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## **The Russian-Turkish relations in the context of syrian crisis**

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### **Abstract**

In this article problems of the Russian-Turkish relations at the present stage in the context of the Syrian crisis are analyzed via comparative qualitative research methods. In result, development of the relations in the sphere of economy, power, naturally have the positive impact on the bilateral relations, however, they are not capable to pull together a different vision of the situation on many moments of international policy. In conclusion, Turkey and Russia seek to strengthen the influence in the region, and this uncompromising position of Moscow and Ankara led to an escalation of the relations between two powers.

**Keywords:** Russia, Turkey, Syrian Crisis, Relations.

## **Las relaciones Ruso-Turcas en el contexto de la crisis siria**

### **Resumen**

En este artículo se analizan los problemas de las relaciones ruso-turcas en la etapa actual en el contexto de la crisis siria a través de

métodos comparativos de investigación cualitativa. Como resultado, el desarrollo de las relaciones en la esfera de la economía, el poder, naturalmente tiene un impacto positivo en las relaciones bilaterales, sin embargo, no son capaces de reunir una visión diferente de la situación en muchos momentos de la política internacional. En conclusión, Turquía y Rusia buscan fortalecer la influencia en la región, y esta inflexible posición de Moscú y Ankara llevó a una escalada de las relaciones entre las dos potencias.

**Palabras clave:** Rusia, Turquía, crisis siria, relaciones.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Russian-Turkish confrontation in world history, has a rich history. Since the formation of the Russian and Ottoman statehood, the interests of both states collided often, and each side explained this fact by upholding its own life priorities. Long opposition of these states during different historical eras set speed for development of European diplomacy. With the disintegration of the Ottoman and Russian Empire their opposition was replaced by the short period of interaction, and at the time of the Cold War remained in the shadow of block opposition. The relations between Moscow and Ankara did not differ in stability within the last two decades. The bilateral relations between the two countries develop according to the common interests of both parties. The return of two states to a big game at the beginning of the 2000th years, meant the beginning of the new page in the bilateral relations. In the economic plan this beginning of strategic partnership and expansion of trade and economic relations in which shadow geopolitical ambitions of two states remained. The economic factor was always a cornerstone of the process of the Russian-Turkish

rapprochement at a turn of the 20-21st century, and strategic position and geographical proximity of two countries played an important role in this regard.

The Byzantine legacy became a basis for the formation of the Russian state and in many respects defined the fate of Russia from Muscovy to the Russian Empire. The Byzantine idea, implemented in foreign policy, gave tremendous results in the form of creating a huge state and attracting not only Russians and Orthodox, but also representatives of other peoples and religions under its wing - the Russian and Soviet empires. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of a new foreign policy of the Russian Federation meant the period of Moscow's withdrawal from the Moscow-Third Rome archetype and the formation of a new direction based on pragmatism. The internal problems of Turkey at the end of the 90s, and the unsuccessful policy of republican Turkey to become part of a united Europe, contributed to the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party led by R. Erdogan and changing foreign policy priorities. The current Turkish government has built its foreign policy on the principles of Neo-Ottomans, which largely predetermined the imminent start of a new round of confrontation with Russia. In the late 90s. Similar events took place in Russia, the rejection of geopolitical interests led to a weakening of Russia's position in the international arena. Russia completely lost its influence in the Balkans, the South Caucasus, and in Eastern Europe.

The refusal of the Moscow-Third Rome archetype led to the collapse of the statehood in 1991, which the current Russian leader Putin called the biggest geopolitical catastrophe and Atatürk's refusal of the Ottoman heritage in 1923 led to the separation of Turkey from the Muslim world which can also be characterized as a geopolitical failure. Events in the countries of the Arab East, which have been characterized as the Arab Spring, became the main factors for the realization of their foreign policy ambitions. If Russia initially took a waiting position, then Turkey from the first days began to actively comment on the events. With the outbreak of hostilities in Syria, Ankara made it clear that the North of Syria is a strategic zone for Turkey. Within the framework of the Syrian crisis, Turkey, like the rest of the world powers, went to violate the foundations of international law by introducing troops into the territory of a sovereign state, effectively occupying the north of Syria. Relying on neo-Ottoman ambitions and realizing them in practice, Turkey almost became embroiled in direct conflict with Russia, knocking down the Russian SU-24, and Ankara's position went against allied relations with the United States and other NATO countries in helping the Kurdish militants. Thus, Erdogan made it clear to the others that the idea of Neo-Ottomanism, and the national security of Turkey are a priority, but not the idea of fighting international terrorism and bloc unity.

The Russian military company in Syria begun in 2015 caused a set of not contents, not only from a number of the western countries supporting the Syrian opposition but also regional powers and first of

all Turkey. Object of a research is process of interaction of two states on topical international issues in particular within the Syrian crisis.

## **2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

The article analyzes the interaction of Russia with the armed idea of Moscow - the Third Rome and Turkey with the ideology of Neo-Ottomanism in the framework of the Syrian crisis. The leading thesis of the article is the statement that, in spite of the seeming convergence of the positions of the two states at the present stage, archetypes will in many respects prevent building new relations based on pragmatism. The Syrian crisis and the problems arising from it and the problem of the Kurds will be a vivid test of the strength of bilateral relations. The basis of the modern geopolitical imagination of Russia inherited from the Byzantine idea is the idea of Russia's dominance not only in the post-Soviet era but in the whole world. The idea of Moscow-Third Rome not only has an anti-Western orientation, but it is also based on domination or patronage over the peoples of the Middle East, which naturally defines it against Neo-Ottomanism of modern Turkey. Turkey's foreign policy under the current ruling justice and development party, defined as neo-Ottomanism, is a consequence of modern realities and the historical legacy of the Ottomans. Trying on the role of a mediator, modern Turkey seeks to increase its international prestige by providing assistance to Muslim peoples, and thereby securing the status of the leader of the Islamic world for Ankara. The actions of Ankara and Moscow in the concept of modern geopolitics, represented by geopolitical expansionism, are aimed at instilling into

public self-awareness the idea of the necessary struggle to protect their interests outside their territories. Both President Erdogan and Putin, represent their countries as unique civilization units who have the honor of being leaders.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

Archetypes play a crucial role in the foreign policy of the state, especially Russia and Turkey. Will they be able to build new relationships in which the Messianic idea will give way to political pragmatism? Modern Russian officials have repeatedly stated that Moscow does not set the goal of regaining the former might of the USSR or the Russian Empire, and called the idea of the Byzantine heritage remnants of the old. After all, the idea of the Third Rome was also based on the principles of Slavophilia and Orthodox unity. Slavophilia in Eastern Europe lost its significance in the twentieth century, and the idea of the spiritual unity of the Orthodox peoples of the universal state was lost as a result of the Bolshevik policy of secularism. According to the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Russia to the UK, Yakovenko :

Messianic in the foreign policy of any country is a waste of time, useless energy and, as a result, zero, and sometimes destructive result. The Cold War, in effect, echoed the experience of religious wars in Europe. Now, as then, there is no alternative to the principles of the Westphalian system, which takes ideology beyond the framework of international relations (2017: 20).

In particular, the Moscow-third Rome is skeptical about opinion on refusal of Russia of the idea in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe. So,

according to the Polish author of Justyna (2018) Moscow as the Third Rome is the basis of Russian thinking about the state and the Russian nation and also Russian geopolitics. It is a solid foundation of anti-Western tendency in Russian geopolitics. The belief about Russia's providential mission is a tool of differentiation between the two types of civilizations and cultures – the rotting western world and the Russian world, which manifests as a cradle of traditional, conservative values that individualistic, materialistic Western civilization has rejected. Russia and Turkey have a set of disagreements on a number of the international problems, the regional interests of Russia and Turkey seriously disperse in Syria, considerable disagreements exist concerning Ukraine and the Crimea and also on problems of the South Caucasus in particular of Nagorno-Karabakh. But Syria will become the main issue defining further relationship. The conflict in Syria led to a serious destabilization of a situation in neighboring states: Iraq and Lebanon. Some armed groups in parallel are involved in fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Though the American scientists did not pay due consideration to this country, in particular researchers Kemp and Harkavi (1997) in the monograph *Strategic Geography and the Changing Middle East*, described the American project of the Big Middle East where for Syria it is not allocated a noticeable strategic importance. As the country though is located at the strategic intersection, has no rich raw material resources, and according to experts has no due priority. For Russia return to a big game in the Middle East began with Syria, and Russia allocated for Damascus the priority purposes. By coming to power of V. Putin the Russian-Syrian relations begun at the president Medvedev period, became more active. Traditionally Kemalist Turkey avoided close ties with the



Arab countries of the Middle East, for Turkey a paramount task was close integration with Europe. But the suspense of the Cyprian problem, and some other problems became the main reason for rejection of Turkey to the European Union. The main theoretical developer of the idea of neo-Ottomanism is the former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Turkey, A. Davutoglu. Taking an active part in political life, A. Davutoglu in his work called for the resumption of work on the ideas of Pan-Turkism and Neo-Ottomanism of the historical and cultural heritage. However, in contrast to the Turkic world by T. Ozal, the Turkic world put forward by A. Davutoglu had real prerequisites for implementation, against the background of the country's economic growth, and as a result of the weakening of Iraq and Iran had the strongest army in the region.

### *3.1. Syrian conflict*

In Syria war runs high, assuming a global scale because many countries of the world are already involved in it and their circle extends. It began with mass anti-governmental disorders and disorders in the different cities of Syria directed against the president of the country Bashar al-Assad and to the termination of long board of the Ba'ath party. In June — July, 2011 of nervousness developed into the open armed opposition - the Syrian revolt, the Syrian crisis: armed conflict between the troops of the government of Al-Assad and paramilitary forces loyal to the government of Syria on the one hand and paramilitary groups of the insurgents (who are generally consisting of Islamists) — with another. The Kurds who created de facto the autonomous region in the northeast and the northwest of the country with own government act as the third party of the conflict.

On the side of opposition foreign volunteers from more than 70 countries of the world are involved in fighting; on the party of the government — fighters of the Lebanese organization Hezbollah and the Iraqi Shiite militarized groups .

At the end of 2012, the report of the UN characterized the war as an openly religious conflict between a militia of Alawites and his Shiite allies who are at war generally against mainly Sunni insurgent groups. This opinion is challenged by both parties of the conflict. Anti-governmental rebels were material supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, the USA and some other states; the government of Syria - Iran, Russia, North Korea and Venezuela. On June 3, 2014 in territories controlled by government forces there took place presidential elections following the results of which the victory was won by the current president Bashar al-Assad. Results of elections were not recognized as opposition and also gained limited recognition from the international community (Trenin & Koshkin, 2018; Umpawan, 2018).

### *3.2. Interests of Turkey*

Turkey at the doctrinal level seeks to become the world-class power. However, even if not strictly to approach definition of the world power, hardly at it will turn out within the updated idea about the younger partner of the USA in the Middle East - an old game with new rules. Economic interests. For Turkey, Syria is the important country in the economic plan. Export from Gulf States through Iraq of energy resources

in view of unstable is not favorable by a situation in the country connected with the wide economic and political autonomy of Kurdistan and activation of Sunni fighters to Ankara. Syria is necessary as a transit zone. Political interests. Return of Turkey to Middle Eastern policy meant geopolitical domination in the region. The Syrian civil war helped Erdogan. Al-Assad used the Kurdish problems against Ankara (Francesco, 2017).

Ankara is also against the formation of the Shiite axis Tehran-Baghdad-Damascus, which would lead to the strengthening of Iran in the region. Watching the fall of regimes in the Arab Spring countries, the Turkish ruling elite concluded that the fate of Al-Assad's regime in Syria was predetermined. Therefore, Ankara made the decision to offer the communications which developed with Damascus and to rely on opposition forces. Many oppositionists are indirectly connected with the founders of the Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party, which is moderately ruling in Turkey. Concerning a situation in the region, the president Erdogan noted that the territory of the North of Syria, where today terrorists are active, was always included in a zone of national interests of Turkey. Military interests of Turkey and fight against terrorism. After Saddam Hussein's overthrow in 2003, Turkey applies for a role of the main military power in the region. After receiving wide autonomy by Kurds in Iraq, the same scenario became possible also in Syria, since the beginning of mass demonstrations and the beginning of the civil war the Syrian Kurds announced the creation of own administrations and non-recognition of the power of official Damascus. The Kurds did not take active part in an initial phase of the Syrian conflict, being limited to protection of controlled territories. And against military

insurgents, she did not undertake active fighting against Assad's regime. Under the slogan of the fight against terrorism Ankara tries not to allow in every possible way strengthening's of the Kurdish fighters connected with the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

### *3.3. Interests of Russia*

The interests of the Russian Federation in the Middle East and in Syria, in particular, have egoistical character as directly affect its stability and safety. The region of the Middle East is geographically close to the territory of Russia owing to what fight against Islamic extremism and terrorism gets another value is perfect, then for the USA as the multimillion Muslim population lives in our country. Also, there are a number of strategic projects in the field of power and arms which have priority value for all regions. The interests of Moscow in Syria can be shared on: economic, political, military and fight against terrorism. But many experts are inclined to consider that the involvement of Moscow in the Syrian conflict is caused by two main strategic objectives: to throw down a challenge to the American hegemony on the world scene and to help regime of the president of Syria Bashar al-Assad with the fight against radical Islamists who are considered as the worst enemies of Russia. But this statement can be challenged, that is, supplemented.

The economic interests of Russia. For Russia, the primary task at the moment is not to challenge the US leadership in the world; Russia is seeking to maintain its influence in Europe by preventing the construction

of a gas pipeline from Qatar and Saudi Arabia to Europe, which would lead to the loss of an important sales market by Moscow. Therefore, in the first months of the conflict, Russia did not take active steps to support the Syrian government. Even at the most critical moment for Assad in 2013, Moscow, unlike Tehran, did not seek to get involved in the conflict. Political interests. For Russia, after the 2008 Georgian company, relations with Western countries entered into a phase of mutual distrust, Maidan events and the subsequent annexation of the Crimea led to the imposition of economic sanctions against the Kremlin. The export-oriented economy of Russia is currently experiencing serious difficulties. Energy prices have fallen sharply, and trade wars have led to the fact that European countries, in order to avoid further pressure from Moscow, began to look for alternative options for the delivery of hydrocarbons (Izilyaeva, 2017).

In this situation, Moscow begins to look for ways out, the war in Syria has played a crucial role in Russia. After the political and economic isolation of Russia, to preserve the status of power and maintain its position in world politics, the war in Syria was a way out of the impasse. Russia seeks to weaken the position of Washington and Brussels in the Middle East. An attempt by Tehran to create a Shiite axis received the tacit support of the Kremlin, but at the same time Moscow is trying to prevent the strengthening of Tehran in Syria. Military interests. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow lost many of its military bases outside Russia. The military naval facility of Tartus in Syria was one of the only ports of Russia. The fall of the regime of Bashar al-Assad would lead to its elimination. With Putin coming to power, Russia began a large-scale military modernization. Chechen companies of the 90s and the Kremlin's blatant indecision during the NATO campaign against Serbia

has greatly undermined Russia's military authority as a military power. Since the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, with the exception of a small conflict with Georgia in 2008, Russia has not had the experience of conducting large-scale hostilities and, accordingly, the ability to try out their weapons in practice. In the conditions of the beginning of the confrontation with the United States, Russia is seeking confirmation of its status as a great power. Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to use the resource, which he and his predecessors after 1991 were practically deprived of. It is a military resource.

Syria is not one decade a client of the Russian defense industry. Its army uses the Soviet and Russian arms, and some Syrian officers had training in Russia - many of them even married Russians. Demonstration of the military power of Russia in the Syrian company had to show to the whole world and first of all NATO countries the increasing military power. Fight against terrorism. From the middle of the 90th Russia faced a problem of the international terrorism, during the Chechen wars and which followed them terrorist attacks in Russia, so-called Islamic radicals, the majority of which got financial support from the Gulf States, actively proved. When in Syria in the race for power Islamists, most of the citizens of Russia became more active, especially natives from the Caucasus and the Volga region adjoined them, and their return home caused fear in the Russian intelligence agencies. Also in a situation from world isolation of Russia, fight against terrorism remained the only platform for dialogue with the countries of the West. Being covered by the purpose of the fight against terrorism, Russia showed in Europe and the USA the readiness on cooperation.

### *3.4. Aggravation of the attitudes of Russia and Turkey*

In fact, Russia and Turkey collided in Syria, where they deliver one blow after the other to each other. After November 24, 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian military aircraft on the border with Syria, Vladimir Putin called it a knife in the back. For a long time, Turkey and Russia could not restore good neighborly relations, but soon Putin and Erdogan again called each other brother. The November incident with the Su-24 bomber turned relations between Russia and Turkey into a state of tough confrontation. The second escalation of tensions in relations was in January 2018 when drones flew out of the territories controlled by the Turkish military in Idlib province and attacked the military air base Khmeimim, which led to significant losses from Russia. But this time, they managed to avoid political escalation, limited themselves to a letter to the chief of the Turkish General Staff.

### *3.5. Whether the compromise is possible?*

Since the beginning of the war in Syria in 2011, Russia supports the intra Syrian dialogue and eventually participation of opposition in the power, but resolutely objects to Assad's leaving at the first stage of political transformations. Over time Assad's support by Russia only became firmer. Russia can agree to departure of the Syrian president as the West and the closest neighbors do not want to deal with it, but will defend the positions and to agree to preservation of the power in the hands of present political elite. It is obvious that at such scenario, Russia does not

lose anything in Syria from the economic or political point of view. Participation in fighting in Syria, played positively for Russia, in particular, it was succeeded to replace in the media field the Ukrainian crisis Syrian and to send energy of super activists to another party. Public attention from internal problems on external is abstract. Russia managed to increase the weight and influence in the world and to escape from the international isolation organized by the western states though now there were new problems. Thanks to military victories in Syria it in certain limits restored cooperation with the western partners in the military sphere. Today Moscow controls many spheres of activity in Syria, thereby practically runs the country. Moscow will make concessions in front of Ankara as today Turkey is the most important economic partner of Russia, and Moscow will not decide on a new escalation of the relations with Ankara.

For the benefit of Russia continuation of cooperation in a format of the triangle. At the same time, it is necessary to be ready and to its possible disintegration, to forming of the constructive relations with Turkey and Iran in a bilateral format. In 2036 the term of the Convention Montreux on the status of the Black Sea passages expires, and Moscow will try not to spoil the relations with Ankara. Russia has important economic and political interests with Turkey allowing Turkey to be in Afrin, Russia advocates the interests. So far as concerns balance of forces, Turkey is on one party, and Kurds on another party. It is clear, that Moscow gives preference to Turkey. At the same time Russia, cooperating with Ankara, does it favor and at the same time gets a trump which will use against Ankara. Moscow understands the desire of Ankara to seize this city located in 40 km to the northeast from Aleppo and approximately in



25 km from the advanced positions of the Syrian government army. If this assessment is right, it, probably, reflects the readiness of Moscow to recognize beyond Turkey the right for the strengthening of its control over a hundred-kilometer strip between two Kurdish enclaves in the north of Syria.

Warming of the relations between Moscow and Ankara led to the fact that Russia needed to take some steps concerning the Kurdish question. As we remember, after the shot-down Russian plane Moscow began to take rather active actions, nearly for the first time in history, for rapprochement with various Kurds, both Syrian, and Turkish and the more so the Iraqi. Also, it became first of all in peak of Turkey. But today Russia cannot openly support the Kurds and in general the level of contacts which exists between Moscow and Kurds so far, allows it to have a set of opportunities for maneuver. Therefore, it is clear that the most reasonable that Russia in this situation can make, it simply to try to take a position of active neutrality and to try not to interfere at all with that conflict which takes place between Turkey and Kurds now. And so its relations with Kurds for the last months seriously worsened, and the relations with Ankara carry now, in the field of the first of all solution of the Syrian crisis, the most strategic character.

At the same time, full defeat of the Syrian Kurds will be allowed by neither Moscow, nor Washington for which Kurds serve as an important factor of balance. Besides territories of Syria controlled by Kurds most likely will remain the main outpost of the American presence in this country. The issue of the Syrian Kurds can be resolved in favor of Ankara and Damascus, which do not want the creation of wide Kurdish

autonomy on the similarity of the Iraqi Kurdistan. Bashar al-Assad agrees to the creation of cultural autonomy without economic and political freedom. The instability of a situation from Syria, puts an end to hopes of Qatar and the EU on construction of the gas pipeline, Russia means the sonny of sale will keep. The political elite of Turkey allowing at the beginning the idea about the federalization of Syria understands that it can be reflected in a question of the Turkish Kurds, most likely will support the territorial integrity of Syria, but in a question of Bashar al-Assad's fate there will be disagreements with Moscow. The option of creation of the government with broad participation of the pro-Turkish forces can be compromise. Ankara will not refuse neo-ottoman ambitions, it is quite probable that in their embodiment the power factor, in particular against Kurds will be involved in Syria and Iraq under the pretext of protection of territorial integrity of the country and fight against terrorism. Recent events in Syria showed that the regional influence of Turkey, which considerably increased after the Arab spring gradually decreases. Besides political miscalculations of R. Erdogan led to deterioration in the relations of Turkey with a number of the leading world actors.

Russia and Turkey are not interested in tightening of the military company as it demands many financial expenses, in the light of the increasing discontent of voters, both leaders will be aspiring to the monasteries of the winner. In Turkey about three million refugees from Syria settle down though Erdogan declared more than once the aspiration to return them back to Syria. Question of refugees this and weak point of the European Union. If Russia does not stop the military company, the return of refugees is impossible, and in this question of the EU it is necessary to agree with Moscow. The current situation in Syria, it is at the

moment favorable to Moscow as significantly nothing threatens Bashar al-Assad's regime, the vast majority of territories earlier controlled oppositions and ISIL passed to official Damascus. Bashar al-Assad's government will depend on Moscow as Tehran in this situation cannot be the main player.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Summing up this work it would be desirable to note the following: The Russian-Turkish relations in Syria are strategically important for both parties. Turkey and Russia seek to strengthen the influence in the region, and this uncompromising position of Moscow and Ankara led to escalation of the relations between two powers. However, both parties understand that without mutual accounting of interests it is impossible to construct partnership. Now Russia and Turkey experience serious difficulties on the international scene, often these difficulties are consequences of geopolitical ambitions of the two states. Deterioration in the relations of the two states with the USA and the EU pushed Moscow and Ankara to close cooperation. But there are many questions a compromise on which it is difficult to find, these are questions on the Syrian Kurds, Bashar al-Assad's fate, a question of the post-war device of Syria, a problem of the Black Sea gulfs, the Crimea and the Caucasus. Modern warming of the relations between two countries if remains in the long term, then it would mean that Neo-Ottomanism of Turkey and Neo-imperial positions of Russia gave way to new pragmatic diplomacy.

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