



The Impact of Turkish-Russian Relations on the Security Dynamics of the Caucasus Region: A Study of Regional Alliances and Military Strategies (2014–2022)

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the impact of Turkish-Russian relations on the security dynamics of the Caucasus region from 2014 to 2022, focusing on regional alliances and military strategies. The Caucasus, a historically contested region, has become a focal point for the competing interests of Turkey and Russia, particularly after the 2008 Georgia-Russia war. While Russia views the Caucasus as part of its sphere of influence, Turkey, with its Turkic and Sunni Muslim ties, sees it as a strategic area. Despite historical rivalries, Turkish-Russian relations improved significantly after 2016, driven by mutual interests in reshaping the regional balance of power. This study explores how this rapprochement has influenced security dynamics, alliances, and military strategies in the Caucasus. Using a qualitative approach, the paper analyzes key events, such as the 2016 ceasefire and NATO missile strikes in 2018, to understand the evolving relationship between Turkey and Russia and its implications for regional stability. The findings reveal that while cooperation has increased, underlying tensions persist, particularly in areas like Syria and energy security. The study concludes that the Turkish-Russian partnership has redefined the security architecture of the Caucasus, with significant implications for regional and international security.

Keywords: Turkish-Russian Relations, Caucasus Region, Security Dynamics, Regional Alliances, Military Strategies, NATO, Geopolitical Rivalry, Post-Soviet Space.

Introduction

This Research Paper investigate Turkish-Russian relations and their significant effects on the security dynamics in the Caucasus from 2014 to 2022. Since Georgia's 2008 war with Russia, security in the Caucasus has been shaped by competing Russian and Turkish interests, leading to a complex geopolitical landscape. Each state's national interests often clash; Russia considers the Caucasus as its sphere of influence post-Soviet Union, while Turkey, with its Turkic and Sunni Muslim ties, views it as a vital area of strategic interest, complicating dynamics further (Arakelyan & Kassab, 2024). Neighboring countries harbor deep fears based on historical narratives and political realities, influencing regional alliances and cooperation strategies. Despite a history marked by rivalry and confrontations, Turkish-Russian relations improved rapidly after 2016, as both powers sought to reconfigure the regional balance of power, leading to transformative changes in security. Understanding the complex alliances and military strategies of key actors is essential, as these efforts shape the broader geopolitical tussle between Turkey and Russia. This essay aims to explore how the

rapprochement since 2016 influences alliances and military strategies in the Caucasus and how this compatibility affects the region's security dynamics during the specified timeframe (Goren, 2018).

The most strategic region for global superpowers throughout history has been without a doubt Eurasia. Different geopolitical theories have exposed the need to control this vast area. Strategic geographical theories have shown that whoever finds themselves in control of this area gains the upper hand in global power aspirations. Within this vast geopolitical space, the Caucasus has been of particular importance since it intertwines many different regions. Its unique geography allows whoever possesses power in the Caucasus to have an operational influence over the wider region. This is not limited to continental powers, as it can also affect global sea powers in terms of Eurasian security. For this reason, the Caucasus has always been a multicultural region host to rich national resources. Its culture, demography, and history have transformed it into a focal area in which different geopolitical interests clash. It has thus frequently been a cradle for rivalries and conflicts of interest. However, since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus has become an area of contention between Turkey and Russia (Eldem, 2022). Turkey and Russia, as regional powers, have been the dominant actors in this region. The Caucasus is an area where the interests of Turkey and Russia clash because they have diverse and sometimes conflicting goals in the context of their broader geopolitical desires.

Historical Background of Turkish-Russian Relations

Since the end of the Cold War, the multifaceted and intricate relations between Turkey and Russia have emerged as a focal point for extensive research as well as widespread speculations within academic and political circles alike. The initial period of these relations was characterized by extensive cooperation stemming from a sense of Western alienation and a pressing need on Turkey's part to secure a reliable supply of nuclear fuel from Russia, alongside seeking resolution for various conflicts present in the surrounding region, most notably in Transcaucasia. Contrastingly, the subsequent period ushered in an era of competition and sporadic yet profound crises arising from the complexities of Turkey's NATO membership and the revival of long-standing historical disputes that had lain dormant.

The most recent phase, which has been ongoing from 2016 onwards, is notably highlighted by a marked solidification of Russian-Turkish rapprochement in direct response to increasing Western pressures and challenges. This evolution of relations cannot be understood without considering a variety of contemporary regional and global circumstances, which include the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ensuing chaos that permeated Russia's near abroad. The end of the bipolar world has also allowed Turkey to adopt a strategy of balancing its relations with Russia through forming alliances with Western powers, while also navigating significant domestic political transitions that have brought about substantial changes in the construction of national identities on both sides (Koçak, 2021).

Additionally, an array of other influential factors has played a pivotal role in shaping the regional balances of power. During this time, the prolonged alliance between Turkey and its historical Western allies has morphed into a dimension of significant anomaly in the regional context. Nevertheless, by critically investigating the dynamics underlying this complex triadic relationship from the Russian perspective, it is argued that Washington and Brussels possess the capacity to deter Turkey a nation that occupies a strategically pivotal geography from

gravitating further towards Russia and China, but only if they are able to come to terms with Moscow. (Kelkitli, 2021) Until such a reconciliation is achieved, it is reasonable to anticipate that the Turkish-Russian rapprochement will endure, particularly given the considerable, multifaceted energy and military-technical cooperation that exists beneath the surface, potentially holding more significance than what appears at first glance. Consequently, NATO's southeastern flank is likely to remain vulnerable as a result of these evolving dynamics.

This study aims to provide both a critical assessment of the existing literature regarding this relationship and present a well-founded argument derived from a historical-materialist analysis concerning the unfolding of the NATO-US-Turkey-Russia Triangle. The median alliance forged among the US, Russia, and Turkey is built upon a vast array of historical, material, and ideational factors, chief among which are the presence of long-standing imperial structures as well as the legacy of post-World War II divisions of the world which were shaped significantly during the era of the Cold War (Öniş, 2023). By 2018, Turkey had successfully acquired 24 Boeing CH-47F Chinook helicopters as part of its military modernization efforts. However, Turkey's demands for a critical "killer switch" to effectively respond to a "friend or foe identification" command have run into significant obstacles. The US Congress, along with the Biden administration, made the consequential decision to halt the supply of essential spare parts necessary for maintaining these helicopters, which has drastically curtailed their operability and effectiveness in the Turkish Armed Forces.

Historical Context of the Caucasus Region

The Caucasus region is known for its unique geography, diverse cultures, and intricate political landscape. The subject of innumerable wars and epic novels, it has enamored and bewildered travelers, strategists, and revolutionaries alike. It has long stood at the crossroads of empires diverse populations keeping one another at arm's length, although not always successfully (Sahakyan & Lo, 2025). Culturally, it has been home to religious and political ideas alike, as well as to migratory communities forever in need of new spaces under the sun. Since the ancient times, the chain of Fortress Mountains for which the neighborhood is named has loomed large over the politics of sun- worshippers, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and atheists from the Turkic, Persian, and Slavic worlds, as well as from many others.

The South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia) and the North Caucasus (Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Adygea) have been far removed from the common tumult of Great Power politics up until very recently. Although trade and missionaries from all of the neighbors settled in distinct and sometimes disputed zones inhabited by a cacophony of bewildering tongues, not one side exercised hegemony for too long. Of course, almost all of the population was subjected to at least one of the historic empires at some point, and often many, too. But the failure of the empires to secure and hold the upper mountains and millennia of equal-sized battles interspersed with brief periods of tranquility accorded this most rugged edges of empires some agency over their fates (Amirbek & Aydin, 2015).

From the expansion of Great Powers in the region to the 18th-century militarily enforced peace treaties favorable to the neighbors, through the modern limping towards nation-statehood, and the periodic implosions since then, the politics have always entailed struggles between the outside powers and with the outside powers. The apparent outside powers have historically included Rome, Byzantium, the Golden Horde, the Mongol Ilkhanate, the Safavids,

the Ottomans, the Circassians, the Vikings of Rus', Venice, the Aq Qoyunlu, the Afsharids, the Saffavids, the Hotakis, the Russians, the British, the French, the Nazis, and, more importantly, the Soviets. To these must be added the common fights against internal imperial-like enemies. Circassians resisted the Khazar Khagans and before and after them empires arose in the plain, trying to build direct land access to the Great Sea ambitions also held by the still regional players to the East Farsiwans, Rum-Seljuks, Ottomans, and Russians, in various guises.

Security Dynamics and Alliances Framework

Security systematically protects individual or collective identity from diverse potential threats, arising from personal vendettas or societal strategies. It is not a concrete state but a dynamic, relative concept with myriad elements and pressing issues. The use of military force as a security measure serves not just as an active response but also as a deterrent, often creating an illusion of safety for elite consensus through militarist tactics. The understanding of security and its anticipatory defense strategies shifts continuously, shaped by state and ally responses to various threats (Mälksoo, 2021).

Security dynamics can be analyzed from dual aspects, as both traditional threats, like territorial disputes from other state actions, and non-traditional threats impacting societies broadly, including economic instability, cultural conflicts, and human rights violations. This complexity generates significant government interest in safeguarding security. The study examines how security alliances and state strategies react to threats posed by state and non-state actors. In regions like the East Mediterranean and Caucasus, security dynamics complicate due to ethnic diversity and historical rivalries among major powers like Turkey, Russia, and Iran, especially following Russia's aggressive posturing since 2008. State and non-state actors perceive security threats through a lens of fear, often engaging in complex dilemmas that may not readily escalate to military conflict but involve competitive maneuvers rooted in mistrust (Bukhari et al. 2024).

Both traditional and non-traditional threats reflect interconnected strategies and alliances, influenced by political culture, historical grievances, and military capability, shaping states' competition within security frameworks. Security policies are therefore intertwined with historical contexts and geopolitical aspirations, demanding a robust and well-structured regional security architecture. Security requires a nuanced understanding beyond binary explanations, proposing a comprehensive, multidimensional analytical approach to state dynamics. Particularly in analyzing the Caucasus region, where Turkey and Russia play pivotal roles, significant differences in perspectives arise, particularly concerning conflicts and territorial occupations. The study's focus is on alliances and military strategies responding to external threats, employing diverse conceptual frameworks to better understand the overall architecture of security. Addressing these complex issues necessitates a multifaceted analysis for a meaningful grasp of security dynamics (Goren, 2018).

Analysis of Turkish-Russian Relations (2014–2022)

Since 2014, significant incidents and developments have occurred to change the course of Turkish-Russian relations. The changing course of these relations is crucial, as they directly impact the security dynamics of the Caucasus region. The changing course of Turkish-Russian relations from 2014 to 2022 and the impact of this changing course on the security dynamics of the Caucasus region are analyzed by sketching the results of the existing analysis in the

light of this in- depth analysis (Goren, 2018). As the analysis is composed differently, it does not only encompass cooperation but also confrontation dynamics. On this basis, a nuanced interpretation of the data is evidently possible, as the data includes several facets of cooperation and confrontation. The analysis is presented in variance components but as a sum of components, which ensures learning about Turkish- Russian relations instead of learning about the analyses' own system. While Russia has to deal with the latent factors characterized as threats to its security and sovereignty, its possible attempts to secure itself by turning Turkey into a regional satellite via its partner imperil cease-fire and protract the convivial resolution of the conflict and resettlement of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons (IDPs) in its tantamount territory. Russia's aviation dominion over Syria grows for it a partnership doggedly featured by entente after its pro-Syrian government-imposed "safe zones" dominion in Syria. Turkey noticeably wields a role in its rendering; enhancing its military- strategic and economic cooperation with Russia, delinking its NATO- based security from the US (which paves the way for Turkey's potential exclusion from this military alliance in a moment of belligerency) and contributing to the Syrian issue's solution ensuring its future territorial integrity (Sadıkoğlu, 2022). Russia safeguards the regime by repelling and repressing opposition as well as terrorist groupings subsumed in the ceasefire term of agreements via air artillery that is alent to conventionally fixed combat because airstrikes are taken accord as belligerent activities in present-day IHL.

Impact of Turkish-Russian Relations on the Security Dynamics of the Caucasus Region

This study investigates the changes occurring in the security dynamics of the Caucasus region and the impact of this change on the regional political stability, concentrating on the growing alliance between Turkey and Russia. The study focuses on the following aspects to analyze the situation in the Caucasus in a more comprehensive way: the conflict and rivalry of regional actors since the collapse of the USSR, Turkey's and Russia's political and military activity in the region, and the nature and alliances formed and maintained by the local actors of the region. (Matjasch, 2021)It especially addresses the new military strategies of actors in the Caucasian region regarding their ties with Turkey and Russia and the balance of power between them.

Since 2014, Turkish and Russian strategies have clashed, except for the 2016 ceasefire that halted indirect confrontations. NATO missile strikes occurred on April 14, 2018. Each military intervention was analyzed for agreements, confrontations, and strategy changes, particularly focusing on Armenia and Azerbaijan's status. Their alliances with Russia and Turkey since 1999 have redefined their roles in an emerging Cold War, affecting war strategies and rearmament. The consequences for governance and societal cohesion in these states are examined. The analysis includes the nature of agreements and their role in limiting foreign influence, as well as the capabilities of local military forces. Changes in contracting parties following military cooperation treaties are also discussed. Regional actors' involvement, including Western partners and historical adversaries, is highlighted (Armutlu, 2023). The signing of military agreements is linked to broader contexts like energy to understand the territorial balance of power in the Greater Caucasus and the geostrategic interests spanning three continents.

Military Strategies of Turkey and Russia in the Caucasus Region

The Caucasus region has emerged as an area of probable cooperation between Turkey and Russia in shaping the security environment due to reciprocal recognition of national interests.

Nevertheless, this emerging situation does not imply a strategic alliance between the two countries since potential collaborative efforts are counterbalanced by competitive military pursuits to varying extents (Asadov2023). The military viewpoints of the two countries regarding these regions draw attention against the backdrop of shifting power balances. This section aims to delineate the framework of military postures based on doctrines, capabilities, nature of new weaponry, and deployment of weapons in regional perspective in relation to the security considerations of both countries. The central conduits through which Turkey frames and implements its military posture are examined with an eye to discerning the primary characteristics of military policy that are responsive to, and co-constitutive with, broader geopolitical goals. Developments, including the threat environment, operations and training, capabilities, proliferation concerns, alliances and cooperation, and defense industrial practices and policies, are analyzed to offer an account of Turkey's distinct approach to the military and security dynamics of the Caucasus region compared to Russia. After this examination of Turkey, the interplay of Russian military policy with the above-mentioned factors, including security goals, and of the specifically Caucasus dynamics (design, exercises, military presence, and arms sales), is explored to present a picture of the dual and entangled dynamics that shape this region (Shlykov, 2023). Finally, the implications of these military postures for the security and power-balance of the region, and their possible formal and discreet cooperation/conflict, are assessed.

Comparative Analysis of Military Strategies

The Macro-Perspective While studying the evolving Turkish and Russian relationship within the variable geometries of alliances and confrontations in the Caucasus, it is crucial to analyse the military strategies each country employs in the region. This effort is complemented by a comparative analysis, juxtaposing the military doctrine and practice of both countries regarding the Caucasus. Even with their diverse capabilities, a robust military strategy can be subject to certain strengths and weaknesses that might be masked at the first look (Ismayil & Yilmaz, 2022). An understanding of military strategies in turn benefits from a precise contextualization in national interests, psychological dispositions, and historical strategical experiences. This study will approach the military strategy of Turkey by accentuating its historical and geographical particularities, and of Russia in the Caucasus through an emphasis on its multifaceted military modernization and historical encroachments.

A comparative analysis scrutinizes the military strategies of antagonistic powers by regarding the complementarity of their strengths and weaknesses as well as reciprocally plausible assessments. A predominately rational choice approach in military strategy, emphasizing the factor unit and its behavioural decisions, is furthermore complemented by an investigation of the effect of alliances on the engrossed policies. In particular, the Turkish-Russian case reveals a two-sided engagement in regional alliances (Golmohammadi, 2021). While one party is pushing towards an alliance, the other party feels increasingly cornered and devises military strategies in consequence. Through the reciprocal negation of their common third parties, Turkey and Russia bear witness to the realist depiction of alliances as results of common enmities. Contrasting the military engagement patterns, the humane face of strategy reveals underlying motives that render even the most cynical prophecies of ineluctable conflict potentially open to reassessment and the virtues of cooperation salient – albeit contingent on the alignment of interests.

Role of External Actors in the Security Dynamics of the Caucasus Region

The Caucasus is a strategically vital region at the crossroads of East and West, North and South, with complex security dynamics influenced by unresolved territorial disputes, ethnic diversity, economic challenges, and geopolitical rivalries. Turkish-Russian relations significantly impact these dynamics, yet current academic discourse focuses primarily on energy-related security concerns, overlooking the transformative effects of these relations on regional alliances and military strategies. (Matjasch, 2021) Although historically rivalrous, Turkey and Russia have increasingly aligned due to regional and international changes. Key low points, such as the 2015 jet crisis, have not deterred them from managing conflicting interests in Syria.

Turkey's distancing from the West, particularly after the 2016 coup attempt, has further facilitated rapprochement. Tensions in Turkish-American relations arise from several issues, including Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile system and US support for Kurdish forces in Syria. Turkey perceives NATO-Russian ties as a security threat, recalling their historical rivalry. Despite conflicting interests with the US, Turkey is vital to NATO's southern flank due to its geopolitical position and ties with former Soviet republics. The current tension with the US, combined with the strengthening of Turkish-Russian relations, has enabled Turkey to seek closer military cooperation with Moscow. Russia is open to providing advanced military technology to Ankara, potentially influencing Turkey's strategic decisions regarding US security architecture in the region.

Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Stability

The Turkish and Caucasus case study highlights that while friendly multilevel alliances between Turkey and non-Turkish ethnic entities are necessary, they are insufficient for achieving regional military and political stability. The security of these entities or Turkey should not be compromised for short-term gains that could lead to severe military complications.

The study reveals that during key periods, effective security bureaucracies within Turkey and these entities utilized successful military strategies at all alliance levels, fostering regional stability. These strategies considered the security interests of opponents, stemming from comprehensive risk analysis and reliable preventive peace measures. Delving deeper into regional stability reveals a complex security web characterized by persistent dilemmas arising from conflicting alliance policies and military strategies that aim to weaken regional adversaries (Mehmetcik and Çelik2022). These tensions contribute significantly to the security dilemma faced by six sovereign states whose national sovereignty, regime types, and alliances influence military strategies. The analysis suggests that instead of focusing solely on alliances, the real measure of military capability lies in the expected post-intervention military capacities of individual states relative to their regional opponents. Thus, only these states and their security structures can craft future military strategies emphasizing sustainable security rather than mere power politics.

Implications for International Security

From an International Security Perspective, the Case of the Turkish-Russian Partnership and the Security Dynamics in the Caucasus Region, particularly in terms of recent regional alliances and particular military strategies, is an indicative case. But today's local dynamics, developments and strategies are not anymore operating in vacuo (Ismayil & Yilmaz, 2022).

The security of the Georgian and Azerbaijani regions are undergoing a potentially significant renegotiation and alignment. The repercussions of this renegotiation and alignment are in turn of considerable interest in the interests of international security. The intersection of the changing security matrix in the Caucasus with the one in the Black Sea, with the Mediterranean and beyond, could create a higher entropy and escalatory environment. In such a reading, while taking some ideal types for the sake of the analysis, the emerging need is also to understand how broader patterns and vectors interact. Nevertheless, such broader patterns and vectors are happening in highly complex and non-linear environments. Additionally, the post-2014 developments have seen a return to a number of older practices of strategic deterrence, including questioning national sovereignty, support for non-state actors, and increased militarization (Mälksoo, 2021). All these practices could have unpredictable consequences. Furthermore, local changes could have wide regional and even global implications, especially in the changing balance of power and shifting military strategies. Yet, the aim here is neither to predict specific outcomes nor follow a deterministic framework, nor to provide a comprehensive understanding of these interactions. Instead, it tries to sketch some of the contours, background conditions, possible trajectories and areas of inquiry.

Conclusion

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey's security engagement with countries in the Caucasus has shifted from an imperial concern in the Cold War to a new regional security involvement in the post-Cold War era. Since its entry into NATO in 1952, Turkey has been an important actor for the collective security policies regarding the southeast flank of the Alliance. Policies aimed at guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Turkey became one of the primary objectives of Turkish security after the end of the Second World War, and these policies have led to the strengthening of the security framework between the United States and Turkey. However, the regional strategic context of Turkey has changed significantly in terms of the military policy of Russia. The article analyzes the effect of the Turkish-Russian relations on the military deployment of both countries in the Caucasus.

For Turkey, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the landscape of international borders underwent significant changes, notably with Russia's refusal to acknowledge the territorial demarcations set by the 1921 Kars Treaty. This refusal coincided with Russia grappling with substantial economic problems, which resulted in a protracted period during which Russia adopted a passive and somewhat disengaged stance regarding its own borders for over a decade, allowing tensions to fester. Both Turkey and Russia, instead of engaging in direct confrontations, have often opted for indirect conflicts in various regional states, effectively sidestepping open confrontation when it comes to their interests. The complexities of their relationship became glaringly apparent during Turkey's attempts to join the European Union. The ongoing non-resolution of the Cyprus dispute, especially highlighted before the Royal Summit that took place in December 2004, revealed to Western nations the considerable strength of Turkey's strategic partnership with Russia. In the years that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey actively sought to capitalize on sectors that had been neglected or abandoned by Russia. Turkey's aspirations included requesting the patrolling assistance of NATO air police in the airspace of Bulgaria, a move aimed at

countering Russia's own military presence and patrolling activities over its interests in Georgia and Ukraine.

Additionally, Turkey's close relations with Azerbaijan significantly influenced Russia's posture towards Georgia, which included military operations in the airspace over Abkhazia, a Georgian region with a complicated status. The realization or delay of significant projects like the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline would undoubtedly be contingent upon Russia's policies, which were crafted to delay any military intervention, whether through Armenia or direct action within Georgian territory. Notably, after the recognition of Abkhazia's independence in 2008, Russia adopted a more confrontational stance and was able to implement direct military interventions in Georgia, highlighting a shift towards a more aggressive policy. Moreover, Russia's possession of nuclear weapons capable of reaching the capitals of both Balkan states and various Middle Eastern countries has consistently served as a tool for coercion and blackmail on the international stage, particularly aimed at the United States, in a context where the actual probability of a direct military confrontation between the two powers remains minimal. A notable recollection comes from a Turkish soldier who participated in the NATO expedition to Sarajevo between 1992 and 1996; he vividly remembers the sieges imposed by Serbs around that city, indicating that NATO's operational limitations, such as the 20km bombing restriction around Sarajevo, were largely driven by a palpable fear of provoking Russian aggression. The Yugoslav intervention is believed to potentially have dragged on for four additional years had there been direct engagement with the Russian military. This precarious situation was exacerbated by the presence of Russian troops in Chechnya, which influenced regional dynamics. If Russia had demonstrated even a minimal gesture of hostility, it is highly unlikely that Turkey would have agreed to host the US fleet of electromagnetic intelligence aircraft in Konya during the aftermath of the Royal Summit in December 2004. Furthermore, the ongoing presence of the Turkish military in the supervision of the airspace of the Baltics, Poland, and Macedonia highlights Turkey's strategic positioning against Russian maneuvers within the buffer zones established by the Schengen agreement.

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