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Conflict Management or Power Politics: Turkish–Russian Engagement in Caucasian Security Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Turkish–Russian relations and their impact on the security of the Caucasus region between 2014 and 2022. The research focuses on key diplomatic, economic, and military interactions to examine how cooperation and competition between Turkey and Russia shaped regional security dynamics. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study relies on secondary data drawn from academic literature, policy reports, books, journals, and credible news sources. A thematic analysis framework is employed to assess major developments, including diplomatic engagement, economic and energy cooperation, military interaction, crisis and normalization cycles, regional conflict management, strategic autonomy, and continuity and change in bilateral relations. The findings indicate that Turkish–Russian relations during the study period were characterized by managed competition, where pragmatic cooperation coexisted with persistent strategic rivalry. Diplomatic engagement primarily functioned as a mechanism for crisis management, while economic interdependence constrained prolonged confrontation without resolving underlying tensions. Military interaction and selective defense cooperation contributed to short-term stability but reinforced external influence and militarization in the Caucasus. The study also finds that Turkish–Russian engagement reduced the role of Western-led security frameworks, resulting in an externally managed and transactional regional security order. The study concludes that although Turkish–Russian relations helped contain large-scale violence in the Caucasus, they did not lead to durable peace. The regional security order that emerged between 2014 and 2022 remained fragile and dependent on continuous external management, leaving the Caucasus vulnerable to renewed instability. The research underscores the need for inclusive and preventive security approaches to achieve long-term stability in the region.

Keywords: Turkish–Russian relations; Caucasus security; Regional conflicts; Diplomatic Engagement; Economic and Energy Cooperation; Military interaction; Strategic Autonomy; Managed competition; 2014–2022

Introduction

In the post-Cold War period of global geopolitical change, Türkiye -Russia relations are an intriguing topic. The area of the Caucasus, strategically important as it connects Europe and Asia, has always been a key battleground in terms of geopolitics. Since 2014, the complex interactions between Türkiye and Russia have had a growing impact on the security environment of this unstable area. The dynamic between these two regional powers is marked by an intricate mix of collaboration and competition, effectively influencing the geopolitical landscape of the Caucasus. Caucasus region is area that is situated between black Sea and Caspian seas, has been historically dominated by various imperial rule such as Persians, Mongol, Arabian, Ottoman Russians and Soviet empires which want to increase its territories in this region due to its strategic location (Asimov, 2020).

The Caucasus is one of the post significant regions for security and peace in Eurasia. Throughout history Turkish-Russian relations have shifted between times of conflict and collaboration. The period following the end of the Cold War saw a notable change as both nations aimed to redefine their positions and plans in the area. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 led Türkiye to reconsider its foreign policy and security strategies in the Caucasus, specifically in terms of its relationships with Russia. Caucasus region situated between Asia and Europe represents a highly significant geopolitical hotspot and attracting various regional and global powers to pursue their interests. Throughout the history, these interests have been entangling in state of perpetual conflicts. Every player attempts to establish its own orders and maximize the geostrategic gain (Iskandarov, Simons, & Gawliczek, 2004).

After gaining the independence from the Soviet Union, Caucasus region has sparked a new wave of competition among the great regional and global elements, with Russia and US involving in competition dynamics. Region's strategic location and extensive natural resources are the basic factor of this competition (Abashedly, 2017). Caucasus region has a potential as a land bridge between Türkiye and Russia. However, being perceived as a buffer zone has hindered growth. By leveraging their geographical location, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan can form a prosperous economic region that stretches southern Russia and eastern Türkiye (Penman, 2010).

De Waal's article provides an introduction to the Caucasus region, emphasizing its geopolitical significance and complex historical background. The Caucasus has been influenced by various neighboring powers like Iran, Russia, and Türkiye, leading to differing historiographies and political tensions. The region's unique cultural and historical features have sparked debates among scholars regarding its civilization identity, with some viewing it as a contact zone between East and West while others argue for a distinct Caucasian civilization. Additionally, the romanticized imagery of the Caucasus in literature and art, particularly during the romantic period, highlights its symbolic significance as a space of freedom and exoticism. De Waal's work likely delves into these multifaceted aspects to provide a comprehensive overview of the Caucasus region. (De Waal, 2010).

The security underlying forces of the Caucasus area have been greatly affected by the historic progress of Turkish-Russian ties. In the start, there was mistrust and competition between states in the early 2000s, but it ultimately turned into closer cooperation due to common distresses about energy security and regional stability. The change from rivalry to cooperation, led by Putin in Russia and the Justice and Development Party in Türkiye, has played a key role in resolving conflicts, fighting terrorism, and strengthening economic relations. Türkiye's strong foreign policy, centered on theories such as neo-Ottomanism and strategic depth, begins it as a key player in the region with interests growing into the Caucasus, allowing for diplomatic dialogues with Moscow (Ruslan & Shangaraev, 2021).

The prominence of the Caucasus as a reliable route for energy resources highlights the advantages for both nations in balancing geopolitical rivalry with partnership in the area. Russian-Turkish partnership within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, which can be considered a functional area of cooperation that uses the convergence of the countries of the region by creating cooperation on various issues, such as the production of energy from underground resources of strategic importance for the region, agricultural production and tourism (Erman & Taliouglu, 2022).

Türkiye and Russia, Cold War enemies, have to rethink their strategy in reaction to new geopolitical circumstances. Russia, a prominent player and Türkiye, a NATO partner, had to reassess their ties after the Cold War (Titov 2015). Due to competitiveness and past conflicts, the Turkish-Russian relationship in the early 1990s was cautious and distrustful. Both nations sought partnership to adjust themselves with the changing global dynamics. Their partnership grew gradually. (Jeffery Mankoff, 2017)

Though there are disagreements, Turkish-Russian relations have also included times of collaboration, especially in the economic and military sectors. In 2019, Türkiye's acquisition of Russian S-400 missile defense systems represented a major advancement in their military collaboration but also caused tensions with NATO partners.

The years 2014 to 2022 saw Türkiye and Russia engage in an intricate mix of cooperation, rivalry, and conflict, which had major effects on the security situation in the Caucasus region. Analyzing the broader geopolitical trends shaping Eurasia and beyond relies heavily on understanding the nuances of this relationship.

Russia's excellent location brings both benefits and difficulties. Türkiye's NATO membership and history as a buffer between Russia and the West make it complicated, yet Turkish pipelines and routes provide access to major European oil markets. Russia's approach to Türkiye alternates between partnership and surveillance. The November 2015 downing of a Russian Su-24 fighter aircraft along the Türkiye-Syria border strained relations between Türkiye and Russia. Russia imposed economic sanctions on Türkiye after the event caused a diplomatic crisis. Russia supported the Assad regime and Türkiye had distinct concerns about Kurdish organizations and the Syrian civil war, which complicated their relationship.

Diplomatic efforts eventually eased the tension, prompting both governments to take steps to normalize relations. However, the instance above showed the Turkish-Russian alliance's vulnerability and the potential for global instability. The changing geopolitical relations between Türkiye and Russia have significantly impacted regional security, notably in the Black Sea and Eurasian area. Türkiye and Russia have long competed and partnered in the Black Sea, which is also shared by Ukraine. Unrest in Eastern Ukraine and Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea has raised Black Sea security worries. Türkiye has played a major role in tackling these security issues due to its NATO membership and Black Sea proximity. (Alec Kuhn, 2016).

Türkiye-Russia relations also affect electricity distribution in the broad Eurasian area. According to Onis and Suhanaz (2015), these states' growing influence in the Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia might alter Eurasian geopolitics. Geopolitically, Türkiye and Russia had a complicated relationship from 1990 and from 2014 to 2022 as well. This partnership balanced collaboration and competitiveness. The complicated interaction between these elements has historically affected local security. The demise of the Soviet Union and geopolitical changes forced both states to reevaluate their international positions. To grasp the dynamic and developing global political scene after the Cold War, one must understand its intricate interrelationships and interdependencies.

Statement of the Problem

The geopolitical relations between Türkiye and Russia have undergone important shifts since 2014, and this shift has impacted the security of the Caucasus region. The era has witnessed series of strategic maneuvers including the Nagorno Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Russian annexation of Crimea, Georgia Abkhazian conflict, which have directly and indirectly affected the security dynamics in the Caucasus and also influenced the Turkish Russian relations. Understanding the nature of Turkish Russian relations and their implication on the region is important to comprehend the border geopolitical structure of the Caucasus region. Keeping in view the above situation the researcher intends to conduct this study.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the key events and developments in Turkish-Russian relations from 2014 to 2022, focusing on diplomatic, economic, and military interactions.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis is made for the study:

- Between 2014 and 2022, Turkish–Russian relations evolved through a pattern of managed competition in which diplomatic engagement, economic interdependence, and selective military cooperation enabled both states to mitigate crises and sustain cooperation despite recurring strategic rivalries.

Significance of the Study

The research work focuses the study of Türkiye-Russia ties and its impacts on the security of the Caucasus region from 2014 to 2022. It holds significant importance for different reasons. Firstly, the era between 2014 and 2022 was clear by important geopolitical changes, with Russia's takeover of Crimea in 2014, which intensified tensions in the Caucasus region. Türkiye's reactions and strategies during this time, including; its support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, prove how bilateral relations between Türkiye and Russia can impact regional stability? Secondly, the Caucasus area is a critical crossroads in terms of local security. Relationship between Türkiye and Russia has the broader security dynamics of the region, with wars, agreements, and the equilibrium of power. Thirdly, the study can deliver valuable visions for policymakers, analysts and international organizations to understand and address security challenges in the Caucasus.

Delimitations of the Study

Study has been limited to turkey Russia relation and impact on security of cacusases region since 2014 to 2022.

Theoretical Framework

This study primarily draws on Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, to examine the security dynamics of the Caucasus region between 2014 and 2022. RSCT argues that security interactions are clustered regionally, as states are most affected by threats originating from geographically proximate actors (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). In the Caucasus, Turkish–Russian relations played a decisive role in shaping regional security due to both states' strategic depth, military capabilities, and historical influence. Russia's position as a dominant security provider—through military bases, arms transfers, and peacekeeping deployments combined with Turkey's growing military engagement, particularly its strategic alliance with Azerbaijan, altered the regional balance of power. From an RSCT perspective, the fluctuating cooperation and competition between Turkey and Russia intensified security interdependence in the Caucasus, influencing conflict escalation, alliance formation, and patterns of regional instability, especially during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; De Waal, 2021).

Complementing RSCT, Complex Interdependence Theory, as articulated by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, provides a framework for understanding the coexistence of rivalry and cooperation in Turkish–Russian relations. This theory emphasizes multiple channels of interaction, the absence of a clear hierarchy among issues, and the constraining effects of economic and political interdependence on the use of military force (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Despite strategic competition in the Caucasus, Turkey and Russia maintained extensive economic ties, particularly in energy, trade, and defense cooperation, which limited direct confrontation and encouraged pragmatic coordination. These interdependencies influenced their military strategies and alliance behavior, producing a fragile and transactional regional security order rather than sustainable peace. By integrating RSCT and Complex Interdependence Theory, this study captures both the regional security structures and the broader political-economic interdependencies that shaped Turkish–Russian influence on Caucasus security dynamics during the 2014–2022 period (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Sakwa, 2016).

Literature Review

The literature on Turkish–Russian relations since 2014 generally agrees that the relationship is best understood as a pragmatic and interest-driven partnership that combines cooperation with persistent strategic rivalry. Scholars describe this pattern as “managed competition,” where bilateral ties are sustained through compartmentalization: crises in one domain (such as Syria or Ukraine) do not automatically collapse cooperation in others (such as energy or trade). This interpretation emphasizes that Ankara and Moscow treat their relationship as a flexible tool for navigating a changing regional order rather than as an ideational alliance. Within this debate, the South Caucasus is often presented as a key arena where Turkish–Russian interaction influences security outcomes indirectly through local partners and regional bargaining mechanisms. Much of the literature also stresses leadership-driven diplomacy as a recurring feature, with summits and personalized negotiation compensating for limited institutional trust. These arguments are reinforced in broader analyses of Turkey’s post-2014 foreign policy recalibration and Russia’s regional power projection strategy (Allison, 2015; Kutlay & Öniş, 2021).

A second body of scholarship focuses on the South Caucasus as a distinct but interconnected security space where unresolved conflicts, militarization, and external involvement generate chronic instability. Research grounded in Regional Security Complex Theory argues that security interdependence within the Caucasus produces spillover effects, meaning that shifts in one conflict arena reshape threat perceptions and alliance behavior across the region. Authors working on post-Soviet conflicts highlight how Armenia–Azerbaijan rivalry, Georgia’s security dilemmas, and the broader Russia–West confrontation interact in ways that make durable conflict resolution difficult. This literature commonly treats external powers not as neutral mediators but as actors whose engagement reshapes local balances. Theoretical work on regional security emphasizes that the Caucasus is not merely a passive arena but a structured security complex where interlocking threats create patterned behavior among states and non-state actors (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Zürcher, 2014).

Much of the post-2014 literature identifies the Crimea shock and the deterioration of Russia–West relations as a structural turning point that intensified competition while also increasing the value of pragmatic dialogue between Ankara and Moscow. Analysts note that Turkey’s response combined normative positioning with strategic caution, reflecting its exposure to Black Sea security dynamics and its dependence on Russian-linked economic sectors. This created a context in which Turkish–Russian diplomacy became more risk-managed and transactional, with an emphasis on preventing escalation and preserving bargaining space.

Research also shows that this period accelerated Turkey's search for strategic autonomy, while Russia sought to consolidate influence in nearby regions through a blend of military posture and diplomatic signaling. The implications for the Caucasus were indirect but significant: geopolitical polarization reduced the effectiveness of multilateral mediation and increased the relevance of regional bargaining arrangements (Kardaş, 2014; Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015).

The Syrian conflict dominates the literature on Turkish–Russian interaction because it represents the most intense arena of confrontation and coordination during 2014–2022. Studies of the 2015 jet crisis emphasize that it exposed the dangers of overlapping military operations without reliable deconfliction mechanisms, producing a sharp political rupture and coercive economic measures. Yet scholars also highlight the rapid normalization process after 2016 as evidence that both states treated confrontation as costly and reversible. The resulting “Syria model” is frequently described as a template of crisis bargaining: Turkey and Russia coordinated tactical arrangements (ceasefires, patrol concepts, de-escalation discussions) while maintaining incompatible political end-goals. This literature matters for the Caucasus question because it shows how Ankara and Moscow learned to manage rivalry and build bargaining habits that later shaped their interaction in other regional conflicts (Erşen, 2017; Dalay, 2018).

A substantial strand of research explains the durability of Turkish–Russian relations through economic and energy interdependence, often drawing on Complex Interdependence Theory. Scholars argue that dense economic ties raise the costs of rupture and create incentives for compartmentalization even during geopolitical crises. This is commonly illustrated through major energy projects and long-term contracts that lock in cooperation beyond short-term political fluctuations. At the same time, the literature warns against assuming interdependence automatically produces stability, noting that asymmetric dependencies can become instruments of leverage during diplomatic disputes. The South Caucasus appears in this discussion because energy routes, trade corridors, and regional connectivity initiatives shape strategic calculations and influence how external actors approach conflict management. The most consistent finding is that economic interdependence stabilized the Turkish–Russian relationship without eliminating rivalry, producing cooperation that is pragmatic rather than trust-based (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Congressional Research Service, 2020).

Defense and military-technical cooperation—especially the S-400 purchase—has generated a large literature on strategic autonomy, alliance politics, and the reorientation of Turkey's security behavior after 2016. Researchers interpret the S-400 as both a material defense decision and a geopolitical signal demonstrating Ankara's willingness to diversify security partnerships. This scholarship also emphasizes the transactional nature of defense cooperation with Russia: despite the symbolic weight of arms purchases, Turkey and Russia did not develop an integrated military alliance, and cooperation remained selective and politically managed. The relevance to Caucasus security lies in the broader implications for regional balancing and the decline of Western influence in shaping security arrangements. The literature frequently argues that Turkey's growing defense assertiveness and Russia's willingness to exploit alliance fractures contributed to a more power-centric regional order in which the Caucasus became increasingly shaped by regional rather than Western-led mechanisms (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Stefanovic, 2019).

Research on the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war represents one of the most important contributions to understanding Turkish–Russian impact on Caucasus security during the period under study. Many authors argue that Turkey's support for Azerbaijan altered military effectiveness and strengthened Baku's bargaining position, while Russia secured its role as the central postwar security manager through ceasefire design and peacekeeping deployment. A

consistent theme is that Turkey and Russia combined rivalry and cooperation: they backed different sides historically, yet converged on postwar management mechanisms that limited escalation and institutionalized their influence. The post-2020 order is often described as externally managed and inherently fragile because it prioritizes enforcement and bargaining over political settlement. This literature also notes the marginalization of earlier mediation frameworks and the emergence of a regionalized security architecture shaped largely by Turkey and Russia (De Waal, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2020).

Arms transfers and militarization trends are another key strand of literature explaining how Turkish–Russian relations intersected with the security dynamics of the Caucasus. Studies using SIPRI data and related analysis emphasize that Armenia’s defense dependence on Russia remained substantial, while Azerbaijan diversified suppliers and strengthened capabilities over time. This contributes to debates about whether Russian “balanced” arms diplomacy stabilizes the region by maintaining leverage over both sides or destabilizes it by fueling arms competition. The literature further links militarization to recurring escalation episodes, arguing that increased capability combined with unresolved political disputes makes ceasefires fragile. These findings matter for understanding Turkish–Russian impact because they show that the bilateral relationship intersects with conflict dynamics through arms supply structures, security guarantees, and post-conflict enforcement roles (SIPRI, 2021; Wezeman & Kuimova, 2018).

A growing body of research highlights the declining effectiveness of Western influence in the South Caucasus during 2014–2022, noting that Western institutions often lacked enforcement capacity and struggled to shape decisive outcomes during major escalations. Scholars argue that the shift was not simply Western absence but the increasing centrality of regional power management, particularly after 2020. The literature also examines how EU engagement expanded after 2020 through facilitation and diplomatic initiatives but remained constrained by hard-security realities and the embedded roles of Russia and Turkey. This debate is important for the study because it frames Turkish–Russian influence not only as a bilateral phenomenon but also as part of a broader transformation from rule-based conflict mediation to power-based conflict management. Western marginalization, therefore, is often presented as both a cause and consequence of Turkish–Russian prominence in regional security (Freire & Kanet, 2021; Delcour, 2022).

Across the literature, the dominant conclusion is that Turkish–Russian relations between 2014 and 2022 affected Caucasus security by producing a regional order that is simultaneously stabilized and destabilized—stabilized through crisis containment mechanisms and destabilized through entrenched militarization and unresolved political disputes. Scholars frequently characterize this as “managed instability,” where external actors can reduce the likelihood of immediate large-scale war but cannot deliver durable peace without settlement of core issues. Theoretical perspectives help explain this outcome: Regional Security Complex Theory clarifies why threat interdependence and conflict spillovers persist, while Complex Interdependence Theory explains why cooperation can endure despite strategic competition. The gap in the literature relevant for further research is that many studies treat Syria, Ukraine, and the Caucasus as separate arenas; fewer integrate them as a connected system of bargaining and leverage that shapes Turkish–Russian behavior across regions. This study’s focus on 2014–2022 therefore aligns with and extends existing scholarship by emphasizing cross-theatre linkages and the combined effect of diplomacy, economics, and military interaction on Caucasus security (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Keohane & Nye, 2012; De Waal, 2021).

Methodology

It is qualitative research because the authors conduct the proposed study in order to understand how Turkish-Russian relationships influenced the security dynamics of the Caucasus region between 2014 and 2022. The qualitative approach is thought to be suitable in this research because it will enable a detailed analysis of intricate political dynamics, the strategies and the security situation in the region which is not effectively captured using the quantitative approach. The paper is explanatory and analytical as it examines the ways in which patterns of cooperation and rivalry between Russia and Turkey have shaped alliances in the region, military policies, and the security performances in the Caucasus region.

The study is founded purely on the secondary sources of data. The data was gathered on a vast pool of academic and scholarly sources, such as research papers, books, peer-reviewed journals, magazines, and policy reports on the Caucasus security environment and relations between the two countries (Turkey and Russia). Besides it, the contemporary developments and changing dynamics were also covered by consulting reputable international and regional news agencies, analytical articles, and official statements. Several academic libraries were also consulted to obtain pertinent literature and archives, which also offered a historical context as well as theoretical underpinning of the study.

As the research topic was rather modern, the focus on the modern events and news analysis was considered high to examine the recent events in the relations between Turkey and Russia and how it affects the Caucasus area. The important events including diplomatic missions and meetings, military interventions, peace agreements and altered regional alliances were traced using news reports and commentary analysis. In order to be accurate and reliable, information sources used in news sources were checked against academic literature and policies.

Qualitative content analysis was the method used to analyze the data collected. This entailed the systematic analysis of the writings in order to spot themes, trends, and stories about regional security forces and the regional alliances as well as military thought. This analysis followed the theoretical aspects of the study especially the Regional Security Complex Theory and the Complex Interdependence Theory that assisted in the explanation of the impact of regional power structures and political-economic interdependencies on security outcomes. Case illustrations were analyzed in terms of key regional events, like major conflicts, diplomatic efforts, etc. with the purpose of making analytical generalizations.

In order to maximize the validity and reliability of the findings, the method of source triangulation was applied, in which the information presented by various types of secondary sources would be compared. Credible and authoritative publications, such as peer-reviewed journals and research institutions that were well established, were given preference. Opposite opinion and interpretation have been examined critically to give an objective analysis with a balanced standpoint. Though the study is based only on secondary data and does not use the primary ones including interviews, the wide usage of various and worthy materials helps overcome this drawback and guarantees having the complete picture of the topic.

Diplomatic Engagement and Political Coordination Events (2014–2022)

The diplomatic track in Turkish–Russian relations between 2014 and 2022 was shaped from the outset by Ankara’s need to balance Black Sea security concerns with deep economic exposure to Moscow, a tension that became more visible after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Turkey avoided recognizing the annexation while simultaneously signaling that escalation in the Black Sea would harm regional stability and Turkish interests tied to trade, tourism, and energy flows. This produced a dual-track approach: principled positioning on territorial integrity alongside sustained high-level engagement to keep channels open and prevent spillover into the wider bilateral agenda. The Crimea shock therefore did not freeze diplomacy; instead, it

forced a more cautious, managerial style of political coordination in which disagreements were acknowledged but bracketed where possible. In this period, diplomatic messaging and risk-management became as important as formal agreements, especially given Turkey's role as a Black Sea littoral state and NATO member. These constraints are captured in both policy analysis produced during the early Crimea standoff and later peer-reviewed research that maps Turkey's "tightrope" behavior through official declarations. (Kasapoğlu & Ergun, 2014; Türkdoğan, 2023)

By 2015, Syria increasingly crowded out other dossiers and turned diplomatic engagement into crisis diplomacy, culminating in the November 24, 2015 downing of a Russian Su-24 by Turkey near the Syrian border. The jet crisis triggered a sharp breakdown in political dialogue and generated a punitive Russian response across tourism, trade, and symbolic diplomatic channels, demonstrating how quickly regional conflict arenas could rupture the relationship. Yet even in this rupture, the crisis was treated as reversible rather than existential: both sides framed the dispute through narratives of deterrence, sovereignty, and airspace rules, leaving room for eventual repair once political conditions changed. Scholarly assessments of the episode emphasize that the confrontation was rooted in diverging Syria preferences and Russia's intensified military posture after September 2015, rather than a single tactical incident. The crisis also illustrated a key pattern for 2014–2022: diplomacy did not disappear under pressure, but it became tightly leader-driven, emotionally charged, and highly transactional. (Erşen, 2017; France 24, 2015)

Normalization diplomacy accelerated in 2016 through leader-level signaling and carefully choreographed political gestures, especially after President Erdoğan's June 2016 letter that opened the door to de-escalation and after the August 9, 2016 St. Petersburg summit that publicly re-launched engagement. Commentaries from that moment stress how both capitals sought to end an information war and restore mutually beneficial cooperation, while still acknowledging unresolved disagreements on Syria and Ukraine. The diplomacy was also shaped by shifting threat perceptions after the July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, which strengthened Ankara's incentive to diversify partnerships and reduced trust in Western political reactions. In practice, this pushed Turkish–Russian political coordination toward a model of selective alignment repairing ties where benefits were tangible, while postponing deeper resolution of strategic divergences. The result was not a full convergence of interests, but a reactivation of high-level mechanisms and a renewed habit of direct leader contact as the primary tool of crisis control. (Kirişçi, 2016; Shlykov, 2016)

From late 2016 into 2017, diplomatic engagement expanded into structured political coordination on Syria, including the Russia–Turkey brokerage of a nationwide ceasefire framework that gained formal endorsement in UN Security Council Resolution 2336 (2016). This period marked a shift from purely bilateral repair toward trilateral diplomacy, with Turkey and Russia increasingly coordinating alongside Iran in ways that reduced Western leverage over the negotiation agenda. The Astana framework became a platform where Ankara and Moscow could institutionalize "managed disagreement," trading influence over opposition groups, ceasefire monitoring concepts, and de-escalation designs. Even when the parties disagreed about end-states, the diplomacy emphasized process control: keeping violence at a level that prevented strategic shocks, protecting core red lines, and using negotiations to manage battlefield realities. The UN documentation around Resolution 2336 shows how Russian–Turkish mediation was presented internationally as a vehicle to "jump-start" a political process, even as many analysts noted its conflict-management logic. (United Nations Security Council, 2016; United Nations, 2016)

Diplomatic coordination became more granular in 2018 as Idlib emerged as the central test case for whether Turkey and Russia could prevent escalation while pursuing incompatible preferences. The September 17, 2018 Sochi memorandum formally transmitted within UN documentation was a hallmark of this phase: leader-driven summitry produced a technical blueprint (demilitarized zones, patrol concepts, separation of forces) aimed at delaying a regime assault while addressing Russia's security concerns. Research and policy assessments of the Sochi deal underline both its immediate diplomatic success (averting a large-scale offensive at that time) and its built-in fragility because implementation depended heavily on Turkey's ability to manage complex armed actors on the ground. Diplomatic engagement thus blended humanitarian risk narratives, strategic bargaining, and procedural commitments, while leaving enforcement ambiguous. The episode reinforced that Turkish–Russian “political coordination” was often less about shared objectives than about producing temporary formulas that kept their rivalry from escalating beyond control. (United Nations Security Council, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2018; SETA, 2018)

In 2019, diplomacy consolidated through frequent summitry and the visible expansion of defense-political symbolism, most notably around the S-400 acquisition and repeated High-Level Cooperation Council engagement. Even when the S-400 decision aggravated Turkey's ties with the United States, Ankara and Moscow presented it as proof that political coordination could survive pressure from competing alliance structures. Analyses of the period emphasize that leader-centric bargaining became the “engine” of the relationship, allowing both sides to compartmentalize conflicts (like Syria) while building deliverables in defense and economic areas. This was also a year when diplomatic engagement signaled strategic autonomy narratives: Turkey demonstrated it could negotiate major security decisions outside Western frameworks, while Russia highlighted its capacity to cultivate partnerships inside NATO's political space. Later assessments frame 2019 as a culmination of the post-2016 normalization arc, where diplomatic engagement and geopolitical hedging mutually reinforced each other. (The Guardian, 2019; Kremlin, 2019; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024)

The year 2020 tested the durability of political coordination through sharp escalation in Idlib followed by rapid summit diplomacy that produced the March 5, 2020 Moscow understandings and a ceasefire/patrol framework. The Kremlin's published press statements after the talks show how both leaders publicly framed the outcome as a stabilizing step after intense violence, reflecting a pattern where spikes in battlefield risk triggered emergency diplomacy rather than diplomatic collapse. Later in 2020, the South Caucasus added another layer: while Turkey and Russia backed opposing sides historically, they converged on a post-war monitoring logic after the November 2020 ceasefire, reinforcing the broader pattern of conflict management through negotiated mechanisms. Policy briefs on Nagorno-Karabakh stress that Russia's peacekeeping and the broader post-ceasefire architecture reshaped local incentives and could “freeze” political resolution, while still enabling Ankara and Moscow to claim stabilizing roles. Diplomacy in 2020 therefore combined crisis bargaining (Idlib) with emerging regional management arrangements (Karabakh), deepening the sense that Turkish–Russian coordination aimed at controlling escalation more than resolving root disputes. (Kremlin, 2020; European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020)

In 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine reconfigured diplomatic engagement into a high-stakes balancing act, with Turkey positioning itself as a mediator while maintaining dialogue with Moscow. Turkey's hosting role in the March 2022 Istanbul talks illustrated how Ankara leveraged working relations with both sides to create negotiating space, even as the war intensified and trust collapsed. The July 22, 2022 Black Sea Grain Initiative facilitated by Turkey

and the UN became the most concrete diplomatic deliverable of this phase, showing that Turkish–Russian political coordination could still generate agreements with global economic implications despite fundamental strategic conflict over Ukraine. The August 5, 2022 Sochi meeting further demonstrated the persistence of leader-level engagement, with discussions spanning trade, energy, and conflict arenas, reflecting continued compartmentalization under wartime constraints. Analyses of the Sochi diplomacy interpret it as both pragmatic (economic stabilization and bargaining) and geopolitical (signaling independence from Western isolation strategies), reinforcing the transactional nature of engagement during 2014–2022. (United Nations, 2022; Atlantic Council, 2022; Feldman et al., 2022; Kremlin, 2022)

Economic Relations and Energy Cooperation Events (2014–2022)

The economic and energy relationship between Turkey and Russia entered a new phase in 2014, when energy diplomacy became the central platform for sustaining bilateral engagement despite widening geopolitical tensions. A decisive development occurred in December 2014, when Russia announced the cancellation of the South Stream project and pivoted toward a Turkey-centered alternative that later became known as TurkStream. This shift elevated Turkey's strategic value as an energy transit corridor while also deepening dependence on Russian supply and infrastructure planning. The event was not merely technical; it represented a reorientation of Russia's export strategy and a recalibration of Turkey's role in regional energy security. Policy analysis at the time emphasized that the move was designed to bypass regulatory and political constraints in Europe, while still ensuring Russia's access to external markets through a new route. From this point onward, energy cooperation increasingly functioned as a stabilizing pillar in the bilateral relationship even when political disputes intensified. (Chow, 2016; Congressional Research Service, 2020)

In 2015, economic ties became directly entangled with political confrontation following the Su-24 incident, revealing how interdependence could be leveraged as a pressure tool. After the aircraft was downed in November 2015, Russia introduced restrictive measures targeting sectors where Turkish exposure was high, especially tourism and agricultural exports, while also sending a strong signal about the vulnerability of economic cooperation during diplomatic crises. Legal and policy reporting from that period documented how Russia imposed bans and restrictions that were designed to produce immediate economic costs without triggering a complete breakdown of long-term strategic projects. This episode highlighted that economic relations between the two states were not insulated from political shocks, but rather could be temporarily weaponized as instruments of coercion short of military escalation. At the same time, the measures demonstrated that both sides still preserved space for eventual normalization by keeping core energy interdependence largely intact. (HFW, 2015; DeVore, 2016)

The year 2016 marked a return to pragmatic economic coordination through a process of normalization that quickly brought energy diplomacy back to the center. After political reconciliation began mid-2016, Turkey and Russia moved to formalize cooperation around the pipeline agenda, culminating in the intergovernmental agreement signed in October 2016. Analysts emphasized that the agreement carried significance beyond infrastructure: it institutionalized long-term energy cooperation and created a legal framework that reduced uncertainty for both sides after the 2015 rupture. This step also signaled the return of a transactional model in which political repair was reinforced through high-cost projects that are difficult to reverse once implemented. The diplomatic reset therefore translated into an economic reset, with energy functioning as the anchor domain where both sides could produce tangible deliverables quickly. (Kremlin, 2017; RUSI, 2016)

In 2017, the TurkStream process advanced through ratification and early implementation measures that demonstrated the durability of energy cooperation once legally structured. Russia's formal ratification of the intergovernmental agreement reinforced that TurkStream was no longer a negotiable concept but an institutional commitment backed by state authority. This phase is important because it shows how economic cooperation shifted from political signaling to operational planning, narrowing the space for future reversal without major cost. Policy documentation emphasized that the agreement regulated planning, construction, and exploitation of pipeline sections intended for both Turkish supply and onward transit. In practical terms, this strengthened Turkey's position as an energy gate while also reinforcing Russia's capacity to diversify routes amid contested European corridors. The relationship therefore evolved into a form of structured interdependence where energy infrastructure became a long-term constraint on crisis escalation. (Kremlin, 2017; Congressional Research Service, 2020)

By 2018, economic cooperation expanded visibly beyond gas pipelines into large-scale strategic infrastructure through the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, deepening interdependence in a different and more binding form. The launch of construction activities publicly marked by a high-level ceremony reflected how nuclear cooperation was being used to anchor the partnership through technology, financing, and long-term operational arrangements. Unlike trade flows that can fluctuate rapidly, nuclear projects create multi-decade dependencies through ownership structures, regulatory processes, fuel cycles, and governance mechanisms. Contemporary reporting on the event underscored that Akkuyu was positioned as Turkey's first nuclear power project and was heavily associated with Russian state capacity and investment. This phase demonstrated that economic relations were not limited to conventional commerce; they increasingly involved strategic sectors that intersect directly with energy security and long-term development planning. (Kremlin, 2018; World Nuclear Association, 2025)

During 2019, the economic relationship became more measurable through regulatory developments and trade patterns that confirmed the depth of interdependence even when geopolitical competition persisted elsewhere. The Akkuyu project progressed through licensing procedures that reflect the institutional entrenchment of nuclear cooperation, and Turkish regulatory documentation shows how applications and licensing decisions evolved through this period. At the same time, trade and investment ties remained strong, reinforcing the point that economic engagement continued despite wider political frictions. This matters because it indicates that Turkish Russian economic relations during 2014–2022 were not merely episodic reactions to crises; they were sustained through institutional and regulatory pathways that locked in cooperation across multiple sectors. The 2019 phase therefore represents consolidation: interdependence became embedded not only in markets but also in state-to-state regulatory processes. (Nuclear Regulatory Authority of Turkey, 2019; World Nuclear Association, 2025)

In 2020, economic and energy cooperation became highly visible at the symbolic and operational levels with the formal launch and inauguration of TurkStream, confirming that the project had moved from negotiation into functioning infrastructure. Official records of the launch ceremony and policy reporting noted that the pipeline created a new export route for Russian gas into Turkey and parts of Europe, reinforcing Russia's diversification strategy while supporting Turkey's transit ambitions. This year is also important because it demonstrated the resilience of strategic economic cooperation even amid global disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic. While tourism and some trade flows were affected globally, the energy dimension of Turkish–Russian relations continued through long-term contracts and operational delivery,

showing how infrastructure-backed interdependence can outlast short-term shocks. The inauguration therefore symbolized not just cooperation, but endurance of cooperation under strain. (Kremlin, 2020; RFE/RL, 2020)

The year 2022 introduced a major stress test as Russia's war in Ukraine reshaped European energy politics and created new incentives for bilateral economic coordination between Moscow and Ankara. In this environment, Turkey's role as an energy corridor gained renewed attention, while Russia sought alternative pathways for influence and market access under sanctions pressure. One of the most discussed proposals emerged in October 2022, when Russia publicly floated the idea of expanding Turkey's role as a gas hub for Europe, illustrating how geopolitical shocks can redirect energy diplomacy into new strategic proposals. This phase highlighted that interdependence was no longer simply about existing pipelines or projects, but about renegotiating Turkey's position within a rapidly changing energy order. The 2022 developments therefore reinforced the study's broader conclusion that economic and energy cooperation persisted as a key domain of interaction, even as the surrounding geopolitical environment became more polarized and volatile. (The Independent, 2022; The Moscow Times, 2022).

Military Interaction and Defense Cooperation Events (2014–2022)

Military interaction between Turkey and Russia from 2014 onward was initially shaped by heightened regional militarization following Russia's actions in Ukraine and the changing security environment in the Black Sea and Middle East. During this early phase, both states pursued parallel but cautious military postures, avoiding direct coordination while carefully monitoring each other's strategic moves. Turkey, as a NATO member, increased its attention to airspace security and deterrence, while Russia expanded its military footprint in nearby regions. Scholarly assessments of this period emphasize that military interaction was indirect and largely adversarial in tone, with limited formal defense cooperation. However, both sides maintained military-to-military communication channels to prevent accidental escalation, signaling an early recognition of the risks associated with unmanaged rivalry. This phase laid the groundwork for later patterns of confrontation followed by pragmatic adjustment (Allison, 2014).

The military dimension escalated dramatically in 2015, particularly after Russia's direct military intervention in Syria and the subsequent downing of a Russian Su-24 fighter jet by Turkey in November. This incident represented the most serious military confrontation between the two states in decades and resulted in an immediate suspension of defense-related contacts. Analysts describe this episode as a critical rupture that exposed the dangers of overlapping military operations without coordination. The crisis triggered heightened air defense measures, increased military alertness, and rhetorical escalation on both sides. At the same time, studies note that neither side sought prolonged military confrontation, instead signaling deterrence while keeping escalation contained. The incident highlighted the absence of institutionalized military coordination mechanisms and underscored the volatility of Turkish–Russian military interaction at that stage (Erşen, 2017).

Following the political normalization process in 2016, military interaction shifted from confrontation to cautious re-engagement. Defense channels were gradually restored, and both sides began exploring mechanisms to prevent incidents, particularly in the Syrian theater. Military DE confliction arrangements emerged as practical tools to manage overlapping operations and reduce the risk of unintended clashes. Analysts emphasize that this period marked a transition from adversarial posturing toward functional military coordination, driven by mutual interest in avoiding escalation. Although strategic distrust persisted, military

cooperation became more pragmatic and narrowly focused on operational safety rather than alliance-building. This phase demonstrated that military interaction could be recalibrated through political intervention and crisis management (Kirişci, 2016).

From 2017 onward, military coordination deepened in the context of Syria, where Turkey and Russia engaged in joint or parallel efforts related to ceasefires, observation posts, and de-escalation zones. The Astana framework provided a diplomatic umbrella under which military coordination could occur, even as both sides supported different local actors. Research on this period highlights that military interaction became increasingly institutionalized through patrol arrangements, liaison mechanisms, and negotiated zones of influence. These arrangements did not eliminate competition but allowed both sides to manage it more effectively. Military cooperation thus evolved into a tool for controlling conflict dynamics rather than resolving them, reinforcing a pattern of managed rivalry (Dalay, 2018).

A major turning point in bilateral defense cooperation occurred with Turkey's decision to procure the S-400 air defense system from Russia, finalized in 2017 and operationalized by 2019. This move represented the most tangible form of military-technical cooperation between the two states and carried significant strategic symbolism. Analysts argue that the S-400 deal reflected Turkey's pursuit of strategic autonomy and Russia's willingness to challenge Western defense norms. While the system was never fully integrated into NATO structures, its acquisition marked a departure from Turkey's traditional defense procurement patterns. The episode demonstrated how military cooperation could serve political signaling purposes while remaining limited in scope and integration (Yegin, 2019).

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war added a new layer to Turkish–Russian military interaction by placing both states on opposing sides of a regional conflict while still avoiding direct confrontation. Turkey's military support to Azerbaijan contrasted with Russia's role as mediator and subsequent peacekeeper, illustrating divergent but coordinated military roles. Analysts emphasize that postwar arrangements reflected a division of labor rather than joint command, with Russia deploying peacekeeping forces and Turkey participating indirectly through monitoring mechanisms. This outcome showed how military interaction could coexist with competition, allowing both states to expand influence while managing escalation risks. The war highlighted the maturity of Turkish–Russian crisis management at the military level (Broers, 2021).

In 2021, military interaction focused on maintaining fragile stability through enforcement and signaling rather than new cooperative ventures. Joint monitoring centers, military consultations, and continued DE confliction in Syria and the Caucasus became routine features of the relationship. At the same time, tensions periodically resurfaced, reminding observers that cooperation was conditional and reversible. Defense analysts describe this phase as one of controlled friction, where military engagement served to prevent escalation without producing trust. The absence of a formal alliance structure meant that military cooperation remained pragmatic and tightly managed by political leadership (Rácz, 2021).

The year 2022 presented new challenges as Russia's war in Ukraine reshaped regional security calculations. Despite Turkey's support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and defense cooperation with Kyiv, military channels with Russia remained open. Turkey's balancing behavior underscored the compartmentalized nature of military interaction, where disagreement in one theater did not automatically sever coordination elsewhere. Analysts note that this period confirmed the durability of deconfliction mechanisms and crisis management practices developed since 2016. Military interaction in 2022 thus reflected continuity in pragmatic engagement amid profound geopolitical strain (Freire & Kanet, 2021).

Crisis, Confrontation, and Normalization between 2014-2022

The period between 2014 and 2022 in Turkish–Russian relations was marked by recurring cycles of crisis, confrontation, and subsequent normalization, reflecting the volatile yet resilient nature of the bilateral relationship. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 represented the first major shock, placing Turkey in a difficult diplomatic position as it balanced commitments to international norms with the desire to preserve cooperation with Russia. Ankara publicly rejected the annexation while avoiding punitive measures, signaling an early preference for crisis management over confrontation. Scholars argue that this episode introduced a pattern in which political disagreements were acknowledged but deliberately contained. Rather than rupturing relations, both sides adopted a cautious diplomatic posture aimed at minimizing spillover into economic and security domains. This early crisis thus set the tone for a decade defined by controlled instability rather than rupture (Allison, 2015).

Tensions escalated sharply in 2015 due to diverging military objectives in Syria, culminating in the downing of a Russian Su-24 fighter jet by Turkish forces in November. This incident marked the deepest confrontation between Ankara and Moscow since the Cold War and triggered a breakdown in political and military communication. Russia responded with economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation measures, and strong rhetorical condemnation. Analysts emphasize that the crisis demonstrated how regional conflicts could directly translate into bilateral confrontation when DE confliction mechanisms were absent. At the same time, neither side escalated beyond limited coercive measures, indicating restraint even at the height of confrontation. The episode revealed both the fragility and the limits of conflict escalation in Turkish–Russian relations (Erşen, 2017).

The normalization phase began in mid-2016, driven by strategic reassessment and leadership-level diplomacy. President Erdoğan's letter expressing regret over the jet incident and the subsequent St. Petersburg summit symbolized a deliberate effort to reset relations. This normalization was motivated by mutual economic interests, regional security concerns, and changing geopolitical calculations following the failed coup attempt in Turkey. Scholars note that reconciliation was framed not as reconciliation of values but as pragmatic restoration of cooperation. Political leaders emphasized future-oriented engagement rather than accountability for past actions. The speed of normalization underscored how crises were treated as episodic disruptions rather than structural breaks in the relationship (Kirişçi, 2016).

From late 2016 to 2017, normalization was consolidated through intensified diplomatic and security coordination, particularly in Syria. Turkey and Russia established new communication channels and began cooperating under trilateral frameworks to manage conflict zones. This period demonstrated how normalization extended beyond rhetoric into operational coordination. Analysts argue that this phase institutionalized crisis recovery mechanisms, reducing the likelihood that future confrontations would escalate uncontrollably. However, normalization did not eliminate underlying distrust; instead, it produced a functional partnership aimed at managing disagreements. The relationship thus shifted from confrontation to managed rivalry, grounded in mutual risk awareness (Dalay, 2018).

Despite normalization, the relationship experienced renewed tensions between 2018 and 2019, particularly over Idlib and broader regional security issues. Military incidents and diplomatic disagreements resurfaced, but unlike 2015, these did not lead to full confrontation. Instead, summits and negotiated arrangements were used to defuse crises before escalation. Scholars describe this phase as one of "preemptive normalization," where crisis management tools were deployed early to prevent rupture. This demonstrated learning effects from earlier

confrontations and highlighted the maturation of bilateral crisis-management practices (Sakwa, 2018).

The year 2020 represented a dual crisis-normalization dynamic, as Turkish and Russian forces clashed indirectly in Idlib while maintaining diplomatic coordination. The escalation in February 2020 resulted in Turkish casualties, bringing relations close to another rupture. Yet rapid summit diplomacy in Moscow produced a ceasefire framework that restored stability. Analysts emphasize that this episode confirmed a structural shift: even severe crises were now resolved through direct leader engagement rather than prolonged confrontation. Later in 2020, coordination over the Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire further reinforced normalization through shared enforcement mechanisms, despite competing regional interests (Broers, 2021).

Between 2021 and early 2022, normalization persisted but remained fragile, with periodic diplomatic strains reflecting unresolved strategic differences. Cooperation continued in economic, energy, and selective security domains, while competition remained visible in regional theaters. This phase illustrated that normalization had become procedural rather than transformational. Analysts argue that normalization during this period functioned as crisis avoidance rather than trust-building, relying heavily on personalized leadership ties. As a result, stability depended on continuous engagement rather than institutional depth (Freire & Kanet, 2021).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 introduced the most severe external shock of the decade, testing the durability of Turkish–Russian normalization. Turkey condemned the invasion but avoided sanctions and maintained diplomatic engagement, positioning itself as a mediator. This response demonstrated that normalization had evolved into strategic compartmentalization: disagreement on core issues did not preclude cooperation elsewhere. Scholars interpret this as the culmination of a decade-long pattern in which crises reshaped, but did not destroy, bilateral engagement. By 2022, Turkish–Russian relations had proven resilient, yet inherently unstable, characterized by normalization without reconciliation (Delcour, 2022).

Cooperation and Competition in Regional Conflicts during 2014-2022

Cooperation and competition in regional conflicts emerged as a defining characteristic of Turkish–Russian relations from 2014 onward, as both states became increasingly involved in overlapping conflict zones. In the early phase following the Crimea crisis, Turkey and Russia adopted competing regional postures while seeking to prevent confrontation from spilling into direct bilateral conflict. Although their strategic priorities diverged, particularly regarding Ukraine and the Black Sea, both sides recognized the risks of unmanaged rivalry. As a result, early interaction in regional conflicts was marked by caution, signaling, and diplomatic restraint rather than coordination. Analysts describe this period as one of competitive coexistence, where both actors tested boundaries while preserving communication channels. This initial phase laid the foundation for later patterns of managed rivalry across multiple theaters (Freire & Simão, 2016; Allison, 2015).

The Syrian conflict quickly became the primary arena where Turkish–Russian cooperation and competition intersected most visibly. Russia's military intervention in Syria in late 2015 fundamentally altered the regional balance and intensified friction with Turkey, culminating in the November 2015 jet incident. This episode demonstrated how incompatible operational priorities could escalate into direct confrontation. At the same time, the crisis revealed a ceiling on escalation, as both states relied on political signaling and limited coercion rather than sustained military confrontation. Scholarly assessments emphasize that Syria exposed the dangers of uncoordinated military activity while also highlighting the mutual interest in

avoiding a broader rupture. This confrontation marked a turning point in how both sides approached regional conflict management (Erşen, 2017).

From 2016 to 2017, cooperation began to take more structured form through the Astana process, which institutionalized Turkish–Russian interaction in Syria alongside Iran. This framework allowed both states to coordinate ceasefires, establish de-escalation zones, and manage frontlines while preserving divergent strategic goals. The Astana process did not resolve the Syrian conflict but created mechanisms for regulating competition and preventing uncontrolled escalation. International assessments noted that this format shifted mediation authority away from Western actors toward regional powers with direct military leverage. As a result, cooperation became procedural and tactical, embedded within a broader context of strategic rivalry (United Nations Security Council, 2016; BAKS, 2017).

Idlib emerged as the most persistent test of Turkish–Russian coordination between 2018 and 2020, illustrating the limits of cooperation under conditions of deep strategic divergence. The September 2018 Sochi understanding temporarily averted a large-scale offensive, but implementation proved fragile due to conflicting priorities on armed groups and territorial control. Recurrent crises culminated in the February–March 2020 escalation, which brought the two states close to direct confrontation. Yet rapid summit diplomacy once again produced a ceasefire framework that stabilized the situation. Analysts emphasize that Idlib demonstrated how cooperation functioned as a crisis-management tool rather than a conflict-resolution mechanism, reinforcing a cycle of escalation and containment (International Crisis Group, 2018; Lindenstrauss et al., 2020).

Libya represented another theater where cooperation and competition unfolded simultaneously, particularly from 2019 onward. Turkey and Russia supported opposing local actors, contributing to military escalation while also engaging in diplomatic efforts to shape ceasefires and political processes. Studies of the Libyan conflict argue that both states pursued controlled rivalry, using military involvement to strengthen bargaining positions rather than achieve decisive victory. This approach reduced the likelihood of direct confrontation between Ankara and Moscow but prolonged conflict dynamics on the ground. Libya thus reinforced the pattern of transactional engagement, where regional conflicts became platforms for negotiated influence rather than arenas for joint stabilization (International Crisis Group, 2020).

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war illustrated a compressed version of Turkish–Russian cooperation and competition in the South Caucasus. Turkey’s support for Azerbaijan and Russia’s subsequent mediation and peacekeeping deployment highlighted divergent but complementary roles. Postwar arrangements reflected a division of labor rather than a shared security vision, with Russia controlling enforcement mechanisms and Turkey participating through monitoring structures. Analysts argue that this outcome marginalized Western mediation and confirmed the rise of regional power management. Karabakh thus became a clear example of cooperation in post-conflict management alongside continued competition for regional influence (Schulze, 2020; Trenin, 2021).

From 2021 to 2022, Ukraine and the Black Sea formed a prolonged arena of strategic competition, intensified by Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022. Turkey opposed changes to territorial integrity while maintaining dialogue with Moscow and managing Black Sea access under international conventions. Despite supporting Ukraine politically and militarily in limited ways, Turkey preserved communication with Russia to prevent escalation and protect regional stability. Analysts interpret this balancing behavior as consistent with earlier patterns: intense competition tempered by functional coordination. In this context, cooperation was less about

shared objectives and more about enforcing rules and managing risk in a volatile regional environment (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

Overall, the chronological analysis shows that cooperation and competition were not sequential phases but simultaneous dynamics shaping Turkish–Russian engagement in regional conflicts between 2014 and 2022. Across Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ukraine, rivalry persisted due to divergent strategic interests, while cooperation emerged from the shared need to manage escalation. This model enabled crisis containment and bilateral resilience but produced fragile and externally managed outcomes. Rather than resolving conflicts, Turkish–Russian interaction institutionalized managed instability, making regional security dependent on continued negotiation and power balancing. This pattern remains central to understanding the broader impact of Turkish–Russian relations on regional order during the study period (Freire & Kanet, 2021; Arakelian, 2021).

Strategic Autonomy and Foreign Policy Reorientation between 2014-2022

Between 2014 and 2015, Turkey's pursuit of strategic autonomy began to take clearer shape as regional instability and global power shifts exposed the limits of traditional alliance-based foreign policy. Developments following the Crimea crisis and the deterioration of Russia–West relations placed Turkey in a complex strategic environment, where rigid alignment risked economic and security costs. During this period, Ankara sought greater room for maneuver by emphasizing diplomatic flexibility and regional engagement while remaining formally anchored to NATO. Scholars argue that this early phase marked a recalibration rather than a rupture, as Turkey began exploring diversified partnerships without abandoning existing commitments. Russia emerged as a key interlocutor in this context, offering Ankara alternatives in energy, trade, and regional coordination. Strategic autonomy at this stage was thus defensive in nature, aimed at reducing vulnerability rather than redefining identity (Kardaş, 2014; Robins, 2016).

The escalation of regional conflicts in 2015, particularly in Syria, accelerated Turkey's foreign policy reorientation. Diverging priorities with Western partners over Syria, combined with growing security threats along Turkey's borders, intensified Ankara's search for independent decision-making capacity. The jet crisis with Russia later that year paradoxically reinforced this trajectory by demonstrating the costs of unmanaged confrontation and overreliance on external security guarantees. Analysts note that the crisis underscored Turkey's exposure to regional escalation and its limited influence over allied responses. As a result, strategic autonomy increasingly became associated with crisis management and bilateral engagement rather than reliance on multilateral frameworks. This period highlighted how autonomy was shaped by security imperatives rather than ideological realignment (Erşen, 2017; Aydın-Düzgit & Kaliber, 2016).

Following the normalization of relations with Russia in 2016, strategic autonomy took on a more proactive and visible character. The post-coup environment in Turkey deepened skepticism toward Western partners and reinforced the leadership's emphasis on sovereign decision-making. Re-engagement with Russia was framed domestically as evidence of Turkey's ability to rebalance its foreign relations independently. Scholars emphasize that normalization was not merely about repairing ties with Moscow but about demonstrating Ankara's capacity to diversify partnerships under pressure. Strategic autonomy thus became a narrative of resilience and self-determination, reflected in intensified bilateral diplomacy and selective security cooperation with Russia. This phase marked a shift from reactive autonomy to deliberate reorientation (Kirişci, 2016; Taşpınar, 2017).

Between 2017 and 2019, Turkey's pursuit of strategic autonomy became institutionalized through concrete policy decisions that challenged established alliance norms. The decision to

procure the Russian S-400 air defense system symbolized this shift, signaling Ankara's willingness to prioritize national security preferences over alliance cohesion. Analysts argue that the S-400 case represented a broader foreign policy recalibration in which Turkey asserted decision-making independence even at the cost of strained Western relations. At the same time, cooperation with Russia remained selective and transactional, indicating that autonomy did not imply strategic alignment. Instead, Turkey sought to position itself as a middle power capable of engaging multiple centers of power simultaneously. This period solidified strategic autonomy as a guiding principle of Turkish foreign policy (Yılmaz, 2018; Kutlay & Öniş, 2021).

Strategic autonomy also shaped Turkey's regional engagement during the 2018–2020 period, particularly in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara's willingness to negotiate directly with Russia over conflict management arrangements reflected a preference for bilateral and regional solutions over Western-led processes. Analysts note that Turkey increasingly viewed regional diplomacy as a domain where autonomy could be exercised most effectively. This approach reduced dependence on external mediation and allowed Turkey to translate military presence into political leverage. However, it also required constant negotiation and compromise with other regional powers, especially Russia. Strategic autonomy during this phase was therefore contingent and relational, shaped by ongoing bargaining rather than unilateral control (Dalay, 2018; Özkan, 2020).

The year 2020 marked a critical test of Turkey's foreign policy reorientation, as crises in Idlib and Nagorno-Karabakh unfolded alongside deepening engagement with Russia. Turkey's actions demonstrated a willingness to use military power while simultaneously engaging in diplomacy to manage escalation. In both theaters, Ankara pursued independent objectives but accepted negotiated frameworks brokered with Moscow. Scholars argue that this illustrates a hybrid autonomy strategy combining assertiveness with restraint. Rather than aligning fully with Russia or the West, Turkey sought to maximize influence through flexible positioning. This approach reinforced Turkey's image as an autonomous regional actor while highlighting the constraints imposed by power asymmetries (Broers, 2021; Dalay, 2020).

From 2021 into 2022, strategic autonomy became increasingly visible in Turkey's balancing behavior amid heightened global polarization. Ankara maintained cooperation with Russia in economic and diplomatic domains while opposing territorial changes in Ukraine and supporting diplomatic mediation efforts. Analysts emphasize that Turkey's refusal to adopt comprehensive sanctions against Russia reflected a calculated autonomy strategy designed to preserve diplomatic leverage and economic interests. At the same time, Turkey reaffirmed commitments to NATO, illustrating the dual-track nature of its foreign policy. Strategic autonomy in this phase was not about equidistance but about selective engagement based on national interest. This balancing posture demonstrated the maturation of Turkey's reoriented foreign policy (Öniş & Kutlay, 2022; Delcour, 2022).

Overall, between 2014 and 2022, strategic autonomy emerged as a central organizing principle of Turkey's foreign policy, reshaping its engagement with Russia and the broader international system. Rather than signaling isolation or alliance abandonment, autonomy reflected a pragmatic effort to navigate an increasingly fragmented global order. Cooperation with Russia became one instrument among many for expanding diplomatic and strategic options. However, the findings also show that autonomy remained constrained by structural dependencies and power imbalances. Turkey's foreign policy reorientation thus produced greater flexibility but also new vulnerabilities, underscoring the complexity of autonomy in contemporary regional politics (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Freire & Kanet, 2021).

Continuity and Change in Bilateral Relations (2014–2022)

Between 2014 and 2015, Turkish–Russian relations displayed a strong element of continuity rooted in long-standing economic interdependence and pragmatic diplomacy, even as geopolitical tensions intensified. The annexation of Crimea and the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West placed Turkey in a complex position, but Ankara avoided policies that would fundamentally disrupt bilateral engagement. Analysts note that Turkey's response reflected continuity in its traditional approach of balancing principled positions with material interests, particularly in trade, tourism, and energy. Despite emerging disagreements, diplomatic channels remained open and high-level contacts continued. This period demonstrates that continuity in Turkish–Russian relations was anchored in mutual recognition of costs associated with rupture. At the same time, early signs of change emerged as security concerns began to play a more prominent role alongside economic priorities (Allison, 2015; Kardaş, 2014).

The year 2015 marked a moment of abrupt change, culminating in the November jet crisis, which temporarily disrupted established patterns of cooperation. The downing of the Russian Su-24 led to a sharp deterioration in political dialogue, military contacts, and economic exchanges, breaking with the cautious stability of earlier years. Scholars emphasize that this episode represented a structural shock rather than a routine disagreement, exposing the fragility of informal crisis-management mechanisms. However, even this confrontation revealed underlying continuity, as both sides avoided escalation beyond limited coercive measures. The crisis illustrated that while bilateral relations could shift rapidly under pressure, they remained constrained by mutual calculations of risk and cost. Change, therefore, was dramatic but bounded (Erşen, 2017; Sakwa, 2018).

Normalization in 2016 reintroduced continuity through pragmatic recalibration, signaling that rupture was neither permanent nor desirable. Political leadership on both sides prioritized restoring cooperation, driven by strategic reassessment and shared interests in regional stability and economic recovery. Analysts argue that the speed of normalization reflected a deeper continuity in bilateral logic: crises were treated as reversible disruptions rather than defining breaks. This phase also introduced change in the form of closer leader-centric diplomacy and reduced reliance on institutional channels. The relationship became more personalized and transactional, marking an evolution in how continuity was maintained. Thus, continuity persisted, but through new mechanisms and practices (Kirişçi, 2016; Shlykov, 2016).

From 2017 to 2018, continuity and change coexisted as cooperation expanded into new areas while strategic distrust remained unresolved. Defense cooperation, energy projects, and regional coordination increased, suggesting a qualitative change in the scope of engagement. At the same time, analysts stress that this expansion did not amount to strategic alignment; instead, it reflected selective cooperation driven by converging short-term interests. The continuity lay in the pragmatic nature of engagement, while change was evident in the willingness to challenge traditional alliance boundaries. Turkish–Russian relations during this period thus evolved into a hybrid form stable in intent but flexible in content (Yılmaz, 2018; Dalay, 2018).

The period between 2018 and 2019 further illustrated this hybrid pattern through repeated crises that were managed without derailing cooperation. Disagreements in Syria and elsewhere generated tensions, yet summit diplomacy and negotiated arrangements prevented breakdown. Scholars describe this phase as one of “learned resilience,” where both sides applied lessons from earlier crises to contain disputes. Continuity was evident in sustained dialogue and economic cooperation, while change appeared in the routinization of crisis

management. Rather than exceptional events, crises became expected features of the relationship, handled through established bargaining practices (Broers, 2019; Sakwa, 2018).

The year 2020 marked a significant moment of change as Turkish–Russian relations were tested simultaneously in multiple regional conflicts. Escalation in Idlib and developments in Nagorno-Karabakh challenged the limits of cooperation, yet both crises were followed by negotiated arrangements that restored functional engagement. Analysts argue that these outcomes demonstrated continuity in the underlying logic of bilateral relations: competition would be managed through negotiation rather than confrontation. However, change was evident in the increasing normalization of rivalry, where opposing interests were openly acknowledged within cooperative frameworks. This reflected a maturation of the relationship into one defined by managed competition (Broers, 2021; Trenin, 2021).

From 2021 into early 2022, continuity was maintained through sustained economic ties and diplomatic engagement, even as global polarization intensified. Turkish–Russian relations showed resilience amid growing international pressure and diverging strategic alignments. Analysts note that this resilience stemmed from entrenched interdependence and accumulated crisis-management experience. At the same time, subtle changes emerged as Turkey increasingly emphasized strategic autonomy and diversified its partnerships. The relationship thus continued, but within a more complex and uncertain international context that required constant adjustment (Freire & Kanet, 2021; Kutlay & Öniş, 2021).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 represented the most significant stress test for continuity in bilateral relations. Turkey's response condemning the invasion while maintaining dialogue and avoiding sanctions demonstrated both continuity and change. Continuity lay in Ankara's commitment to engagement and balancing, while change was evident in the heightened geopolitical stakes and constraints. Scholars interpret this as confirmation that Turkish–Russian relations had evolved into a compartmentalized and transactional model capable of absorbing shocks without collapsing. By 2022, continuity was no longer based on shared vision, but on mutual adaptation to an increasingly volatile international order (Delcour, 2022; Öniş & Kutlay, 2022).

Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study confirm the central hypothesis that Turkish–Russian relations between 2014 and 2022 evolved through a pattern of managed competition rather than sustained alliance or permanent confrontation. Across diplomatic, economic, and military domains, both states demonstrated an ability to compartmentalize disagreements while preserving cooperation in areas of mutual interest. Diplomatic engagement remained the primary tool for crisis management, particularly through leader-level coordination and summit diplomacy. This pattern supports the objective of analyzing key developments in bilateral relations by showing that diplomacy functioned less as a means of conflict resolution and more as a mechanism for damage control and recalibration. Rather than eliminating rivalry, diplomatic interaction helped stabilize relations during periods of heightened tension.

The analysis of economic relations and energy cooperation reveals that economic interdependence acted as a stabilizing but not pacifying factor in Turkish–Russian relations. Major energy projects and trade linkages constrained the likelihood of prolonged rupture and incentivized normalization after crises. However, the findings also show that economic ties did not prevent confrontation, as demonstrated during periods of political and military escalation. Instead, interdependence enabled rapid recovery once political conditions shifted. This supports the hypothesis that economic cooperation contributed to continuity in bilateral

relations but did not transform underlying strategic competition. Economic engagement therefore functioned as a buffer rather than a foundation for trust-based partnership.

Military interaction and defense cooperation emerged as one of the most complex dimensions of the relationship. The findings indicate that military engagement oscillated between confrontation, coordination, and selective cooperation, particularly in conflict zones where both states were operationally active. Defense cooperation remained transactional and limited, aimed at enhancing strategic leverage rather than building an integrated security partnership. At the same time, military deconfliction mechanisms and post-conflict enforcement arrangements demonstrated a shared interest in escalation control. This confirms the hypothesis that military cooperation coexisted with rivalry and served pragmatic objectives rather than signaling strategic alignment.

The study's examination of crisis, confrontation, and normalization cycles highlights a recurring pattern in Turkish–Russian relations during the study period. Major crises did not result in lasting rupture but instead led to recalibration and renewed engagement once costs became apparent. Normalization processes were driven by strategic reassessment, leadership intervention, and economic considerations rather than reconciliation of values or interests. This finding supports the hypothesis that crises reinforced a transactional relationship structure, where confrontation was treated as temporary and reversible. As a result, bilateral relations displayed resilience but remained inherently unstable and dependent on continuous political management.

The findings related to cooperation and competition in regional conflicts demonstrate that the South Caucasus and other regional theaters served as arenas where Turkish–Russian rivalry was managed through negotiated arrangements rather than resolved through shared security frameworks. In these contexts, both states pursued competing objectives while coordinating mechanisms to limit escalation and shape outcomes. This interaction significantly affected the security dynamics of the Caucasus by reinforcing external influence, marginalizing multilateral mediation, and producing enforcement-based stability. The study confirms that Turkish–Russian engagement contributed to a regional security order characterized by managed instability rather than durable peace.

Finally, the analysis of strategic autonomy and continuity versus change shows that Turkish–Russian relations underwent significant adaptation without fundamental transformation. Turkey's pursuit of strategic autonomy reshaped its engagement with Russia, allowing for diversified partnerships and flexible positioning. However, this reorientation did not lead to alliance formation or abandonment of existing commitments. Instead, continuity persisted in the form of pragmatic engagement, while change was evident in the methods and scope of cooperation. The findings thus support the overarching hypothesis that Turkish–Russian relations between 2014 and 2022 were defined by continuity in pragmatic interaction alongside change in tactics, arenas, and instruments of engagement.

Conclusion

This study set out to analyze the key events and developments in Turkish–Russian relations between 2014 and 2022 and to assess their impact on the security of the Caucasus region. The findings demonstrate that Turkish–Russian relations during this period were neither defined by sustained partnership nor by permanent confrontation, but by a pattern of managed competition. Across diplomatic, economic, and military domains, both states consistently balanced cooperation and rivalry in ways that allowed them to protect core interests while avoiding direct conflict. This dynamic significantly shaped regional security outcomes,

particularly in the South Caucasus, where external influence and power-based management became central features of stability.

The study concludes that diplomatic engagement functioned primarily as a crisis-management tool rather than a mechanism for long-term conflict resolution. High-level political coordination enabled Ankara and Moscow to contain disputes, recalibrate relations after crises, and maintain functional cooperation despite deep strategic differences. Economic and energy interdependence further reinforced this pattern by constraining the costs of rupture and encouraging normalization. However, these economic ties did not eliminate political or military tensions, underscoring the transactional nature of the bilateral relationship. Military interaction and defense cooperation played a critical role in shaping outcomes on the ground, especially in regional conflicts. While both Turkey and Russia pursued competing strategic objectives, they developed mechanisms to manage escalation and regulate conflict dynamics. These arrangements contributed to short-term stability but also entrenched militarization and external dependence. As a result, security in the Caucasus became increasingly shaped by enforcement and bargaining rather than inclusive political settlement.

The study also finds that Turkish–Russian interaction contributed to the marginalization of Western-led security frameworks in the Caucasus. Regional power management increasingly replaced multilateral mediation, altering the nature of conflict governance. Although this shift allowed for more decisive intervention during crises, it also reduced transparency and limited opportunities for durable peace. The resulting security order remained fragile, dependent on continuous external management rather than internal reconciliation.

The research concludes that Turkish–Russian relations between 2014 and 2022 reshaped the security landscape of the Caucasus without producing lasting stability. The relationship demonstrated resilience through repeated cycles of crisis and normalization, yet remained inherently unstable due to unresolved conflicts and competing interests. The Caucasus security order that emerged during this period can best be described as externally managed and transactional, characterized by managed instability rather than sustainable peace. This study highlights the importance of understanding great-power interaction in regional contexts and underscores the limitations of security arrangements that prioritize short-term stability over long-term conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- Move beyond enforcement-based conflict management toward inclusive political dialogue that addresses the root causes of conflicts in the Caucasus, including territorial disputes, security guarantees, and post-conflict governance.
- Encourage regionally driven confidence-building mechanisms among Caucasus states to reduce excessive reliance on external powers and to improve communication, incident management, and trust.
- Turkey and Russia should adopt greater transparency and restraint in their regional engagement by clarifying the scope of their military and political roles and avoiding actions that intensify militarization or escalate rivalries.
- Strengthen early-warning systems and institutionalized communication channels to prevent crises from escalating into armed confrontation, particularly in conflict-prone zones.
- Western actors, especially the European Union, should recalibrate their engagement toward long-term diplomatic presence, economic support, and institutional development rather than episodic crisis intervention.

- Promote inclusive economic and connectivity projects that foster mutual regional interdependence rather than exclusive alignments with external patrons, ensuring that such initiatives contribute to stability rather than new dependencies.
- Prioritize preventive diplomacy and confidence-building over reactive crisis containment to enhance the prospects for sustainable peace in the Caucasus region.

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