Harmoon Centre for Contemporary Studies is an independent, nonprofit, research, cultural and media institution. Its main focus is to conduct studies and researches about the Arab region, especially Syria. It also works towards cultural and media development, enhancing the civil society performance, and spreading democratic awareness and values of dialogue, as well as respect for human rights. The Centre also provides consultation and training services in political and media fields to all Syrians on the basis of Syrian national identity.

To achieve its objectives, the Centre conducts its activities through five specialized units, (1) Policy Studies Unit, (2) Social Researches Unit, (3) Books Review Unit, (4) Translation and Arabization Unit, and (5) Legal Unit.

A set of action programs are also adopted, such as the program for Political Consultations and Initiatives; Program for Services, Media Campaigns, and Public Opinion Making Program; Program for Dialogue Support and Civil and Cultural Development Program; Syria Future Program. The Centre may add new programs depending on the actual needs of Syria and the region. In implementing its programs, the Centre deploys multiple mechanisms, including lectures, workshops, seminars, conferences, training courses, as well as paper and electronic press.
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Introduction

The common denominator between Russia and Turkey is that they are both descendants of two Euro-Asian empires, but they have been excluded - both procedural and historical - from the arrangements of the Western European house, since the end of the Second World War and the Cold War, to the present day. If we add the current situation of divergence between the Atlantic system and Moscow, along with careful dealing between the system itself and Turkey, then we will see one of the determinants of the Russian-Turkish rapprochement, which can upset geopolitical equations, if it goes ahead.

On the other hand, it is impossible to deny the historical legacy of the differences between the two countries, the most prominent of which are the differences over the passage of the Bosphorus Strait, the competition for the transfer of Central Asian oil and the Caspian Sea, the position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Syrian issue, the Cyprus issue, Russia’s support for Greece, and finally the problem of Chechnya and the Turkish position.

Nevertheless, economic factors represent the cornerstone of the Russian-Turkish relations; Turkey is Russia’s seventh largest trading partner, the first destination for Russian tourists, and the second largest export market after Germany for the Russian giant Gazprom, and Russia is the second largest trading partner of Turkey.

The Russian-Turkish relations are a model of political pragmatism. The positions of the two countries differ on some issues without affecting the overall development of their relationship. But still, the Russian-Turkish relations will always remain governed by the realities of geopolitics between them and the climate of mistrust that has existed for decades.

First: the history of Ankara's turn towards Moscow

Historically, Turkey’s turn towards Russia is not the first of its kind. Apart from the vital Soviet support of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in the 1920s, there have been many other examples: Adnan Menderes, Bulent Ecevit, and Suleiman Demirel. The longest and more intimate period of time was with the arrival of AKP in Turkey in 2002. In the first decade of this century,
Moscow and Ankara sought to play a bigger role in the world order, and were frustrated because of what they considered as a Western rejection of this role. The most prominent factor in the Russian-Turkish partnership, after Erdogan became prime minister in 2002, was the retreat of the Russian forces from the Turkish border, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Turkish President’s visit to St. Petersburg on 9 August 2016, after the downing of the Russian aircraft in October 2015, received wide attention and follow-up, for opening up possibility of cooperation on several issues, especially the Syrian one, as both parties felt the weight of their involvement in this issue.

The legacy of the Cold War and the great differences between the two sides on the issues of (Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, Kosovo in the Balkans, Greek Cyprus and finally Syria) prompted the two countries to give the economic dimension in their relationship a priority because of their need for each other’s, putting their political disagreements aside, or at least preventing their impact on the economic issues.

**Second: the foundations of the Turkish-Russian rapprochement**

Usually, major political entities do not make sharp turns on converge or diverge, but gradually and steadily, starting with cooperation, and reaching integration, to finally reach close alliance. In this context, the two presidents, Erdoğan and Putin, are both unhesitant to embark on geopolitics. Putin understands that any Russian leader must provide buffer zones for Russia in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Erdogan knows that his country must become an important force in the Middle East to gain influence in Europe, and both of them feel more uneasy towards the West, which is dealing with each with much care, and distancing itself from them. Both sides seem to be keenly aware of the importance of restoring relations, and of how beneficial their mutual pragmatism is. It is the politics of interests that bring together enemies and divide allies.
A - Russian basis

Russian relations with the West, European and American, are at their worst since their last improvement after the fall of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was the source of unprecedented tension, when Russia supported Ukrainian separatists and annexed the Crimea, prompting Europe to punish Russia severely. The Western economic war on Russia has become so intense as if it was trying to stifle the Russian economy. Hence the many Russian basis of rapprochement with Turkey:

* Turkey is Russia’s sea gate from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and this is a lifeline for Russia.

* Moscow sees Ankara as an economic breathing aid and a strategic lifeline to reduce the negative and painful repercussions of the Western sanctions that have besieged it since the summer of 2014, in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, especially after Turkey refused to join Western countries in their imposition or application on Russia, and for being the intermediary partner for transporting natural gas to Europe, following the failure of the joint European energy projects, the most important of which was project (South Stream).

* Putin knows Turkey's relatively limited capabilities in changing the international balance of power, but he wants to exploit the current gap in the Turkish-American positions to prevent Turkey from completing the circle of the blockade on Russia if it joined the American effort in Romania and Ukraine, and the missile deterrence wall, and to restrict its vital geographical range, which are the lessons learnt from the Western conflict with Russia in the last three centuries. Added to that, he is exploiting the deterioration of trust between Turkey and the United States, which has not responded to any of the Turkish requirements in Syria, including those affecting the Turkish national security directly, such as the Kurdish file. Russia also sees the forces against the Turkish influence are growing to form an arc in its strategic environment, and that Ankara is sensing a restriction, not only for its influence, but also for its political relations with its surroundings. Putin also wants to send a message to Western capitals that, despite sanctions and blockade, he can penetrate the Western camp and infiltrate it at home.
in its this strategic approach, Turkey represents the side of Eurasia for Russia, the vital Russian space represented by most of the former Soviet Union in the imagination of President Putin, because Turkey is connected with the people of Central Asia in this space with present ethnic and religious ties, and other historical links that stimulate the imagination for a different future, namely -worryingly Islamic- especially what is reported in Moscow about Turkey's support for some Tatar organizations in Crimean whom seen by Russia as extremists.

* Russia sees that after the repercussions of the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, Turkey is more eligible and responsive to the partnership. If Russia is able to provide reassurance about the issues Turkey fears and become part of the division that Russia sees in the region, Turkey will become more able to recognise the reality in Syria, with some formality changes to save face, and the same may apply in relation to Iran, Iraq, Eastern Europe, the Black Sea, and the supply of gas.

* Moscow is looking for lines of cooperation with Turkey in Syria, to penetrate the ranks of the international coalition against the Syrian regime, despite the wide divergence in the positions of the two sides on the Syrian issue. Turkey is still insisting on Assad's departure and demands a buffer zone in the north of Syria, demands that Moscow is firmly rejecting, insisting on leaving the question of Assad to a later stage. Moscow is aware that Turkey is the most influential regional state in the opposition, the most capable of acting on the Syrian ground, with its 900-kilometer border with Syria, and its relations with Islamic militant groups on the ground.

B- Turkish basis

Based on the understandings between them, Presidents Erdogan and Putin swapped the threatening language to a pragmatic one, manifested in frequent meetings and contacts between them. Three reasons explain these understandings; First, Turkey's relations with the West, both American and European, have been strained. Ankara has been wary of Western policy toward the Syrian issue, especially Western support for the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Forces. Second, the economic dimension is a vital factor in the Russian-Turkish relations. Thirdly, the Russian military intervention produced a new equation on the ground in Syria. Turkey
considered that it was preferable to deal with, given the balance of power and regional alignments with regard to the Syrian issue.

* Ankara sees its emergency strategic rapprochement with Moscow compensates for the decline of regional trade as a result of the Arab spring revolutions and the deterioration of tourism against the backdrop of the global economic recession. The compensation is based on a growing trade exchange, a growing Russian tourist flow, and high-level coordination in energy, security, and intercontinental logistics projects.

On the other hand, the high expected economic return to Ankara from its partnership with Moscow is one of the reasons for its keenness to open up to the Russian neighbour. Economically, Russia remains a difficult figure in Turkey's energy security equation.

The economic sanctions imposed by Russia on Turkey after the jet incident have adversely affected some sectors of the Turkish economy, including tourism, construction and food exports. Turkey’s losses from these sanctions amounted to about $10 billion, and the number of Russian tourists to Turkish resorts fell to more than 80 per cent. In addition, Turkey's demand for Russian gas is very large, because 70 percent of the gas it needs comes from Russia, which is an economic, social and political lifeline for the Turkish state. Turkey was counting on the new Russian gas pipeline to and through, which would give it a chance to turn - in the future - into a major intermediary for the sale of Russian natural gas, passing through its land to the countries of the European Union.

The success of the process to re-normalize the Turkish-Russian relations has been used to put more pressure on the Western allies who have failed Ankara in many occasions: their lukewarm reactions to the failed coup attempt in Turkey, the American approach to the solution in Syria, who depended on allying with the Kurdistan Workers Party, the delay of the Europeans in the process of Turkey's accession to the Union, and in the implementation of their obligations under the Refugee Agreement, the revocation of visas for Turkish citizens wishing to enter the (Schengen) zone, as well as the shy support provided by NATO to Ankara during its crisis with Moscow, the failure of NATO countries to help it build a missile defence system, and pressurising it to retract the agreement that it had signed with a Chinese company in this area; all the factors caused Turkey's resentment towards the West.
* With the battle of Al-Raqqa to expel organization of Daesh entering its most critical stages, Turkey sought to achieve its goals by protecting its national security, in the presence of Russia, which was only interested in increasing the influence of its ally, Bashar Al-Assad, and the United States, who seemed to have permanently turned its back on Turkey, determined to rely on the usual enemy of the latter, i.e. the Syrian wing of the party (PKK); the (Kurdish Democratic Union).

* Ideas of major projects have emerged with great importance beyond the “business” between the two countries to reach global balance. Examples of these projects are constructing a Russian nuclear power plants on Turkish soil and what that could entail, if it takes place, of a possible strategic partnership between Ankara And Moscow. But the most important and most dangerous project is the project to run Russian natural gas pipelines to the Mediterranean through Turkish territory in what is called the Turkish Torrent project. However, the talk about the Russian offer to build a missile shield system for the Turkish army was the most prominent and most sensitive matter in the files put so far, because of its huge strategic dimensions. This is one of the most sensitive issues in the relationship between Turkey and NATO, which strongly opposes Turkey’s use of any non-NATO missile defence system (the Patriot system).

The Russian-Turkish rapprochement, if understood from the perspective of the acute crisis experienced by Ankara’s relations with its Western partners, after the attempted military coup to oust Erdogan in July 2016, with its direct links to the ramifications of the Syrian file, it falls into a broader strategic dimension that is relocating the global geopolitical axis to Asia, putting Turkey at the heart of a complex international equation dominated by relations between the three competing powers to control the Asian sphere: the United States, Russia and China. What we are witnessing today, in the Putinist phase, is Russia’s exit from its European ambition, which dominated the transitional governments after the end of the Soviet era, to consolidate its Asian presence and invest it in the new rules of the international game. Turkey, on the other hand, is forced to abandon its European ambition, for the new Asian repositioning.

The two presidents, Putin and Erdogan, each has found in the other a saviour in their current crises. The economic and political interests have crossed roads, and although some
observers hope that the new start of bilateral cooperation will be reflected in the controversial
issues, that is unlikely to happen, especially that Turkey is still a member of NATO, and it is
using its dealing with Russia to put pressure on Europe. Moreover, The strategic dimension of
the Turkish-Russian relations is not based on circumstantial problems faced by countries, and
are dealt with by making some economic agreements; Turkey is still a strategic necessity for
the West, that cannot be given up or allowed to form a strategic alliance with Russia.
Therefore, it is impossible to talk about a strategic partnership between Moscow and Ankara,
but comparing the tension between the two countries after the Turks downed the Russian
Sukhoi, the current reconciliation is a major progress in the hope of seeking - at least - to
resolve some of the problems between the two countries.

Third: The limits of the Russian-Turkish understandings on the
Syrian issue

The Russian intervention in Syria has confused Turkey's foreign policy at several levels. The
presence of a large Russian military force in northern Syria is a powerful warning of future
change in the long-term geo-strategic balance of the region. In addition, the Russian
intervention frustrated Turkey because it was working to overthrow Assad and his regime.
The idea of creating a safe area in southern Turkey and making it a no-fly zone also became
difficult.

Turkey's downing the Russian aircraft in October 2015 to rein the Syrian-Russian progress
on the ground, particularly in the Latakia countryside, paving the way to the establishment of
a buffer zone from Jarablus to the Mediterranean, has had the opposite effect of the Turkish
expectations. The incident caused Russia to cross all red lines in the bank of targets it bombed
in Syria, after Turkey crossed all the Russian red lines by dropping the plane. For the first time,
Russian planes bombed routes on the Turkish border and directly assisted the Kurdish
protection forces in Afrin on the front, which seemed to have opened up against the
opposition supported by Turkey.
In fact, they both decided that the key to their project lies in the Syrian portal, both of which are aware that they are unable to implement their project as long as the others are fighting them. Therefore, the margin of understanding between the two countries did not collapse, in the framework of the Vienna process for the future of Syria at the end of 2015, because the process has provided the means to look directly into the future of Syria, while agreeing to put their differences off while building on the basis of unanimity. The most important of these differences were: the future of Bashar al-Assad in the transition process, the definition of the terrorist organizations and who was accepted as Syrian armed opposition, and the time plans for the exit of non-Syrian forces from Syrian territory. Since the end of last year, Moscow and Ankara have been able to establish a mechanism for cooperation in Syria, through the establishment of a joint committee to monitor the truce, overcoming their differences in the Syrian file and their divergent views on the future of Syria.

There is no doubt that Turkey has suffered a decline and tension in its foreign relations with many parties, which led to a u-turn in its positions, it has apologized to Russia and normalised relations with "Israel." Russia, besieged by the Atlantic and its creeping projects into its vital range, and under damaging Western sanctions and economic difficulties, does not want to get stuck in the Syrian quagmire and is seeking a solution that would preserve its interests in Syria. Are these grounds enough to achieve a political breakthrough that changes the positions of the two countries on the Syrian issue? Has the Turkish efforts succeeded in developing some understandings?

During his meeting with Putin in Moscow on March the 9th, President Erdogan sought to develop understandings with Putin on the Syrian file, especially in the wake of the field developments in Al-Bab and Manbaj, the attempts to obtain a Russian green light by expanding the Euphrates Sheild Op to new areas, and reducing the influence of Daesh’s and US-backed Kurdish units in northern Syria. The search also focused on the effort to reach a political solution, to assess the outcome of the Geneva and Astana meetings, and to give new incentive to the Moscow-Ankara ceasefire agreement. Erdogan asked Putin to cooperate to get the Kurdish militants out of the city of Manbaj and to strengthen coordination to prevent clashes on the city’s borders, which were surrounded by regular forces allied to the armies of Turkey, Russia, America, the Syrian regime, Shiite militias and the Euphrates Shield.
The Turkish priority in the Syrian issue is based on its interests and on its national security, which became threatened after the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria established Kurdish cantons in the Syrian north, supported by the United States and the Russian Federation. Therefore, Turkey wants Russia to stop supporting it.

On the other hand, there are some indicators that rule out Turkey’s embrace of Russian politics, as a country whose strategic importance is a bridge between Europe and Asia. In addition, the indicators do not give a clear picture of the possibility of full agreement between Ankara and Moscow on Syria, but these indicators also confirm that the Syrian file will not spoil the obvious features of the détente between the two countries.

The launch of Operation Euphrates on 24 August 2016, did not happen without a trade-off between the two presidents, Erdogan and Putin, in return for the Turks abandoning the armed groups in the Battle of Aleppo and withdrawing the largest possible number of them to Jarabuls. Deeply, each party wanted to use the other to achieve its strategy towards the Syrian issue. Moscow was aiming from the carrot policy with Turkey to control the borders and cooperation against the armed factions and the military withdrawal from the battle of Aleppo. Ankara also assumed that the economic and political rapprochement with Moscow might push the latter to respond to its policy on the Syrian issue, and perhaps the gradual abandonment of the head of the Syrian regime, especially as Moscow has always said that it was not keen on the regime, but rather on the unity of the Syrian land, and maintaining the structure of the state.

It seems that the previous understandings between the two sides were limited, as revealed by the field developments on the ground, so that Russia wanted the (Euphrates Shield) Op to be limited, and to stop - more accurately - at the gates of the city of Al-Bab. Thus, the targeting of Turkish soldiers, killing four of them, in a raid that has been carried out by the Russian or Syrian air forces as it has been said, comes as a clear Russian message about what was the permissible limits for the Turkish operation, indicating that there was an understanding among Russia, Iran, and the Syrian regime, on the limits of the Turkish incursion and for specific targets. On its part, Turkey’s strategy is different, as it focuses on preserving its national security, preventing the creation of an independent Kurdish entity on its southern border, and investing in the Operation of the Euphrates Shield to secure its influence in Syria.
However, the meeting of the US, Russian and Turkish Chiefs of Staff in Antalya on 7 and 8 March, revealed the American position on the liberation of Al-Raqqa from Daesh, depending on the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Russian emphasis on the need to hand over the city to the Syrian regime after its liberation to guarantee its stability, and the failure of the meeting to coordinate the efforts of the three parties to advance towards Al-Raqqa. Nevertheless, it was possible to reach an understandings on dividing Syria into three specific sectors, one for each party, and the announcement by the Syrian Democratic Forces on March 4 that they reached an agreement with the Syrian regime to hand over the City of Manbaj. Faced with these developments, Turkey began to wonder whether the Russian forces were the ones who facilitated handing over the city of Manbaj to of the Assad forces, and then, reduced the area of Turkish influence?

In the midst of these contradictions, Turkey went back to doubting the Russian position. Russia knows whether there is an agreement between the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Pentagon or not, because America coordinates its moves with Russia. In addition, the Kurdish militias affiliated with the (Democratic Union) do not hide their positions and military movements from the Russians, so did Russia hide these agreements from Turkey?

The military situation in Syria, especially around the city of Manbaj, was one of the topics in President Erdogan’s talks in Moscow. The fate of Manbaj and Raqqa became the main issue in regional politics.

As the preparations for the battle of Raqqa are approaching amid international disputes over control of the city of Manbaj, things got more complicated. Deputy Prime Minister Numan Qortolumush called on the United States and Russia to choose between Turkey and the Democratic Union Party: "The United States and Russia should decide, would you favour 3 to 5 thousand armed fighter from the Democratic Union Organisation, over the stable Turkish state of 80 million people, and who has the largest army in the region?"

Despite the complexity of the scene, the Russian-Turkish understanding, if achieved, can play an important role in ending the Syrian slaughter. This is due to the great influence of the Russians and Turks in the Syrian and regional parties of the conflict, especially with the emergence of somewhat an international and regional consensus that the crisis, which affected everyone to varying degrees, must end. But the actual success depends on the
availability of several factors: First, putting an end to the military intervention of Iran and its Lebanese, Iraqi and Afghan militias; second, the continued divergence in the Russian and Iranian agendas; third, the United States of America weighing in to support and consolidate the agreement; fourth, focusing in Geneva’s negotiations on the political transition rather any other issue; and fifth, the Syrian opposition to reconsider their situation, and to head towards activating the role of the Syrians in determining the fate of their country.

Fourth: The obstacles for the Russian-Turkish rapprochement

With Turkey’s focus on what is happening in Syria, Moscow can keep Turkey hanging by continuing to support the Kurdish separatists and complicate any Turkish military plans in Syria by strengthening the Russian military presence on the battlefield. Moscow considered the Syrian Kurds its potential allies, especially after Moscow allowed the Kurds of Syria to establish a representative office in Russia. In addition, the Russian air force carried out missions that contributed to the progress of the Syrian Kurds in the areas of influence of (Daesh) and the control of more land on the Turkish border, Ain al-Arab (Kobani) - Afrin to the west of the Euphrates.

On top of that, Russia’s growing influence in the Turkish backyard, in the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the wider Middle East, shows the diminution of the Turkish influence, limiting the chances of an effective partnership between Ankara and Moscow.

Thus, there are many obstacles to the sustainability of such rapprochement, the most important of which are:
**A- The geographical and strategic location of Turkey**

The strategic positioning of any country, and the identification of the dangers that surround it, is composed of decades of historical experiences, and perhaps centuries of history. Hence, the identification of Turkey's enemies and those who pose permanent and not temporary strategic threats to it, makes Russia, Iran, Armenians, Greeks and Kurds one the sources of strategic threats. Turkey's political, civilizational, and security options have given it some democratic and legislative gains that it will not find in the Shanghai Organization, nor in Moscow or Beijing. It is this option that has deterred and is still deterring threats in light of the West's need for Turkey in its conflict with Russia and Iran. Therefore, a radical Turkish anti-Western and anti-American shift in favour of the relationship with Russia and the Shanghai Organization is unlikely, because it requires a major Turkish strategic decision, which carries great risks.

**B- Intersecting spheres of influence**

Turkey and Russia have overlapping areas of influence in the Black Sea region, parts of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In sensitive geopolitical conditions, the Middle East was a collision zone between Turkey and Russia. Turkey has also been active in anti-Russian activities, both by supporting Chechen elements opposed to them, or by efforts to strengthen relations with the Turkic-speaking countries of southern Russia (Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan), which were the moves that caused Moscow a lot of concern, in addition to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, where Moscow stood with its ally Armenia, and its partner in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, while Turkey stood with its ally Azerbaijan. On 24 March 2017, the Russian newspaper Moskovskij Komsomolets published an article entitled "Signs of serious disagreement between Putin and Erdogan" stating that "Turkey announced on 18 March that it would not recognize the annexation of the Crimea to Russia because this is a violation of international law, and will continue to support the Tatar population of Turkish origin on the island." On the other hand, "something had upset the mood of the Russians, the delegation of the Syrian opposition armed did not attend the third round of talks in Astana, with the
support of Turkey”. So far, President Putin is pretending that things are still going well in relations with Turkey, but the fire is burning between the two countries, and it can be fuelled by the tiniest pretext.

C- Turkey’s affiliation with NATO

During the Cold War, Turkey was NATO’s first front line with the Soviet Union. Russia realized that Turkey wanted to achieve a set of goals with a single blow by dropping the Russian plane. The most important of these was a moral blow to President Putin, and enticing Moscow into a confrontation in Syria, that is out of its front range. Most importantly, is to put the NATO in front of a new reality to accept President Erdogan’s plan to establish a secure buffer zone from Jarablus to the Mediterranean.

D- The Russians thwarting the Turkish safe zone

Instead of Turkey succeeding in imposing a Turkish buffer zone on the border with Syria, Russia was able to establish a Russian buffer zone, after Moscow’s decision to deploy and activate S-300 and S-400 missile systems on Syrian territory, in addition to operating jet fighters to accompany air ops. This is what was expressed by the commander of the Russian military units stationed near Afrin, Andrei Volkov, who did not hesitate to emphasize the importance of the Russian military presence in the region "so that the Russian flag is visible, and everyone to understand that we support the Syrian government and its armed forces and that our presence in this region is to ensure peace and security in the border area."

E- Turkey doubting the Russian position on the Kurds

Now, Turkey has got some results, and there is only the major battle in Raqqa, the one that requires a diplomatic and military deliberation. It is unreasonable for the "free army", the "regime army", Iranian militias and Democratic Syrian forces to be on the same side, and the same front, without obliging Russia and Turkey to reconsider the alliance they have founded in the absence of the big players, especially after reviving the talk about the Kurdish-Russian
alliance, when Russia received the leader of the Kurdish Democratic People’s Party, before the Turkish turn towards Moscow, after opening its old books, bringing back the Kurdish card as a strategic option in the comprehensive confrontation with the West, exactly like the 1980s and 1990s, when Moscow’s support for the PKK was part of the Cold War to strike the eastern side of NATO.

The deployment of the Russian troops recently in the region of Afrin, where Kurds represent the majority of its population, to prevent a possible clash between the "Syrian Democratic Forces" with the Turkish forces or the "Free Syrian Army", and to confirm the sympathetic Russian position with the Kurdish ambitions.

Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossein Moftioglu said on March 22 that "the Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned the Russian Charge d’Affaires in Ankara against the background of the killing of a Turkish soldier by firing from areas controlled by militia units from the Syrian side." He added that: “the reason for the summon is that Russia was responsible for monitoring violations of the ceasefire in that region,” that is the northern city of Afrin, and stressed that "the Turkish officials also informed the Russian Charge d’Affaires of the Turkish position regarding the deployment of elements of the Russian army in Afrin."

Fifth: Turkey plays in the lost time

The (dreamy) deal demanded by Russia from the Turks requires a shift in the Turkish position and the transition of the Anatolian plateau from the NATO alliance to the Eurasia project, a shift that contradicts the requirements of this position as it emerged during the Cold War and beyond. This type of strategic decisions, and challenging America and the West, requires a Turkish historic decision.

It seems that the parameters that ruled the international balance of power will be difficult for President Erdogan, even if he wants to move east. He knows the limits of his movement and his abilities as a regional player in the face of international leaders, but he wants to send messages to the West that he has other options and that the rapprochement with Russia expands the margin of manoeuvre in the Turkish-Russian issues in Syria.
Conclusion

Both the Turkish and the Russian projects, are independent and self-contained, and do not necessarily have to integrate or collide - at least for now - despite some points of contact between them in the Caucasus and the Middle East. The threats to the two projects do not come from one against the other, and the wise leaders understand this well. The great danger, which is almost a quasi-unilateral, on each of the two projects comes from the West (Europe and America), the real common opponent of the two states. The danger of the West comes from its fear of the independence of Moscow and Ankara with their strategies and turning them into dangerous decision centres with all the power they possess: Russia with its strategic energy power and large arms arsenal, and Turkey with its historical, geographic and geopolitical power backed by an ambitious young economy.

The Russian-Turkish relations have been tugging over the past months and are expected to reach a clear conclusion when the US new administration’s strategy for the Middle East is clarified. Until then, the new phase of the Russian-Turkish relations will reflect the pragmatism of the two presidents, Erdoğan and Putin, as pragmatism is the access for their intertwined interests. Of course, Moscow will try to get from Erdogan the maximum possible political and economic gains, and perhaps geopolitical as well; the Russians imagine that the Turkish president is not as strong as before, especially after the failed coup. The future relations between Russia and Turkey may, to a certain level, be governed by the formula that "the tension of Turkish-Western relations necessarily increases Ankara’s rapprochement with Moscow."

The question remains: Does the partnership with Russia and turning towards Central Asia represent a strategic step in the course of the Turkish state? Or is it merely a matter of tactical and circumstantial step, necessitated by the effects of the Syrian issue on Turkish vital security, especially with regard to the Kurdish issue?