

The book is addressed to anyone interested and working in International Relations, Middle East politics, Turkish history, and politics. It deserves positive comments in many ways. First of all, it should be noted that the content is very well constructed. The theoretical background, the historical process analysis, and discussions on the subject are well distributed in the sections. The author supports his main argument well with the right questions and

observations. It is a sincere determination by the author that the texts that need to be analyzed on the subject are constantly being produced (p. 5) and it is important in terms of accepting the limitations of his own work. In addition to these positive aspects, the analysis of TFP narratives through two dominant ideological camps may be functional for the author, but it has drawbacks for a full understanding of reality.

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## Turkey-Russia Relations in the Twenty-First Century: Cooperation and Competition amid Systemic Turbulence

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By Muhammet Koçak

Lexington Books, 2022, 180 pages, \$95.00, ISBN: 9781666915730

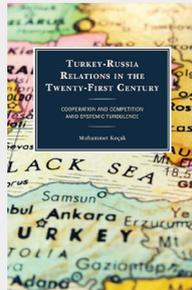
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The relation between Türkiye and Russia is an active topic that attracts many scholars and writers to attempt to shed light on such developing relations. Both countries have a significant amount of interest over important regions and share a mutual engagement in resolution efforts to solve conflicts, which the Western powers have failed to solve or address in a proper way. The successes of both countries in addressing hot conflicts, especially the one in Syria and the 3-decade-long Nagorno-Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia, have given an international dimension and recognition to their relations.

The relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Russian Federation are not new, as it goes back nearly seven centuries, since the establishment of the Ottoman and Russian Empires where they engaged in a severe rivalry over the domination of areas in the Balkans



(Eastern Europe), the Caucasus and the Black Sea regions. Thus, making the historical dimension an important factor in shaping their relations and foreign policies towards multiple regions of common interest.

Under the title *Turkey-Russia Relations in the Twenty-First Century:*

*Cooperation and Competition amid Systemic Turbulence*, Muhammet Koçak highlighted the developments in the relations between the two countries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period saw a dramatic change in the course of their relations as of the end of the First World War where two new entities emerged; the modern Republic of Türkiye (the heir of the Ottoman Empire) and the Soviet Union (the heir of the Russian Empire). While the book goes back to link history and their former bilateral relations, the author also puts the spotlight on the developments in their relations at the beginning of the new millennium. Both

have new assertive leaders that rose to power countries and reshaped their respective foreign policies in their pursuit of a better status and position on the international map. This does not mean that they are fully engaged in a full-fledged alliance, competition between them is still present, but being managed and observed by the leaderships of both countries to keep it at the level of not affecting their track of cooperation.

The book starts, in its first chapter, by highlighting the historical background, which helps the reader to understand the historical context to follow the developments in Turkish-Russian relations. The chapter highlights the important events and main blockages in the relations between Türkiye and Russia, including the early engagement between them after the emergence of the new Turkish Republic where Soviet Russia was the first state to formally recognize the Kemalist government of Türkiye in March 1921. The chapter goes into detail to cover the period known as the inter-war period between First World War and Second World War. Then, it follows the development during the Cold War period, which ended in the early nineties of the last century. The 1990s were crucial in building the basis of their relations as both countries approached each other with a new cooperative and friendly atmosphere that removed many of the misgivings between them, including building means of cooperation in the economic, trade, and energy sectors.

Chapter 2, “Turkey-Russia Relations in 2001-2009,” is the real start of the book as it starts covering the relations and its developments between Türkiye and Russia at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with new emerging leaderships in both countries; Erdoğan in Türkiye and Putin in Russia. The failure of the U.S. to maintain its unipolarity over the world af-

ter its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan helped advance the Türkiye-Russia nexus. Both countries constructively engaged at various levels, officials of both countries exchanged visits, and bilateral agreements were signed to institutionalize their relations. The “zero problems with neighbors” was another step by Türkiye to seek enhancement of ties with Russia as the more stable relations and increased understandings led to more trade and economic benefits for both countries.

Chapter 3, which covers Turkish-Russian relations between the years 2009 and 2016, explores dramatic events that impacted the course of their relations, most notably the Syrian crisis –as part of the Arab Uprising. This turned into a brutal civil war where both Türkiye and Russia found themselves on different sides of the crisis with Türkiye backing the people and opposition groups, and Russia’s strong support to the Syrian regime. This event had its negative shadows and reverberations on Turkish-Russian relations. Yet, it is important to mention that prior to the breakout of the Syrian crisis, both Türkiye and Russia established the High-Level Cooperation Council, which enabled the two countries to coordinate their bilateral trade relations and to pave the way for the agreement on the construction of the Turkish Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant by Russia. The most serious event that was close to jeopardizing all efforts between them was the incident of the downing of a Russian jetfighter by a Turkish jetfighter on November 24, 2015. At that moment, Türkiye felt loneliness or rather betrayed by the West\NATO against Russia over the incident. Things started to further deteriorate and cast shadows on other regional issues of common interest. Türkiye realized these developments and addressed the issue of the Russian fighter crisis through President Erdoğan’s letter of regret to Putin

over the incident. A move that was enough to stop the worsening of relations between them, and was also enough for Moscow to put their relations on track again to pre-crisis levels.

Koçak started the period of chapter 4 with the year 2016 to indicate a new phase of relations between them after the resolution of the Russian warplane incident. Yet, this period started with a serious development in Türkiye that was about to transform the Turkish political landscape; Türkiye experienced a coup d'état attempt on July 15, 2016, which the Turkish leadership and people were jointly able to thwart, and subsequently disclose numerous internal and external links of the putschists. As a result, the Turkish foreign policy further distanced itself –or became more independent– from its Western allies and came closer to Russia, which was among the first to stand officially and publically against the coup attempt. This stance strengthened their scope of cooperation and was reflected in contributing to the de-escalation of the fighting in Syria as well as the decisive Turkish decision to pur-

chase the Russian state-of-art S-400 missile defense system. President Erdoğan made his first diplomatic visit to Russia after the failed coup, an indication of the Turkish post-coup-attempt foreign policy direction, to the extent that the assassination of Russia's ambassador to Ankara Andrey Karlov in December 2016 “did not drastically negatively impact on Turkey-Russia relations.” Furthermore, the Libyan conflict and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia were two important stops of cooperation between Türkiye and Russia in their efforts to address these conflicts.

Koçak concludes his book by examining the events that both countries have been through at the end of this phase which has eventually brought them closer. The book is an important reference for any researcher looking into the relations between Türkiye and Russia, and also to understand both countries' foreign policy towards each other over the last twenty years. This study will help the reader to assess Turkish-Russian relations and to predict how they could develop in the future.