closer to the brink of significant conflict in 2017.

In his 17 February address to the MSC, Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yıldırım opened with an outline of Turkey’s contributions to settling the Syrian war, in particular bearing a three and a half million refugee burden and engaging actively in both Syria and Turkey to defeat Daesh (aka IS, ISIL, ISIS). As such, he noted, Turkey helps protect the southern borders of NATO, and ensure the security of Europe; keeping refugees in the region and fighting Europe’s top terror threat, ISIS (Yıldırım, 2018). Yıldırım then went on to praise the trilateral Turkey-Iran-Russia Astana and Sochi processes as key to moving forward on a ceasefire, de-escalation and ultimately a political solution with democracy and human rights for Syria. But the war has not come an end, according to Yıldırım, because the US has been working with another terrorist group in Syria, the Kurdish PKK affiliate, the Syrian Kurdish YPG. Yıldırım then went on to mention another terrorist group, the Gülenist FETÖ organization, that was not only behind the 15 July 2016 coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP government, but also enjoyed active support in both the US and Europe. It is important, Yıldırım concluded, that we join in on the fight against all terrorist groups and do not prejudice ourselves against Muslim terrorist groups (Ibid.).

The ensuing questions were shrill. How exactly were they to understand Erdoğan’s poorly veiled threat of an “Ottoman slap” against US soldiers embedded with the YPG in Manbij? Did Turkey’s incursion into Afrin obey international law? And how was he in a position to talk about the development of democracy and human rights in Syria when the very same values were under severe pressure in Turkey? The last question got a significant applause from the audience.

Not quite at the brink yet, the question for this paper is whether global security dynamics will mesh with local and regional developments to pry Turkish and European threat perceptions and security interests further apart pushing the two parties towards the brink, or if they will facilitate further cooperation, keeping the relationship at bay. This is a big question. Cutting it down to size, the paper will address and assess three still large sub-questions in this field:

1. How are developments in security relations between Turkey, on the one side, and the US and NATO, on the other, likely to impact Turkey-EU security relations in the FEUTURE 2023 timeframe?

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: This is a co-authored paper. The analyses and assessments deployed does not necessarily reflect the view of the individual authors.



2. How will Turkey’s swiftly developing security relations with Russia influence Turkey-EU relations in a 2023 timeframe?<sup>2</sup>
3. How will the slightly more amorphous global security shifts such as demographics and migration, and new (in-)security trends such as cyber-warfare, transnational terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction influence Turkey-EU relations?

The paper will argue that these three groups of global security dynamics will push Turkey-EU relations in a more conflictual direction, yet cooperation—often out of necessity rather than want—will continue to keep the relationship on track, resulting in a form of conflictual cooperation.<sup>3</sup> Whether or not this will amount to more conflict than cooperation depends, to a large degree, on the question of whether the most general of global security dynamics will develop in the direction of a resurgent bi-polar ‘either-or’ scenario e.g. between traditional NATO partners on the one side, and Russia on the other. This is likely to entail more conflictual security dynamics between Turkey and Europe. Alternatively, the near future could be ‘muddier’ with waning support for institutions such as NATO, splits within the NATO alliance e.g. on Iran, and the rise of a more *ad hoc* and bilateral transactionalism on most security counts. This is likely to lead to a more cooperative short-term security scenario. The paper deploys this distinction when laying out the assessed nature of conflictual cooperation, mindful that dynamics such as US withdrawal from the Middle East, South East Europe, and the Post-Soviet space could come to act as drivers on both sides of this distinction.

The paper will deploy two analytical matrices. On the one hand, it will apply a taxonomy of global forces that have an either centrifugal or centripetal bearing on the Turkey-EU relationship, and, on the other hand, it will make an attempt at bringing the analysis one notch deeper by invoking as analytical tools key aspects of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).<sup>4</sup> Before we turn to the core of the paper, a brief introduction of these two matrices are thus in order.

The centrifugal and centripetal forces first. Judging from recent developments it can easily be surmised that centrifugal forces are in the zenith, and that brinkmanship will be called for to salvage a floundering relationship. It is arguably no longer a given that Turkey will end up on NATO’s side in the resurgent conflict between NATO and Russia, as Turkey’s alleged purchase of the Russian S-

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<sup>2</sup> A decision has been made not to include relations with China into this paper, since the assessment is that, barring wild card developments, these are likely to matter less in the 2023 timeframe of the paper. Also, the scope of this relatively brief paper is already quite expansive.

<sup>3</sup> All sorts of caveats naturally apply here. Questions about how broadly to conceive of security dynamics—e.g. to include questions of identity and/or energy security—will not be addressed in detail in this survey study. Also, it is difficult to isolate global dynamics from regional and domestic dynamics in this time and age. No detailed attempt at disentangling will be applied here.

<sup>4</sup> The objective of this paper is not theoretical, and is thus not committed to the veracity or predictive powers of this theory. Rather, it faithfully adopts a few key aspects thereof such as Turkey’s claimed role as an ‘insulator’ between three major regional security complexes, the European, the Russian, and the Middle Eastern, and invokes this as a helpful tool in the assessment of the likely scenario for Turkey-EU security relations in 2023.



400 missile defence system and the recent Skripal affair have illustrated. Deep cleavages between Turkey and the US on the Kurdish PYD/YPG in Syria is just the tip of an ever longer list of differences between the two countries. Turkey’s recent rapprochement with Iran is also bound to at least complicate relations with the US and NATO, if to a lesser degree with the EU. These developments add to both more abstract trends such as the weakening of international institutions and more local trends such as a rising tide of nationalisms to provide a centrifugal perspective, prying Turkey and the EU further apart on security.

On the other hand, level-headed analysis is still able to produce enough centripetal forces and overlapping security concerns to warrant a less conflictual and more cooperative scenario for the near future. The EU is still dependent on Turkey to solve its migrant-crisis and assist its anti-terrorism efforts. For NATO, Turkey is still a key strategic and tactical partner; NATO will go far to keep Turkey out of Russia’s embrace. On the other hand, Turkey is deeply dependent on the EU and the West more generally, not only for economy, but also for security backing. Also, on the issue of Iran as already noted, Europe and Turkey have a shared interest in keeping the JCPOA agreement in place and valid. Finally, balancing out talk of European or American weapons sanctions on Turkey, there are also talks of possible cooperation between Turkey’s fast-expanding arms industry and Europe on individual projects within the still dawning Permanent Structured Cooperation (PeSCo) (see e.g. Ekim, 2018). Centripetal forces such as these are likely to stay in place, bringing Turkey-EU relations back from the brink, to echo the 2018 MSC report.

This reference to centripetal and centrifugal forces is reminiscent of at least two central tenets of contemporary international security theory—the second analytical matrix to be deployed in this paper. The first such tenet is that security is an inherently “relational” dynamic. One of the main intuitions of security complex theory (Buzan et al, 1998) resides in its ability to shift the paradigm that had regarded cooperative and conflictual scenarios of security interdependence as opposing and exclusive. On the one hand, traditionalist approaches had posited that states seek to promote and protect their national security in an anarchic environment where a state’s survival must take place at the expense of others’ survival if need be; on the other hand, liberal approaches would allow for the emergence of cooperative security regimes as a way to maximize states’ individual gains. Yet, considering security a relational matter is particularly apt in the case at hand because it entails allowing for conflictual, cooperative and other kinds of possible dynamics as existing *simultaneously*, perhaps at different levels and in different actor’s constellation (see e.g. Wæver, 1995).

That leads to the second insight that theory can offer in understanding how global security drivers can bear on EU-Turkey relations, pitching Turkey as an “insulator”, sitting between three separate security complex dynamics—the European, the Middle Eastern, and the post-Soviet complexes—without quite belonging to any of them. Turkey’s membership in NATO and negotiations with the EU have underscored Ankara’s western orientation, but its peripheral role in them confirms the characterization of an insulator. Recent years have arguably been characterized by Turkey’s attempt first at prying out its own regional security complex—through notions such as “strategic



depth” (see e.g. Barrinha, 2013 and Stein, 2014)—and then defending its independence e.g. on production of weapons and playing on more horses to meet its unique security interests. Whether or not this is viable, the question of Turkey as an insulator is a key analytical tool for this paper.

We now turn to the heart of the paper, an identification of the most salient, impactful, and durable of the global security drivers that have driven and are likely to drive Turkey-EU relations in one direction or the other in the 2023 timeframe. We do this with a view to the most likely scenario that this is likely to produce. In section one, we address the impact of Turkey’s relations with the US and NATO. In section two, Russia’s impact on Turkey-EU security relations is considered. In section three, the paper looks at both the more abstract and more localized global security shifts and new (in-)security trends to assess what role they are likely to play in pushing Turkey and the EU in one direction or the other in 2023. In conclusion, the paper will make an initial attempt at outlining a few recommendations on how to address the challenges and make the most of the opportunities that this entails.

## 2. Turkey, the US, NATO and the impact on EU-Turkey security relations

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In a 2017 PEW survey on perceptions of leading global security threats, 72% of those surveyed in Turkey answered that American power and influence is a major threat to their country (PEW, 2017a). This tops the list of 38 countries surveyed. Also, Turkey was the only one among the countries surveyed to place the US as its top threat. In the 10 EU countries surveyed in 2017, an average of only 31% saw the US as a security threat.<sup>5</sup> In 2013, only 44% of those surveyed in Turkey saw the US as a major threat. Similarly, PEW has found that Turkey consistently since 2007 has held some of the most unfavourable views of NATO, often eclipsing Russian perceptions of NATO. In 2017, 58% of those surveyed in Turkey held unfavourable views of NATO, also the highest number of the countries surveyed that year (PEW, 2017b). In 2017, 23% held favourable views of NATO in Turkey. In the 10 EU countries surveyed, an average of 61% held favourable views of NATO.

In view of such numbers, as well as a steep rise in bilateral tensions between Turkey and the US and increasing divergence on basic security concerns, several observers have begun to ask whether the relationship which to a large extent rests on security cooperation can be brought “back from the brink” this time (Walker & Badackçi, 2017, Cağaptay, 2017, Trofimov, 2017 & Danforth, 2018<sup>6</sup>). Experienced observers, often with a military background will nod grudgingly (Stavridis, 2017). Turkey is simply too important geostrategically for the US to contain the likes of Iran and Russia in Turkey’s neighborhood, but also China further afield. Also, the history of Turkish-American relations has recorded many difficult balancing acts, always surviving, however dramatic the crises may have appeared at the time.

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<sup>5</sup> In Europe, ISIS is the primary security concern at 74%. Also of note is the somewhat underreported Turkish concerns with refugees See chapters 3 and 4 for further treatment of this.

<sup>6</sup> See also Lindgaard, 2017a from which much of the material for this section is adapted.



In order to make an informed assessment of how American security relations with Turkey might impact Turkey-EU relations into 2023, this section will first have a brief look at the pertinent recent historical developments of Turkey-US security relations. Secondly, it will outline a summary of key alignments and differences with a view to identifying the key drivers that underpin the relationship. Finally, it will wrap up with an assessment of the direction US-Turkey security relations are likely to drive EU-Turkey relations towards.

## 2.1 Drivers from history

Looking forward to 2023, it is key to understand what lessons can be learned from the recent history of Turkey-US security relations and how they have affected Turkey-EU relations. From the point of view of the US, Turkey has been key since WWII to address first the perceived Soviet threat and then as a Muslim majority NATO ally which could aid Western efforts against Islamist terrorist threats out of the Middle East.

The 1947 Truman doctrine and 1952 inclusion of Turkey into NATO was thus due to the US's then one overriding interest: keeping Soviet expansion at bay. If the US and NATO (perhaps inadvertently<sup>7</sup>) were conducive towards the introduction of democracy and a pro-European post-War orientation in Turkey, the US soon turned a blind eye to the Turkish military's anti-democratic transgressions through a series of coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980.<sup>8</sup> The US also only briefly embargoed weapons sales to Turkey following the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Tying Turkey to Western Europe vis-à-vis Soviet expansion enjoyed force majeure.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the US had an immediate interest in harnessing Turkish support in an outreach to former Soviet territories of the Caucasus, central Asia and the Balkans, moving Turkey from being a flank member of NATO to become a frontline member.<sup>9</sup> Washington was quick to see this and urged the EU to reconsider its 1997 denial of Turkey's requested EU candidate status.

Since then, Turkey has been invoked by the US as a “role model” of sorts, mainly because of its Muslim identity. Following the 9/11 2001 attacks, for instance, President George W. Bush hailed Turkey as a model country (Bush, 2002) of peaceful Muslims to illustrate that his war on terror was not an all-out war on Islam.<sup>10</sup> Bush kept to this much-needed stance even after Turkey refused

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<sup>7</sup> It is a good question how exactly to understand this process. Especially Cemin Koçak has shown that there was virtually no pressure from the US for Turkish transition to democracy. Also, Turkey's main concern was security, to protect Turkey from the Soviet Union and since this could only be done by getting the protection of the West the multiparty elections were instigated. On this account, mutual security concerns were thus the main drivers of the introduction of democracy in Turkey.

<sup>8</sup> This was notably not the only accommodation. Portugal, for instance, was a dictatorship when it was one of the founding members of NATO in 1950 and remained so until 1974.

<sup>9</sup> As the EU denied Turkey EU candidate status at the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, the EU arguably viewed Turkey as a potential liability in this context rather than a strategic advantage, thus also reflecting the opening cracks in the expectation management of the otherwise strong Cold War alliance (Özel, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> And to try to get Turkey on board for the subsequent 2003 invasion of Iraq.





to let US troops pass through its soil on the way to Iraq in 2003 (CNN, 2003) and Erdoğan proactively sided with Hamas in Gaza in 2006 (Cağaptay, 2006).

Obama counted Erdoğan as one of his top five international friends (Obama, 2012a) and a useful ally against rising Islamophobia around the world. This was the case even after a severe reaction by Turkey to Israel’s Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009 and after the row between Israeli President Shimon Peres and PM Erdogan at Davos in 2009.

Obama also embraced Turkey as a much-needed role model during the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ that broke out in 2010-11 as an example of a Muslim-majority country with a well-functioning market economy and secular democracy (Obama, 2012b), even if Erdoğan caused consternation with his strident support of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt—subsequently even adopting and adapting the iconic Rabia sign for his own purposes (Erdoğan, 2017)—and of alleged support for Sunni extremist groups in Syria like Ahrar al-Sham, Jund al-Aqsa, and Jabhat al-Nusra (Sengupta, 2015).

As ISIS gained ground and occupied a vast territory in Syria and Iraq in 2014, Turkey was again a necessary Sunni ally against the also Sunni terrorist group, even if US support was fraught with worries that Turkey was an ally with a host of caveats yet again (de Bellaigue, 2014). Obama had to see US commandos get forced out of a town in northern Syria by a Turkey-backed Sunni insurgency group when the commandos came to help the rebels expel ISIS from the area in 2016 (Al Jazeera, 2016). Obama had to accept that although Turkey opened the important Incirlik airbase to the US-led anti-ISIL coalition in the summer of 2016, Erdoğan used the opportunity as a launching pad to go after not ISIS, but the PKK (Göksel, ICG, 2015). And Obama he had to deal with a deepening rift on the US’s most important ally in Syria, the Kurdish PYD/YPG.

From a Turkish point of view, the relationship with the US has been equally tested. Trust had already taken a blow as the American Jupiter missiles stationed in Turkey were removed from Turkey as part of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis bargain between the US and the Soviet Union, and the US had embargoed weapons sales to Turkey following the 1974 invasion of Cyprus. Turkish Post-Cold War worries that the US and NATO would abandon Turkey meshed with a perception that the US and NATO were impervious to Turkey’s security concerns first during the 1990-91 Gulf War, then during the subsequent set-up of a no-fly zone over the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq, and, in particular, during the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.<sup>11 12</sup>

In Turkey, the 2000’s came with the AKP Government and a new<sup>13</sup> Foreign- and Security policy outlook. Traversing a number of phases, this also came with increasing tensions in its relations with the US and NATO. Turkey has by far been the most frequent invoker of the NATO §4 meetings

<sup>11</sup> The Turkish drive towards independence on the production of military capabilities to reduce dependence on allies that has reached new heights over the last couple of years arguably originated back then.

<sup>12</sup> This and the following paragraph partly draw on Özel, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> It is a point of justified debate to what extent this “new” foreign policy drew on developments already set in motion by previous governments. For reasons of space, this will be left to the side here.



requested to discuss security concerns of one member state. Turkey invoked §4 in 2003 ahead of the Iraq war, in 2012 after Assad shot down a Turkish F-4 Phantom jet, and in 2015 following Russia’s entry on the Syrian scene. On all three occasions, Turkey received a perceived foot-dragging response from its NATO allies. Also, in Syria, Erdoğan was at first frustrated with the absence of US support for his quest to topple Assad, and then frustrated that the US ended up supporting the Kurdish YPG once they finally engaged.

More generally, the AKP Government was frustrated that the US and others did not sufficiently recognize Turkey’s growing regional clout and insinuated historic right to extend its leverage to the former Ottoman lands of the region. Ankara wanted to carve out its own regional security complex, rather than being a mere “insulator” at the margins of others’ security zones. As regional developments further isolated Turkey and the AKP turned to coopt the rising nationalist sentiments domestically, publicly shared suspicion grew ever more prominent at top levels to the effect that the US and EU were conspiring with the likes of the PKK and the Gülen movement—designated a terrorist organization by Turkey in May 2016 as FETÖ and allegedly the main perpetrator of the 15 July 2016 coup attempt against the Erdoğan Government—to undermine Turkish integrity and sovereignty (see e.g. Bilgi, 2018 and CAP, 2018a). However incredulous this might sound to the outsider, such beliefs figure both as a cause and integral part of more recent developments such as the ostensible purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system, more generally the pivot towards Russia in Syria and beyond, the recent rapprochement with Iran on Qatar and the Kurds of Iraq (see Lindgaard, 2017b), Turkey’s position—holding the Presidency of the OIC—as a lead against the US move to open an embassy in Jerusalem, and, beyond all, Erdoğan’s and other cabinet members’ all but outright threats against US forces positioned with the Kurdish YPG militia in Manbij, Syria (Independent, 2018).

## 2.2 Key areas of difference and alignment

The question for the present paper is how this increasingly strained balancing act between Turkey and the US is likely to develop in the future and how it is likely to affect EU-Turkey security relations. With the usual caveats of unpredictability, uncertainty, populist politics, etc. in mind, we will now make an attempt at spelling out key alignments and differences with a view to identifying the drivers that are assessed to be the most salient, pertinent, and durable today and in the near future. These should enable us to assess which scenario of EU-Turkey relations is the most likely in the 2023 timeframe.

Since Turkey’s relations with Russia is dealt with in the next section, let’s begin with Turkey’s turnabouts on Iran, as regional conflicts involving Iran are likely to gain salience in the years to come. Before the AKP, the Turkish security establishment worked closely with Israel and were sceptical of the rising Islamism, not least in Iran, e.g. urging Iran to voice a strong criticism of Turkey’s President Süleyman Demirel at the 1997 Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Tehran, making Demirel leave the summit prematurely, but also clearly aligning Turkey with the US. As the AKP government came to power in 2002, Turkey began engaging in a rapprochement with Iran, if



cautiously so in the early years to assuage concerns in the still strong Kemalist-secularist security establishment. In 2007, Erdoğan thus expressed his support for Iran’s nuclear program as long as it is used for peaceful purposes, in 2009 expressed his support for Ahmadinejad, avoiding mention of the Green revolution in Iran, and in 2010 Turkey opposed a fourth and tighter round of sanctions on Iran against US and EU wishes at the UN Security Council.

2011 put a sudden halt to this whiff of rapprochement, as Turkey suddenly gave up its resistance and allowed for the deployment in Turkey of a NATO X-band radar and early warning system as part of the NATO missile defence shield against Iran. This has been seen as a response to Iranian support for Shia autocrats in Syria and Iraq, and for Tehran’s alleged support of the establishment of the Kurdish PYD/YPG militias in Northern Syria (ICG, 2014). As Turkey called the mentioned \$4 meeting to deploy Patriot missiles on Turkey’s southern borders in 2012, and Iranian army chief warned that this could ‘ignite a third world war’ (Reuters, 2012).

At the end of 2016, Turkey’s relations with Iran picked up again as Turkey joined Russia and Iran to set up the Astana talks for creating peace in Syria (Kazakh MFA, 2017). In 2017 Turkey joined Iran and backed Qatar in its rift with a group of Gulf States led by Saudi Arabia, the Iranian Chief of General Staff, Mohammed Hossein Bagheri arrived in Ankara to meet also with President Erdoğan in the first of its kind visit since the 1979 Iranian revolution (Daily Sabah, 2017), and Turkey and Iran jointly supported military pressure on Erdoğan’s one Kurdish ally, Masoud Barzani following the 25 September KRG referendum on independence.

Now, if one of the prime US strategic interests in the region is the containment of Iran—as the withdrawal from the JCPOA deal and boost of ties with Saudi Arabia and Israel seem to suggest—it is a good question if the US can count on Turkish support towards this purpose. For one, Turkey also shares Iran’s default animosity towards Israel.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, both Turkey and Iran have a deep historical interest in containing Kurdish dreams of independence, even if they do not hesitate to support certain Kurdish groups to pitch them against the other at times. Thirdly, before the Sunni-pro-activism of the Arab Spring, the AKP government did set in motion a pan-Islamic outreach and process of rapprochement also with Iran—one we are arguably now seeing a return to. Fourthly, energy and trade are strong centripetal forces between the two, as they both struggle economically and can meet each other’s’ needs, as the alleged oil-for-gold program seemingly revealed during the December 2013 corruption allegations and the more recent trial in the US against claimed participants in this program also bears witness to. Fifthly, the joint defence of Qatar over the summer of 2017 for Turkey is also about the establishment of a military presence in the region, something Iran will be ready to support as long as it serves as a balance against Saudi Arabia, a close US ally.

Wresting Turkey away from Iran might not be an easy task for the US, especially if the conflict with Iran gains momentum and salience. And even if this is less likely to worry the EU, Iran’s strong

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<sup>14</sup> Though Israel is not perceived by Turkey as a hard security threat of the kind it is by Iran.



footprint in Iraq and Syria is unlikely to accommodate two of Europe’s primary security concerns in Syria; the prevention of further Sunni oppression and resentment leading to an ISIL 2.0, and the facilitation of reconstruction and a neutral governance that will allow the many (often Sunni Muslim) refugees to return to Syria in the near future. Of course, Turkey is not completely aligned with Iran on everything. Also, Turkey could act as a mediator (perhaps with the EU) as tensions between Iran and the US build. But there is a real risk that Turkey’s rapprochement and re-alignment with Iran will further strain the US-Turkey balancing act on security, and possibly adversely affect Turkey-EU relations.

This brings us to the ever-thorny Kurdish issue. The Pentagon is deeply embedded with the Kurds in Iraq and Syria and has been increasingly so since the establishment of a no-fly zone over the primarily Kurdish areas of northern Iraq after the first Gulf War in 1991 (Noack, 2017). In 2003, the Turkish refusal to let US troops traverse Turkish soil en route to Iraq made the Kurds a key ally on the northern flank against Saddam. And since 2014, the Kurds of Iraq and Syria have proven to be the least Islamist, the most Western in their orientation, and the most capable on the ground fighting ISIS, three key desiderata of the US.

In the same period, the Turkish trajectory on the Kurdish issue has traversed from a hard-line securitized stance of the 80’s and 90’s, through attempts at outreach by the current AKP government between 2006 and 2015 (Yeğen, 2015) and back to the historical pattern of a hard crackdown on the Kurds after the critical June 2015 general elections in Turkey (Keaten, 2017). All the while the issue has grown in scope from being a domestic concern to now being both a regional and global issue.<sup>15</sup> As Ankara sees the Syrian Kurdish PYD/YPG as identical to the PKK (Yeni Şafak, 2017), US special forces wearing YPG insignia in Syria (Tilghman, 2016) is seen as US support to the PKK, an organization the US has recognized as a terrorist organization since 1997.<sup>16</sup>

Further detail and developments to the side, the question is if this impasse will push Turkey and the US over the brink. The US dilemma in Syria is palpable. Continued support for PYD/YPG (or the broader SDF and local military and civilian councils) will, on the one hand, not only entrench its presence in a region it has claimed to withdraw from, it will also retain a source of conflict with Turkey that holds the potential to trump attempts at diplomatic solutions. If, on the other hand, decisions are made—as Trump has suggested mid-April 2018—to pull out of Syria the US will remove a bone of contention with Turkey by withdrawing support of the Kurdish YPG, but then run the risk of not being able to fight ISIL, ensure stability in Syria, and leaving Syria to Iran and Russia. In order to dodge the choice of either horn of this dilemma, the US will want to go quite far to

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<sup>15</sup> The PKK has also facilitated this “regionalization” and of late also globalization of the issue through the establishment of the regional umbrella organization after the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein, today known as KCK, as well as coordinated outreach to Russia, Europe, and the US. Arguably, the Kurdish issue always had a global component, but it has certainly grown in both depth and scope in the latter years.

<sup>16</sup> The EU recognized the PKK as a terror organization in 2002, a year following the 9/11 terror attacks. Also, as EU countries are party to the anti-ISIS Operation Inherent Resolve, EU countries are also party to the support for PYD/YPG in Syria.





assuage Turkey’s concerns without withdrawing its support for the PYD/YPGSDP entirely. In the current context, this is a minefield.

Turkey, on the other hand, would arguably also want to keep the US on board as a leverage against getting outsmarted and marginalized by Iran and Russia in Syria. The trouble for the Erdoğan government is that it is being consumed by the nationalist agenda it has co-opted to crawl back after the failure of June 2015 elections, making it all but impossible to dampen the anti-Kurdish sentiment rampant at campaign events around Turkey (see e.g. Doğan, 2018). It is unlikely that this climate will change in the foreseeable future, especially after the perhaps surprisingly strong showing of the nationalists in the 24 June 2018 elections (Daily Sabah, 2018c).

In sum, it would be fair to say that compromise and cooperation between Turkey and the US on the PYD/YPG is possible (not to mention, prudent), but further conflict is more likely, also pushing Turkey and the EU in a more conflictual orientation in this context.<sup>17</sup>

This leaves the also tested bilateral relations between Turkey and the US as a candidate centrifugal force between the two. It has been a source of immense frustration for the US when Turkey conducts an unannounced air raid on YPG not far from where US soldiers are stationed in Syria, as they did on 25 April 2017 (Gordon & Kakol, 2017). Or when the Turkish pro-government press leaks the whereabouts of US Special Forces in Syria, as was done in July 2017 (Gutman, The Daily Beast, 2017). Arrests in Turkey of US consulate employees, with details of their names and charges published in pro-government media (Karaman, 2017) also further strained relations. The series of street scuffles that have accompanied three of Erdoğan’s recent visits to the US (Kirişçi, 2016; Majority Report Video, 2017; and Astor & Fandas, 2017) also have gained Erdoğan a fair share of negative attention inside the Washington beltway. Add to this the fact that Erdoğan seems at least to the outside world to have adopted the practice of taking political hostages, such as the US pastor, Andrew Brunson (Weise, 2017), and it gets difficult to see how the relations can be improved significantly in spite of post-election statements of good intent. Possible US sanctions on transfer of some 100 F-35 fighter jets to Turkey is still looming.

The single largest bone of bilateral contention, however, has been the case in the US first against the Iranian-Turkish businessman, Reza Zarrab, and then as Zarrab entered a plea bargain with the prosecution, against the deputy CEO for the Turkish Halkbank, Mehmet Hakan Atilla (Weiser, 2017 and Filkins, 2017). The scheme was first made public during the 17 & 25 December 2013 graft probes in Turkey that implicated members of the Turkish government. The police and the prosecutors involved in these cases were later identified as belonging to the network of Fethullah Gülen, who has resided in the US since 1999, and is accused of being the mastermind of the botched coup of 15 July 2016. To the US this has been a case of the Turkish government setting up a scheme to bypass US sanctions on Iran through an ‘oil-for-gold’ program run by Reza Zarrab with the willing support of Halkbank and—also allegedly—key people in the Turkish government. It is still an open

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<sup>17</sup> For a helpful and highly insightful further discussion of this thorny issue, including four strategic options, see Kadercan, 2018.



question if this case will end up with the imposition of US sanctions on Turkey (Zaman, 2018). Were that to be the case, it would of course further deteriorate Turkish-US relations, and likely adversely affect Turkish-European relations.

This somewhat gloomy picture to the side, alignments and bases for cooperation are still available. Like Turkey, the US announced its dismay with Massoud Barzani’s push for staging an election on independence from Iraq on 25 September 2017 (Frantzman, 2017). There is also nothing to suggest that the US will divert from the recurrent Turkish call—since mid-2015 (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016)—for a Syria whose ‘territorial integrity’ is maintained. Irrespective of Erdoğan’s recent relative silence on Assad, it is possible (if increasingly less likely) to see Turkey and the US partner on a joint push to ensure that a transition to a political solution in Syria would envision an end game that does not include Assad in the picture. Also, even if Turkey has arguably sacrificed some of its support for the anti-Assad Syrian Sunni insurgency to pursue the PYD/YPG—as both the Euphrates Shield and Olive’s Branch seem to bear witness to (Tattersall & Pamuk, 2016; Bechev, 2016; Reuters, 2017)—the US would probably still be able to find a strong partner in Turkey in a quest to ensure that Sunni frustration does not give birth to an ISIS 2.0.<sup>18</sup>

Then there are the resurgent regional tensions between Iran, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and Israel on the other. Were the US to pursue a less belligerent course on Iran than has been the case of late, then a less belligerent Turkey could possibly be invoked as a helpful mediator of sorts. This is a bit speculative, perhaps, but not entirely outlandish given the also somewhat troubled balancing acts Turkey has traversed on Iran, as outlined above.

Finally, there is an elephant in the room here, as when Trump in the eye of the storm in a joint press conference with Erdoğan in September 2017 stated: “We have a great friendship, as countries and I think we’re right now as close as we’ve ever been” (Trump, 2017). With both populist and pragmatic leaders at both ends of the relationship, conflictual predictions can be contradicted by the stroke of a tweet or rally speech. Ahead of then US Foreign Secretary Tillerson’s meeting with Erdoğan in February 2018, for instance, the US dropped a number of charges against Erdoğan’s bodyguards, openly reconsidered selling Patriot systems to Turkey, postponed sanctions suggested by congress, and expressed support for Turkey’s concern with the presence of PKK-forces in Iraq’s Sinjar region. However strained, there is still an interest in continuing the balancing act.

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<sup>18</sup> One major caveat here is that many of Turkey’s Sunni Muslim partners on the ground in Syria today are groups that the US (and Europe) will count as extremist Islamist groups. These groups count the Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Idlib, and as of late also Jayish al-Islam relocated from Douma in Damascus to the area around Al-Bab controlled by Turkey.



### 2.3 Contours of a future scenario

The contours of the US-Turkey security relationship in the near future remains a conflictual one, and a few differences between Europe and the US aside, this is likely to push EU-Turkey relations in a conflictual orientation.

As we will unfold in the next section, the relatively stable US-Turkey alignment against the Soviet Union is no more. Turkey’s recent rapprochement with Russia does not reflect the action of a strong US ally. Largely the same can be said for Turkey’s relations with Iran. The joint fight against Sunni extremist terror groups of the Bush and Obama years is increasingly frustrated by Turkey’s top two terror concerns, the PKK and the Gülen group. Turkey is arguably going to make it more difficult to ensure a lasting stability in Iraq and Syria through open opposition to Kurdish inclusion and through its loss of leverage as a strong supporter of Sunni groups. And bilateral relations with the US are fraught with challenges and lack of trust, especially over Gülen.

Anti-Americanism in Turkey is not merely rampant, it also seems to unite otherwise unlikely bedfellows across large swathes of the political spectrum in Turkey (Akyol, 2016, Alaranta, 2018). This comes with recurrent statements of suspicion tracing back to the 2003 fall-out over the US invasion of Iraq to the effect that the US is a source of instability in the region, a supporter of anti-Turkish groups such as the PKK, and there because of oil and gas (see e.g. Yeni Şafak, 2018a).

That said, there will be stabilizing drivers to be found in the US-Turkey security relationship as well. A Turkish break from NATO is unlikely, and thus NATO will persist as a forum of security dialogue, however difficult. Over the last couple of years, the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg has also acted as a mediator and diplomat between Turkey and the US (and EU members) to mend fences. The US and Turkey, as outlined above have a shared interest in the establishment of a stable Middle East to where refugees can return, and Sunni Muslims feel at home. If the US is to continue down its path of retrenchment from the region, the US will want to retain Turkey as a strong ally and will want to nudge the EU and Turkey in the direction of security cooperation. The host of centrifugal issues to the side, the EU will also want to seize in on the centripetal forces to prevent the return of an ISIS 2.0 and to facilitate the return of refugees to the region.

### 3. The impact of Russia as a global security driver of Turkey-EU security relations

Already mentioned as a complicating factor in Turkey’s relations with the EU, NATO, and the US, we now turn to have a closer look at the arguably resurgent global role (Stronski & Sokolsky 2017) Russia has played from a security point of view in either promoting or discouraging deeper ties between Turkey and the EU. Forward-looking as this paper is, the following analysis will also include an initial analysis of the drivers that have been the most salient, pertinent, and durable in this respect with a view to an assessment which of these drivers are the most likely to obtain in a 2023 timeframe, and which of the 3C-scenarios (convergence, cooperation or conflict) this constellation is likely to drive EU-Turkey relations into.



The overarching questions that will guide this enquiry are basically:

1. how deep are Turkey’s security relations with Russia likely to be in a 2023 timeframe?
2. what impact will this have on Turkey’s security-borne relations with the EU?

Judging by recent (Spring 2018) developments, opinions, and analyses, the answers to these two questions are (1) deeper than most in the EU would like to think and (2) a high impact driving Turkey-EU relations in a more conflictual direction. In a recent survey conducted by Bilgi University and sponsored by the German Marshall Fund, 12,1% of the respondents see Russia as Turkey’s most important ally (only topped by “No one” at 20,4% and “Azerbaijan” at 28,4%) compared to 54,3% who see the US as Turkey’s biggest threat (Bilgi, 2018).<sup>19</sup> Now, as most who follow the political developments in Turkey will object, individual polls must be taken with a pinch of salt. Also, only a few years ago, Russia were perceived to be Turkey’s biggest threat (Kadir Has, 2016)<sup>20</sup>. But concerns are still rising that not only are Russia and Iran exploiting Turkey to drive a wedge down into and pry apart the NATO partners Turkey and the US (and EU countries) (Votel, 2018), but also that Turkey is a willing partner to this divisiveness (Töl, 2018). A poll run by the Center for American Progress in the run-up to the 24 June 2018 elections, 2,9% say they trust the US more, whereas 40,5% say they trust Russia more (with 50,1% saying ‘neither’) (CAP, 2018b)

In order to take a step back from the somewhat giddy recent developments and assess in a bit more depth the way Russia might influence Turkey-EU relations in 2023, this section will first turn to a brief survey of the pertinent history of the Turkey-Russia relations from a security perspective (2.1), then summarize the key alignments and differences with a view to identifying the most important drivers of the relationship (2.2), and finally outline the assessed contours of the 2023 scenario of the direction that Russia is most likely to push Turkey-EU relations into (2.3).

### 3.1 Drivers from history

Simplified somewhat, there are basically two schools on Turkish-Russian security relations.<sup>21</sup> Most will grant that economic ties have grown strong, especially after the Cold War ended, even if the economic ties seem to be “asymmetric” (see e.g. Önis & Yılmaz, 2015 and Baev & Kirişçi, 2017).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Notably, this is one of only three features that seem to unite the otherwise highly polarized Turkish political landscape, another being low degrees of trust in the EU. The third shared interest is sending the many especially Syrian refugees back to Syria (Bilgi, 2018)

<sup>20</sup> At the end of 2015, this Kadir Has poll thus found that 64,7% thus found Russia to pose a threat towards Turkey (up from 28,2% a year earlier). At the end of 2015, only 39,2% found the US to constitute a threat, down from 51,3 the previous year (Kadir Has, 2016: 31).

<sup>21</sup> And, as a necessary caveat, these claimed “schools” are of course “ideal types” or “gross generalization” of the sort that paper over the host of differences and cross-overs between the two as well as—and perhaps more importantly—whether or not their relationship is asymmetric and out of necessity, rather than want.

<sup>22</sup> Notably, against this almost conventional wisdom, the IISS February 2018 analysis “The Russian-Turkish rapprochement” argues that Turkey has the upper hand e.g. on energy as Russia is dependent on not only on selling oil and gas to Turkey—notably also exempt from the sanctions following the November 2015 plane incident—but also on geographical leverage as an energy hub for Russian gas towards Europe (IISS, 2018).





But regarding security, the stronger school will insist that Turkish-Russian relations are skin deep, that basic security interests are still highly divergent, and that relations are characterized by being ad hoc, tactical, and without trust (see e.g. Baev & Kirişci, 2017, Saivetz, 2018, Titov, 2015, IISS, 2018<sup>23</sup>). In the following, we refer to this as the “*without trust*” school. On the opposing side, some analysts have begun pointing not merely to the rising influence of the pro-Russian so-called “Eurasianist” school in Turkish foreign and security policy (e.g. Aktürk, 2015 & Alaranta, 2018), but also to a deeper convergence than meets the eye both today and historically (see e.g. Özdal et. al., 2013). Here we refer to this as the “*deeper convergence*” school.

With the “Return of a Global Russia”, as a recent Carnegie Report has pitched it (Stronski & Sokolsky 2017) and increasing Russian impact on European security concerns both directly on Europe’s eastern borders and indirectly through its manoeuvring in the Middle East, the depth of Turkey-Russia security relations is highly likely to be a key driver of the Turkey-EU security relations in the near future. It is a good question then what to expect?

According to the “without trust” school, Turkey’s and Russia’s imperial predecessors fought no less than 13 bloody wars from 1568-1918 over disputed territory, Black Sea sovereignty and the ever-contested Turkish straits. After WWI and the mutual experience of empire lost, Turkey weighed its options and ended up staying neutral during WWII, and then opted for the Western Alliance at the end. The Truman Doctrine set in motion a process of integration with the West through Turkish membership of the Council of Europe, the OECD and NATO, an association agreement with ECC, and a firm Turkish position in the NATO camp during the Cold War, enforced among other things by the 1950-53 Korean war, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, US support for the containment of rising Communist groups in Turkey, and Russian support for Turkey’s nemesis in the 80’s and 90’s, the PKK in Syria.

As the Cold War petered out and the Soviet Union collapsed, Pan-Turkist outreach in the post-Soviet Caucasus, support for the other’s rebellious Chechen and Kurdish minorities—Moscow even hosted a PKK conference in 1994—support for opposite sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, support for opposite sides in the Balkan wars, Turkish and American collaboration to successfully establish the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline to Russia’s chagrin, and Russia’s deployment of the S-300 missile defence system to Greek Cyprus in 1996 all worked to remind both parties that alignment on key security interests would hardly emerge anytime soon.

Even into the 2000’s as Erdoğan and Putin emerged as leaders to introduce attempts at warming up relations, Turkey and Russia still found themselves on opposite sides of key conflicts such as Russia’s 2008 invasion of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s coup against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2013, and of Russia’s annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. As Turkey took on the role of the frontrunner in a push to topple the Assad regime

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<sup>23</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), February 2018: “The Russian-Turkish rapprochement”



in Syria during the early years of that conflict—often through more or less active support for Islamist opposition groups in Syria—Turkey brought a Russian dual-use cargo plane down for inspection in 2012 and infamously downed a Russian fighter jet on the Syrian border in November 2015.

As is well-known, this “jet crisis” even brought the tendency to compartmentalize economic and security-related affairs to a halt with Russian sanctions against Turkish construction businesses in Russia, a halt of Russian tourists to Turkey, a stop of the 2014 Turkish Stream deal, and a freeze of the plans for Russia’s Rosatom to build Turkey’s first nuclear power plant in Akkuyu on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast.<sup>24</sup> It also seriously constrained Turkey’s room to manoeuvre to actively address what since the June 2015 Turkish general election had risen to become Turkey’s number one security concern, the Kurdish PKK, and the territorial entrenchment of the PKK’s alleged sister groups the PYD/YPG along Turkey’s southern border in Northern Syria.

In June 2016, President Erdoğan apologized for the shoot-down of the Russian jet and Putin was quick—much quicker than the leaders of the West—to offer his support for Erdoğan during the 15 July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. Cooperation between Turkey and Russia resumed on Syria and on the Turkish procurement of the much debated, not NATO-interoperable Russian S-400 Missile Defence system<sup>25</sup> allegedly came through. But there was always a sensed backdrop of deep distrust of the other, e.g. on Syria’s contested Idlib region, on Russian support for the PYD to be part of a Syrian political process towards re-conciliation (irrespective of developments in Afrin), and on Turkey’s much-heralded (and likely disappointed) demand for the S-400 deal to include co-production and transfer of technology to Turkey.

On this fly-over of the “without trust” background picture of the Turkey-Russian security relations, the ostensible warming up of Turkish relations with Russia since the summer of 2016, and the mounting salience and alleged influence of the aforementioned “Eurasianist” school in Turkey, Turkey-Russia security relations are likely to retain a conflictual path with occasional, *ad hoc* mood swings against a background of a fan of areas where Turkey does not see eye-to-eye with Russia on security such as Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, the Balkans, Cyprus, Egypt, perhaps Iran, etc. The underpinning drivers of the relationship are simply too conflictual to warrant a deeper strategic relationship for the EU and NATO to worry about.

The “deeper convergence” school paints a very different picture. According to this school, 350 years of imperial conflict was soon replaced by Soviet support of Turkey against the Western powers already in the 1919-1922 War of Independence. The Soviet Union was the first country to of-

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<sup>24</sup> Tol & Goren 2017 also argue that Russia levelled similar threats during the 2008 Georgian crisis, and Çelikpala, 2017 interestingly note that the 2015 jet crisis was a reflection of how the mindset of compartmentalization was overwhelmed by geopolitical developments, and thus left the Turkish government unable to deal with such developments in a professional fashion.

<sup>25</sup> See Kasapoğlu, 2017 and Töl & Gören 2017 for analysis of background and consequences of the S-400 deal.



ficially recognize Ankara as soon as 16 March 1921. The two parties cooperated on the still significant 1936 Montreux Treaty, limiting the naval presence of non-littoral states in the Black Sea. Turkey became the single largest recipient of Soviet foreign aid following the 1962 Cuban Crisis as the US withdrew their nuclear Jupiter missiles from Turkey as part of the US deal with the Soviet Union. Bülent Ecevit signed declarations of good neighbourliness with Russia even after the otherwise divisive Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.<sup>26</sup> And in 1998, only four years after having hosted the PKK congress in Moscow, Russia turned down the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan’s request for asylum in Russia.

In the early 2000’s Turkey and Russia also joined forces in limiting US presence in the Black Sea, as the US was planning to expand its naval presence there following the 9/11 2001 terror attacks.<sup>27</sup> Both Turkey and Russia preferred neighbourhood stability over support for colour revolutions and disruptive invasions from outside the region, in particular the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As already mentioned, the AKP government joined Russia and warmed up to Iran on Iraq. Turkey kept a relatively low profile on Georgia (2008)<sup>28</sup> and Ukraine (2014), and even aligned with Russia in discouraging their NATO membership. On the background of an intractable mix of growing parallel nostalgia for empires lost, a resurgent co-opting of religion for political purposes, and mutual feelings of being excluded by the US, NATO and the EU, Turkey and Russia sealed the 2000’s with the 2009 declaration to deepen friendship and multidimensional partnership, the 2010 inauguration of the Turkey-Russia High-level Cooperation Council (HCC), and the 2011 introduction of visa-free travel.

Already mentioned, Turkey was also markedly muted as Russia annexed Crimea and engaged in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. This was surprising to some as the Turkic Tatars arguably suffered the most on Crimea. But according to this deeper convergence school, Turkey’s response to the crisis was not only muted, it also ended up benefitting Turkey (and Russia) at the EU’s and Ukraine’s expense. First, Turkey did not join in on the joint US/EU embargo on Russia, and saw a boost in foodstuff trade with Russia as Russia retaliated with foodstuff sanctions on the EU and the US, also helping out Russia. Secondly, as the South Stream deal of providing gas from Russia under the Black Sea to Bulgaria and the South-eastern European market—circumventing Ukraine—was scrapped by the EU, Turkey and Russia agreed on building the Turkstream gas pipeline from Russia through the Black Sea to north-western Turkey, and from there potentially onward to the South-eastern European market. Thus, Turkey already in 2014 provided Russia with a fresh opportunity to circumvent Ukraine. Briefly on hold during the infamous seven month November 2015 – June

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<sup>26</sup> The 1974 US weapons embargo against Turkey will have helped alleviate Russian disagreements with Turkey.

<sup>27</sup> In 2001, Turkey and Russia with other littoral states thus established the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Force (BLACKSEAFOR), a counter-balance to the NATO led Operation Active Endeavor, and in 2004 joined in on the Operation Black Sea Harmony (see e.g. Çelikpala & Erşen, 2018) (REF: Mitat, Çelikpala and Emre Erşen: Turkey’s Black Sea Predicament: Challenging or Accommodating Russia” Forthcoming)

<sup>28</sup> There was even a meet between the Turkish and Russian chiefs of staff on a joint approach to the Black Sea area during this crisis (ibid.)



2016 hiatus, TurkStream is now under construction. Thirdly, the 2011 plan for Russian ROSATOM to build and own 51% of the shares in Turkey’s first nuclear power plant in Akkuyu on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast was resuscitated in 2014.<sup>29</sup>

And as is well known, Turkish-Russian security relations have picked up and advanced to new heights since mid-2016. Two areas stand out here, Syria and S-400. If fraught with tensions (Shapiro, 2018), the joint Astana and Sochi processes and recent developments on the ground—in particular the lead-up to the Turkish Afrin operation—seem to have brought Turkey and Russia even closer on Syria. Arguably, Russia traded in its support for the YPG in Afrin and the PYD on the Sochi guest list for Ankara’s relative quiet on Assad and regime aggression in parts of Idlib, a sped-up Sochi process (if the late January meetings were not the success hoped for by Russia), and a joint front against American plans for Syria, not least against the announcement of US support for a 30.000 man large border force, consisting mostly of Kurdish YPG fighters (Reuters, 2018).<sup>30</sup> Erdoğan also talks to Putin, who is the only leader Erdoğan does not publicly criticize at all, more than any other world leader.

As the S-400 negotiations revealed, work still needs to be done in establishing the kind of trust for the trade of highly strategic—and political—weapons such as the S-400s demand. It is thus worth asking if the deal will carry through and if it does, whether it will include the much-craved co-production in, and transfer of technology to, Turkey. That said, the S-400 deal will still be perceived by the “deeper convergence” school as a sizable pebble on its side of the scale. Procurement of its own missile defence system has been on Turkey’s wish-list for a long time, traversing initially unsuccessful negotiations with the NATO partner PATRIOT and EUROSAM SAMP/T, Aster-30 NT systems through floundered negotiations with Chinese CPMIEC HQ-9 to the Russian S-400 (see Kasapoğlu, 2017 and Töl & Gören 2017 for more detail). Judging from developments in October and November 2017—where a MoU with EUROSAM from July 2017 was all of a sudden renewed and highly publicised—Russia has likely joined its predecessor competitors and rejected the much-touted wish for transfer of technology to NATO member Turkey. Still, both parties have announced the S-400 purchase to be a done deal.<sup>31</sup> And this is the case in spite of the countless warnings and subsequent statements of regrets by both NATO, NATO members and the US, reflecting, perhaps, a ‘deeper convergence’ with Russia than with the previous US, European, and Chinese sellers. That said, the jury will remain out on this deal for some time to come, adding to the still prominent air of uncertainty surrounding especially Erdoğan’s relations with Putin.

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<sup>29</sup> That said, this is not without skirmishes between Russian Rosatom which holds 51% of the shares, and the disgruntled Turkish partners holding 49%, leading some Turkish partners to withdraw from the project in the spring of 2018 (AA, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> If Iran has been more vocal in its criticism of Turkey’s Afrin operation, they also joined Russia and Turkey in honing in on the US as the real impediment for peace in Syria.

<sup>31</sup> Arguably more importantly, Erdoğan has even proposed that Russia and Turkey jointly develop the S-500 system under way (Daily Sabah, 2018d).





### 3.2 Key areas of alignment and differences

Now, the question for the present paper is if Turkey’s relations with Russia will mesh with local and regional dynamics to act as either centripetal or centrifugal forces in the development of EU-Turkey security relations. Assuming as we are for present purposes that Russia will be interested in driving down a wedge into Turkey’s relations with NATO and the EU, a ‘deeper convergence’ between Turkey and Russia will act more as a centrifugal force than it is the case if the relationship is ad hoc, tactical, and ‘without trust’.

Also, these two ‘schools’ do not exhaust the range of candidate drivers. As Erdoğan keeps on airing his criticism against the UN Security Council that “the world is greater than five” (Hürriyet Daily News, 2018a), and there is a strong quest for independence in Turkey, also on the production of military hardware—a key driver of the recurrent calls for “co-production” and “transfer of technology”—Turkey could also be on a path towards further independence in the security realm, however infeasible this will sound to the outside observer. Also, a core driver of divergence and conflict between Turkey and EU/NATO/US is that Turkey is relatively isolated on its top-two security concerns of the present, the PKK (and its regional off-shoots) and FETÖ. In any case, a further turn not eastward, but inward is also an option.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, many will argue that a reorientation towards Russia on security (and economy) is not feasible either and will stumble on reality checks again and again if attempted. On security, Turkey is simply too entrenched in, and too dependent on, the NATO umbrella—also as a leverage in negotiations with Russia—to seriously jeopardize it. And economically, Turkey is too dependent on especially Europe to let Russia challenge it.<sup>33</sup>

With such caveats in mind, what is the current paper’s assessment of the alignments and differences on security between Turkey and Russia? For one, leadership in both countries seem keen on forging deeper ties between the two countries, as 2019 will be the year of Russian culture in Turkey, and the year of Turkish culture in Russia (Daily Sabah, 2018a). Also, Turkey decided not to align itself with its European and NATO partners on evicting Russian diplomatic staff over the Skripal affair (Daily Sabah, 2018b), thus following the position on Russia over Ukraine and Crimea in 2014 of not aligning with the US or EU in implementing sanctions on Russia. Add to this the fact that Turkey and Russia are growing further and structurally intertwined in the field of energy with the construction of Turkstream and the Russian engagements in building Turkey’s first nuclear power plant in Akkuyu on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. They have developed a level and frequency of dialogue to nip in the bud burgeoning differences, and an ability to turn a blind eye to

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<sup>32</sup> This still leaves the conjecture that Turkey is not merely growing more authoritarian (see e.g. Hürriyet Daily News, 2018a), but also that this makes it difficult, if not meaningless, to talk of a strategic orientation other than in the direction of further consolidation of power. See Section five for further discussion of such more general points.

<sup>33</sup> To illustrate this, Russia does not make it onto Turkey’s top-10 export markets in 2017, but seven EU members did. Bearing in mind challenges surrounding Turkey’s trade-balance and current account deficit, the EU by far outmatches Russia on importance, even with Russian gas and nuclear power in mind.



their differences e.g. on Syria. And arguably, the AKP government seems to have left the ideological high-tide of post-national and revisionist strides in support Sunni insurgency groups for regime changes in their neighbourhood to the side—especially since the ouster of chief ideologist Ahmet Davutoğlu—in favour of a support for national integrity, and against the toppling of autocratic regimes in its immediate neighbourhood. Finally, Turkey and Russia seem to concur on a shared push to make the US leave Syria and leave the endgame to the Astana trio.

If not necessarily historically, this draws the outline of a current and near future scenario where the Turkish-Russian stars are aligned to drive Turkey-EU relations (amongst others) into a more conflictual direction.

That said, several variables could come to tip the scales back in a more pro-European and pro-NATO orientation. As extremist jihadist groups amass in the Turkey-controlled Syrian northwestern crescent, a difficult balancing act on these groups await. Also, will Russia (and Iran) be willing to acquiesce on a prolonged Turkish presence in Afrin? What if the Turkish nationalist push for independence also on security yet again comes to run counter to Russian interests; if Russia for instance, returns to a pro-active insistence on including Syrian Kurdish PYD as a strong and independent actor on laying out the contours of a future Syria. There are enough questions to go by here, left alone the number of frozen conflicts between Turkey and Russia in their shared neighbourhood.

But with such caveats duly noted—along with the caveat outlined above that questions the feasibility of aligning further with Russia on security—there are several reasons to take seriously the fact that alignments between Turkey and Russia could well trump differences in the near future to propel Turkey and the EU into a scenario of more conflict on security.

### 3.3 Contours of a future scenario

If, for the sake of argument, it would be possible to isolate Turkey’s security relations with Russia, *ceteris paribus*, then it would drive Turkey-EU relations in the direction of conflictual cooperation in 2023. Whether or not this will be more conflict than cooperation rests on a host of factors, including several factors external to the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia. Thus, Turkey’s relationship with Russia still lack sufficient depth to make it immune to winds of change. Leadership change in either Turkey or Russia could be one such crucial change, since much in the relationship hinges on choices of the current leadership rather than deep-seated convergence on institutional or popular levels.

Also, compared to Russia, Turkey is an “open” country on both security and economy in the sense that it is more vulnerable or susceptible to actions—either in the form of sanctions or the opposite—by the US, NATO or the EU. With the mentioned doubts about the feasibility of Russia as a substitute for NATO on security and the EU on economy in mind, NATO and the EU could make a difference in the direction of Turkey-Russian security-relations in 2023.



But gauging from most of the pertinent announcements by the current Turkish leadership it seems to share in on the Russian leadership’s frustrations with the West. Given that the Turkish leadership does not change in the near future, and wild card developments do not emerge to bring this leadership back on track with EU’s security priorities—the recent 2018 EC Country Report on Turkey (EC, 2018) notes that Turkey in the latest reporting period formally has aligned on the European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) on a mere 10 of 64 occasions (16%)—Russia also on this count is likely to hold a conflictual potential for Turkey-EU relations in 2023.

#### 4. Global security shifts and new (in-)security trends

The roles of Russia and the US in determining the near future of Turkey-EU security relations are also pitched against the background of both more abstract global security shifts and complicating new trends in types of security challenges.

The more abstract global shifts count developments such as (i) a tilting economic power balance, (ii) the rising tide of nationalism, (iii) demographic changes, (iv) climate changes, (v) mass movements, (vi) a larger role for regional- and non-state actors to play in emerging local conflicts resulting also from US retrenchment, (vii) divisions on who to count as a terrorist, (viii) a return to concerns about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of state actors such as North Korea, Iran and Russia, but also non-state actors vying to get their hands on WMD’s, etc.

New types of security threats especially count the deployment of information technology to inflict various forms of harm, ranging from peddling propaganda and false news to exploit societal rifts and sway elections, at one end of the spectrum, to cyber-attacks against critical infrastructure, at the other end.

In this section three, the paper will turn to a brief survey of these both more abstract and more elusive global security dynamics as well as the new complicating trends in types of security threats, again with the purpose of assessing which direction they are likely to drive Turkey-EU security relations into in a 2023 timeframe. Though the particular role and outcome of these drivers for Turkey-EU relations are less straightforward to detect, they are arguably at least as important and thus deserve mention here.

##### 4.1 Global security shifts

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, a key driver of international security relations these years is the perception of a waning international liberal order with concomitant international institutional support to the benefit of a resurgent Russia globally and rising tides of nationalism locally. The most recent iteration of the Freedom House report mapping developing trends in liberal rights across the world thus concluded that 2017 “marked the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of decline in global freedoms” (Freedom House, 2018). Whether or not it will lead to more conflict or stability e.g. in the MENA region is a matter of debate. What it does seem to entail, however and on the other hand, is a sharpening of the conflictual fault-lines between Turkey and the EU. In spite of the EU process, Turkey was thus the country to experience the largest drop on the Freedom house scales



over the last twelve years. Tensions are growing as a result of this and alignments on security concerns are waning, driving Turkey and Europe in a more conflictual orientation.

Another key global driver is to be found in the likelihood of global shifts in economic power. This trend also has many faces. First, the developing world and Asian countries in particular continue on an impressive trajectory of growth. Not only has China overtaken the US as the largest economy in purchasing power parity (Smith, 2017 & Allison, 2017<sup>34</sup>). Meanwhile, the EU27’s share of world GDP is predicted to fall below 10 percent in the same time span (PWC, 2017b). As argued in a recent article on “The End of the Democratic Century – Autocracy’s Global Ascendance”, this is key as wealth and prosperity holds considerably more sway to most countries than does democracy and human rights (Mounk & Foa, 2018). China and organizations such as SCO could thus emerge as attractive alternatives to the EU, removing a key centripetal force also for security relations. But as Turkey’s trade stands today, the EU is likely to retain its current position as the primary economic partner also into 2023.

Transnational terrorism is also likely to stay in place as a key driver of Turkey-EU relations, if the acute ISIS-related danger has experienced a drop in European threat perceptions following the near-defeat of ISIS as a claimed state. Following up on Yildırım’s MCS speech mentioned in the introduction, cooperation is likely to continue on fighting ISIS both militarily, but increasingly so also through police-cooperation. That said, alternative perceptions on who to count as a terrorist will remain a deep driver of conflict. There are obvious disagreements on the PYD/YPG in Syria and the Gülenist organization designated by Turkey as a terrorist group (FETÖ). Perceptions in Turkey are ripe that EU countries and the US are actually supporting these claimed terrorist groups to subvert Turkey. From the point of view of Europe, on the other hand, there is support for Turkey’s fight against the PKK and attempt to punish those directly responsible for the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. But claimed anti-terrorist purge that goes well beyond that is (and is likely to remain) a key source of criticism out of the EU. This leaves some of the groups in north-western Syria with whom Turkey are working in one form or another at the moment, most prominently Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham, the successor to the Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra group. This is also likely to be a driver of conflict in the near future.

The return to centre stage of weapons of mass destruction count as a fourth global security shift with likely implications for Turkey-EU security relations. With North Korea, Iran and the claimed Russian possession of a hypersonic nuclear bomb in mind, and technological developments also within this field more generally, questions of alignments on these countries are key. Leaving North Korea to the side here, Iran and Russia become key. Turkey and the EU also align on a wish to uphold the JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran vis-à-vis the hardliners in Washington DC, something that could drive relations in the direction of cooperation (Lindgaard, 2017b), if in tested waters and

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<sup>34</sup> See, Graham Allison, *Destined for War. Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017, p. 10-12, 118-119. Others are predicting that India may well surpass the US and become the second largest economy by 2050 (PWC, 2017a).



under US adding centrifugal pressure. This leaves Russia. Already addressed in section two above, it suffices to say here that Turkey will find it increasingly difficult to join in on the mounting European and American pressure on Russia, a further driver of conflict.

Other global shifts of course count changing demographics, climate change and resultant mass movements of people from more challenged parts of the world to the less challenged parts. As seen with the 2016 1:1 migration “statement”, this is likely to impact Turkey-EU relations, also on security. Cooperation is of course a possible future scenario in this field, as has been the case with the 2016 statement. But conflict is also not out of the question, as the run-up to the statement reminded everyone of, and as the serious disagreements over the deployment of Frontex and NATO ships in the Aegean as part of the agreement reminded everyone of. In the 2023 timeframe of the present paper, the paper will thus store these global changes in the category of wild cards that are difficult to predict, but with the likelihood of enjoying a high impact.

## 4.2 New trends in security threats

This leaves the potential impact on Turkey-EU relations of the steep rise in hybrid threats all stemming from ever galloping developments in and exploitations of information technology. Since exploiting information technology to peddle propaganda, spread false news, and conduct cyber-attacks—all the hype to the side—is but a new tool in the hands of aggressors and a new means of inflicting harm of various sorts and at various levels, much here depends on who the aggressor is, and who the defendant. And it of course depends on where Turkey and the EU stand on the aggressor and defendant.

Hybrid threats have been identified as far back as 2010 by NATO’s Capstone Concept as a key source of concern for the future of security.<sup>35</sup> The EU has further developed its strategic thinking on the concept<sup>36</sup> and has most recently supported the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats by the Government of Finland in April 2016.<sup>37</sup> It is not entirely out of the question that Turkey and the EU can cooperate further within this field.

But the question remains what direction these types of threat are likely to drive Turkey-EU into. Is Turkey likely to align itself with Europe on Russia, also in the case of propaganda wars and cyber-attacks? Can we imagine official exploitation of ‘fake news’, ‘propaganda wars’, ‘hacking’, ‘leaks’ of classified material, etc. against each other? The cautious assessment of this paper is that cooperation in this field is likely, but that a conflictual potential with a high impact is there to be exploited, which could amplify a conflictual orientation.

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<sup>35</sup> [European Parliament, 2015](#)

<sup>36</sup> [EEAS, 2015](#); [EC, 2016](#)

<sup>37</sup> [EEAS, 2017](#)





## 5. Global security-related drivers and a FEUTURE scenario

In a January 2018 interview in *Spiegel* magazine, titled “We are Seeing What Happens When the U.S. Pulls Back”, German Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel made the following statement:

We are in the midst of an era of competition between democratically and autocratically constituted states. And the latter are already trying to gain influence in the European Union and to drive a wedge between us. (Gabriel, 2018)

The 2018 MSC Report presents a strong case for the challenges involved in the claimed erosion of a rules-based international liberal order. This is perceived as the number one global security threat to Europe and the West—by co-presenting this tendency with a marked difference between a decline in defence spending in Gabriel’s ‘democratically constituted states’ and an increase in the ‘autocratic’ ones (Munich Security Conference, 2018: 7). The concern is compounded by a marked contrast between a nostalgic imagery of the US as a former defender of the liberal world order, on the one hand, and the current Hobbesian picture made explicit by Trump advisors, H.R. McMaster and Gary Cohn:

[T]he world is not a ‘global community’ but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it” (McMaster & Cohn, 2017)

Granted that this is an adequate picture of some of the most abstract—but arguably also deepest—global security dynamics, Turkey-EU security relations will find themselves under their influence. The question is what direction this will take. If, on the one hand, the fault-line that Gabriel paints is both true and likely to gain salience in the 2023 context, then the risks of an either-or scenario where Turkey in particular will be under the pressure to choose sides, are amplified. And as things stand today, centrifugal forces could very well gain the upper hand and push the relationship in the direction of an all-out conflict.

If, on the other hand, global security relations are likely to grow even muddier with ever waning support for a democratic and liberal world order and strong institutions such as the UN, NATO and the EU, also in Europe, then a more pragmatic form of interest-based and transactional cooperation is likely to prevail. This will help Turkey evade calls to choose sides, such as in recent calls from the UK for show of solidarity against Russia on the ‘nerve agent’ case (Hürriyet Daily News, 2018b; Yeni Şafak, 2018)<sup>38</sup>, and pursue the ever more pragmatic and ad hoc bilateral relationships also with countries such as Iran and Russia. Europe, on the other hand, will still be interested in cooperating with Turkey on common interests such as fighting terrorism, curbing immigration, and the like. This would leave an ad hoc scenario of transactional, interest-based cooperation where centripetal forces would balance centrifugal ones from case to case.

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<sup>38</sup> Turkey seemingly did join in on the 14 March NATO statement in support of the UK’s suspicion of Russia as the perpetrator of the nerve agent attack in the UK.



Irrespective of whether the overall future scenario is one of ‘either-or’ or ‘muddier’ nature, centrifugal forces appear too salient, too pertinent and too durable to prevent the relationship from moving in the direction of convergence on security.

### 5.1 Global security-related drivers in sum

Following as we have done in this paper the analytical matrices of centripetal/centrifugal forces and a few helpful tools from RSCT, the paper now outlines the global security drivers that are likely to push Turkey and the EU in one direction or the other in 2023. Outlining both centripetal and centrifugal drivers in this section, the following section 4.2 will conclude by assessing their consequence in either an ‘either-or’ or ‘muddier’ scenario for 2023.

Events with global security impact have acted as both centripetal and centrifugal forces on Turkey-EU relations. As unfolded in this paper, both types of forces are likely to remain, if with the centrifugal forces in a more salient and influential position looking forward. The EU will need Turkey to address threats emanating not only from a reemerging Russia, but also to deal with migration and anti-terrorism, let alone as a sheer military force within the NATO orbit, acting as a ‘buffer’ against or ‘bridgehead’ to a troubled region. Turkey will need the EU and NATO for economy and security. But basic security alignments are likely to remain thin increasing the likelihood of conflict.

From Turkey’s relations to the US, a few alignments are arguably still in place to support this picture. One such alignment is a wish to keep both Syria and Iraq as undivided, sovereign nations. Another is a shared wish to prevent another round of Sunni Arab frustration in Syria and Iraq to fuel the rise of an ISIS 2.0 and block the return of the bulk of Sunni Arab refugees. Depending on whether or not the hardliners of Washington D.C. will prevail on Iran, Turkey could arguably also be a helpful mediator in further negotiations with Tehran. Also, in this context, Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg has been a voice of diplomacy, and an arbiter of continued dialogue and cooperation within the auspices of NATO, however difficult this might be.

But Turkey’s relationship with the US is also in a state of crisis management at the moment. Anti-Americanism in Turkey is rampant. Alignments on Russia, Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia are all but completely absent. Whether or not to support or fight the Syrian Kurdish PYD/YPG is also a bone of contention. US perceptions of arrests of US citizens in Turkey, and Erdoğan’s seeming willingness to engage in hostage diplomacy, is also a source of concern. Inversely, widespread perceptions in Turkey that the US is actively supporting the Gülen-movement against Turkey, will also not help.

It can seem that the one silver lining for Turkey-EU relations to be found here is that the US revocation of the JCPOA deal (as well as the move of the US Israeli embassy to Jerusalem) could push Turkey and the EU closer together, against the US. But this is a minefield with considerable risks, and unlikely to serve as a foundation of any kind of consolidated cooperation on security.

On Russia, much depends on whether or not Turkish-Russian relations are perceived to be ‘without trust’ or reflecting a ‘deeper convergence’ than perhaps meets the eye. Mindful of the fact



that Turkey’s security relations with Russia have vacillated considerably, this paper still has detected an orientation towards a ‘deeper convergence’, especially since the 2000’s , and in particular in the outlook of the current leaderships. Details to the side, this is likely to retain a conflictual potential for Turkey-EU relations in the near future.

On the global shifts, economy is still likely to act as a centripetal force between Turkey and the EU into 2023, irrespective of the much-debated Turkish energy-tourist-dependency on Russia, and the much-heralded ‘rise’ of China. Mounting disagreements on terror aside here, cooperation on the anti-terror campaign against ISIS is also likely to continue, if with a waning salience and impact. Finally, Turkey is acutely aware of its lack of an independent WMD defence or deterrence. In this context, neither the S-400 (if the deal materializes) nor thought-up Russian help are likely to match NATO on this count, pushing Turkey in the direction of NATO. But the fight against terrorism complicates things, with some ground for cooperation, but increasing non-alignment on who to priorities and count as the most troublesome terror groups, especially in Syria. Whether or not hybrid threats will emerge as a source of cooperation or conflict to a large degree depends on the question of whether or not the current Turkish leadership—if it will remain in power into 2023—will further distance itself from the liberal order that is not only under a perceived threat, but also makes up a key fault-line in contemporary global security dynamics, and is likely to do so also in the near future.

## 5.2 Conflictual cooperation – the most likely of the possible 2023 scenarios

In sum, centrifugal forces stemming from key aspects of Turkey’s relationships with both the US and Russia as well as some of the more abstract global shifts will likely remain salient in a 2023 timeframe, countering the centripetal forces to push Turkey and the EU in the direction of conflictual cooperation.

Mindful, again, of growing unpredictability and erosion of rules-based engagements as global dynamics are tied to the outlined waning of the international liberal order, the question remains what more concretely this will entail. Will the growing nationalism as the flip-side of the waning liberal order entail further escalation of the tendency towards conflict between Turkey and Greece for instance, bearing in mind security-related incidents such as Turkish armed forces stopping an Italian ship on its way to explore gas fields off the Cypriot coast (The Maritime Executive, 2018), the collision of Turkish and Greek patrol boats off the coast of a disputed islet in the Aegean (Straits Times, 2018), the Greek denial to extradite eight Turkish soldiers that escaped to Greece in a Helicopter as the 15 July 2016 coup attempt failed (Hürriyet Daily News, 2018c), and the arrest of two Greek soldiers on espionage charges (DW, 2018)? Or will cooperation on migration—the 26 March Varna meeting between Erdoğan and EU representatives has pitched the March 2016 1:1 migration ‘statement’ as the bedrock for further cooperation (Yetkin, HDN, 2018)—and the more difficult issues of terrorism (Yeni Şafak, 2018c) keep relations on track, if on a more ad hoc and transactional basis?



Turkey and the US are unlikely to mend fences any time soon, and Turkey is unlikely to align with the US on Russia, Iran, Israel, and the Kurds. In any case, Turkey’s perceived tendency to play more horses—possibly in a push to gain more independence on security—is unlikely to rebuild trust between Turkey and the US (and NATO, and the EU) in the relatively short 2023 time-frame of this paper. On Russia, the ‘deeper convergence’ might not have the upper hand historically, but Turkey and Russia in the current global context and with their respective current leaderships seem prone to at least be on a trajectory towards deeper convergence. This holds the potential to make security-relations between Turkey and the EU even more complicated in the years to come; especially if the ‘either-or’ scenario will continue on its current path towards further entrenchment.

As this paper has argued, however, drivers of a centripetal kind, keeping Turkey-EU security relations away from the brink are also likely to persist. NATO diplomacy and willingness to embrace the hard talks on security differences between Turkey and EU members seems to be one such driver. Re-establishing stability in e.g. Syria and easing the migrant-pressure to curb societal insecurity in both Turkey and Europe is another joint interest, if pursued on different tracks at the moment. The economy; not least the highly symbolic talks on visa liberalisation and an updated Custom Union are also likely to act as a centripetal driver in the 2023 time-frame. In the best version of the scenarios on conflictual cooperation, Turkey will also get attached in one way or another to the EU-25 Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) on the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and enjoy a successful partnership with French-Italian EUROSAM consortium over the joint development of the SAMP/T Aster-30 NT missile defence system that is interoperable with Turkey’s NATO security infrastructure.

## 6. Conclusion (and initial recommendations)

This paper has presented a survey of the direction global security dynamics are likely to push Turkey-EU relations into in a 2023 time-frame. This has included a survey of the role US-Turkey relations will play in this context, as well as the Russia-Turkey relations. Also, the paper has outlined and assessed the role of more abstract global dynamics such as economic shifts, the waning liberal order and the concomitant rise of nationalisms, new trends in threats emanating from transnational terrorism, and the returning role of nuclear WMD on the global security agenda. Finally, the paper has briefly touched on what role hybrid cyber threats might have on EU-Turkey security relations.

The assessed collective upshot is that the EU and Turkey are likely to address a scenario of conflictual cooperation in 2023, leaving some uncertainty open as to whether or not this will be more conflict than cooperation than vice-versa. The question that remains is how to address the challenges that stem from this scenario. Here follows three initial recommendations, all based on the analyses outlined in this paper.

First, work needs to be done to ensure that trust on key security issues does not erode further and alignments on basic threat perceptions and security interests are re-established. Difficult enough in itself, this will have to include a balancing act between the US and Russia. This will be hard work,



but concrete places to start could be joint efforts to defuse and nip in the bud the escalation of a regional conflict between Iran, on the one hand, and Israel and Saudi Arabia on the other. This is no easy feat, as Turkey is perceived in the region to be too partisan in the Iranian camp to figure as a potential mediator. But Turkey does have a recent past of mediation—going off of RSCT, Turkey’s insulator role provides Turkey with a unique geostrategic opportunity structure to figure as a mediator—and the EU is sufficiently neutral to be able to play a mediating role. Also, Turkey has also at least until recently been a champion of the Sunni Muslim cause in Syria and Iraq, something that repeatedly has nudged Europe to laud Turkey as a ‘model’ ally in the fight against ISIS. The EU and Turkey could join hands in ensuring that Syria and Iraq do not embark on another round of Sunni exclusion and oppression increasingly the likelihood of an ISIS 2.0, and making a return of refugees more problematic. Now, with Russia and the US firmly placed on the opposite sides on Iran’s role in the region and Assad’s longevity as the ruler of Syria, this could pitch Turkey and the EU in the role of mediator between the US and Russia. A host of caveats and difficulties naturally apply here, but attempts in directions such as these two would help remind Turkey and the EU that they can work together to address still present joint security interests and serve the roles of a balancing force against a further escalation of an ‘either-or’ scenario outlined above.

Secondly, joint efforts to find concrete venues for on the ground cooperation on key elements such as the PESCO, EUROSAM, joint efforts against hybrid cyber-attacks, cooperation to ensure that WMD in the hands of both state and non-state actors do not rise to new levels of strategic threats on the global scene, etc could serve to keep elements of a rules-based international security environment in place. This is a clear interest of both parties.

Thirdly, it is as important to remind Turkish decision makers that a pivot away from the EU, NATO and the US on security will leave it exposed and without much leverage in relation to both Iran and Russia, as it is to remind European decision makers that Europe still enjoys several areas of security alignment with Turkey, and that Turkey geostrategically is a key ally for addressing core European security concerns such as curbing migration and fighting Islamist terrorism.

Such and other creative ideas are at the least a key desideratum to ensure that the likely 2023 conflictual cooperation is kept from the brink.





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# ABOUT FEUTURE

FEUTURE sets out to explore fully different options for further EU-Turkey cooperation in the next decade, including analysis of the challenges and opportunities connected with further integration of Turkey with the EU.

To do so, FEUTURE applies a comprehensive research approach with the following three main objectives:

1. Mapping the dynamics of the EU-Turkey relationship in terms of their underlying historical narratives and thematic key drivers.
2. Testing and substantiating the most likely scenario(s) for the future and assessing the implications (challenges and opportunities) these may have on the EU and Turkey, as well as the neighborhood and the global scene.
3. Drawing policy recommendations for the EU and Turkey on the basis of a strong evidence-based foundation in the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

FEUTURE is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels, Director of the Centre for Turkey and European Union Studies at the University of Cologne and Dr. Nathalie Tocci, Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome.

The FEUTURE consortium consists of 15 renowned universities and think tanks from the EU, Turkey and the neighborhood.

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