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## Turkey's Relations with Russia after the Failed Coup: A Friend in Need of a Friend Indeed?

Bezen Balamir Coşkun\*

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the resolution of the crisis between Turkey and Russia. The diplomatic crisis erupted when Turkey shot down a Russian warplane on its border with Syria on 24 November 2015. The diplomatic crisis went hand in hand with an extensive economic embargo. Russia suspended the reciprocal visa-free regime with Turkey, as well as banning charter flights to and from Turkey. Russian travel firms were told by Moscow to stop marketing Turkish holiday programs. Moreover, Putin signed a decree calling for a ban on imports of certain goods from Turkey. After a period of intensity, however, the leaders of the two countries (President Putin and President Erdoğan) decided to reset the relations. The failed coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 provided a window of opportunity for the resolution of the crisis. In light of this background, the article puts forward an analysis of both the system level factors (international conjecture) and domestic factors (military capabilities, economic capacity and government type). The article puts a special emphasis on how the failed military coup in Turkey constituted a decisive turning point for Turkey-Russia relations in recent years.

**Keywords:** Turkey-Russia Relations; Turkish Foreign Policy; Russian Jet Crisis; Process Tracing; Two-Level Games

### Introduction

On 24 November 2015, a Turkish F-16 jet shot down a Russian warplane near the Syrian–Turkish border. The event caused the deterioration of the relations between Turkey and Russia. As argued by Çelikpala (2017: 1), the downing of the Russian jet “had direct negative consequences on the almost two-decade-old Turkish-Russian modus vivendi”. The diplomatic crisis was accompanied by a Russian economic embargo. Moreover, Russia suspended the reciprocal visa-free regime with Turkey. However, the tension only lasted about seven months. In this context, the aim of this article is to analyse the resolution of the crisis between Turkey and Russia. Throughout the article, the state of Turkey-Russia relations before and after the jet crisis will be traced. The path tracing will involve both the system level factors and domestic factors in analysing Turkish foreign policy towards Russia. It is argued that such an analysis will allow us to discuss the foreign policy decisions of the

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leaders as a “two-level game” to maintain their domestic influence and power in promoting a desirable foreign policy.

For this analysis, the process tracing method (Bennett 2008; Checkel 2008; George and Bennett 2005) will be used. Process tracing helps us “to identify the intervening causal process between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” (George and Bennet 2005: 206-207). In order to make causal inferences in single case analyses, process tracing allows the researcher to study causal mechanisms. Here, it is argued that process tracing will contribute to describing political, economic and social aspects of the Russia-Turkey dispute and its subsequent resolution. The method will also allow us to evaluate the causal claims of both sides. The purpose of the analysis is to explain the resolution of the crisis between Turkey and Russia through building a sufficient explanation by conducting a case study analysis.

For a minimally sufficient explanation, the researcher starts with tracing the process backward from a known outcome. Then, the empirical process that led to this particular outcome is traced (Beach and Pederson 2013). Working backwards from the outcome by analysing empirical evidence to explore the causal mechanism that produced the outcome requires an inductive path. By following an inductive path in process tracing, the researcher uses empirical material to explain a causal mechanism, whereby X(s) produced Y (Beach and Pederson 2013). In this context, this article aims to explain the causal mechanism, whereby Russian and Turkish leaders resolved the tension after the jet crisis. To do this, both sequence evidence, which is a temporal and spatial chronology of events, and account evidence, which is the content of empirical material, will be analysed. The following events are chosen as events for sequential evidence:

- Event 1 - Russian air campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and other anti-government forces (30 September 2015),
- Event 2 - The Russian jet crisis (24 November 2015),
- Event 3 - The failed coup attempt in Turkey (15 July 2016).

The article places a particular emphasis on how the 2016 failed military coup in Turkey constituted a decisive factor in the outcome of the Turkey-Russia thaw. Official documents and statements and both sides’ policy actions after each sequential event will be analysed as account evidence. The analysis involves both the system level factors and domestic factors to allow for a discussion of the two-level game that leaders played to maintain their domestic influence. Particularly, in the areas regarding environmental, economic and trade-related issues in international relations, domestic politics has a considerable impact on foreign policy. Thus, in multilateral or bilateral negotiations, foreign policy executives often engage in a “two-level game”. Putnam (1988) argued that during international negotiations, foreign policy executives played both at the domestic and international levels. Leaders as “chief negotiators” need domestic approval for the execution of the foreign policy. As stated by da Conceição-Heldt and Mello (2017: 15), “whereas at the international level, the challenge consists in finding a compromise agreement that is acceptable to all negotiating parties, at the domestic level the main challenge is to find a deal that is acceptable to domestic constituents and legislators so that it can be ratified”. Governments’ need for ratification or legislative

approval for foreign policy issues is regarded as the crucial theoretical link between the domestic and international level (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello 2017). Besides the formal approval mechanism, there exist informal ways of domestic approval, such as public opinion and public approval ratings (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello 2017). According to Putnam (1988), leaders' win-set should include domestic approval too. In this regard, the range of the domestic level win-set of the leader is also crucial. At the international level, national leaders engage in bargaining with different interests and preferences, while at the domestic level, a variety of actors with different interests attempt to influence the governments' foreign policy decisions (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello 2017).

In order to trace Turkish-Russian relations before and after the jet crisis, the article begins with a brief review of Turkish - Russian rapprochement starting with the 1990s. The period is called by Çelikpala (2017) as the *modus vivendi* period. Then, both the sequence evidence and account evidence will be analysed throughout three significant events: 1) Russian air campaign against the ISIL and other anti-government forces, 2) Russian jet crisis and 3) failed coup attempt in Turkey. The concluding discussion will put forward a brief analysis of the two-level game of the period.

### **Modus Vivendi: Turkey - Russia Rapprochement (1990 - 2015)**

Turkey and Russia had grown apart during the Cold War after Turkey decided to join NATO 1952; however, the end of the Cold War in 1991 marked a new period in Turkish – Russian relations. During the 1990s, relations were deepened albeit mutual fear and mistrust remained. In this period, the differences and hostility between the two states were replaced with cooperation in many fields. Rubin and Kirişçi (2001: 155) identified this period with the term “virtual rapprochement”, which was underpinned by two main dynamics: “managed geopolitical rivalry” and “unique economic cooperation verging on interdependence”. Geopolitical rivalry between Turkey and Russia manifested itself in their relations vis-à-vis the newly independent states of Eurasia such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Russian policy of Eurasianism and Ankara's Pan-Turkism emerged as competitors for establishing ideological hegemony over the post-Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Despite the occasional tensions, Turkish and Russian officials managed to keep diplomatic channels open and gradually improved the cooperation between two states. Furthermore, cooperation over economic and trade issues accelerated after the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1992. Later in 1997, Russia also appeared as a convenient alternative to Ankara's deteriorating relations with the EU, when Turkey's candidacy was rejected at the Luxembourg Summit (Rubin and Kirişçi 2001).

According to Aktürk (2013), during the late 1990s and early 2000s, both Russia and Turkey worked around the complementarities regarding their bilateral relationships, in contrast to their confrontational stands of early 1990s. Within this context, in 2002, Russia and Turkey even planned to form a political and military alliance. However, plans for the alliance failed as a result of divergences of political interests in several occasions including the five-day war between Georgia and Russia in 2008, the Syrian Civil War, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2015.

As opposed to the aforementioned political tensions, Turkey and Russia have developed strong economic relations in the areas of trade and tourism over the years. Following the signing of the Joint Economic Commission in 1992, the 1990s' unofficial "shuttle trade" was gradually replaced with official trade relations, mainly in the area of energy trade. The Blue Stream pipeline has made Russia the primary source of natural gas for Turkey. Hence, economic interests have become the lynchpin of relations. The trade volume between Turkey and Russia has dramatically increased between 2000 and 2014 (see **Table 1**). Besides the energy imports and agricultural exports, Turkish construction companies have obtained massive construction projects across Russia. Before the jet crisis, Turkish construction companies had reached over \$30 billion in investments and around 10 thousand Turkish employers in Russia ("Rusya Türk şantiyelerini bastı" 2015). Tourism, particularly from Russia to Turkey, has become another backbone of Turkish Russian economic relations. Between 2000 and 2015, the number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey rose from 677 thousand to 4.5 million (see **Table 2**).

To sum up, by 2015, Turkey and Russia were just so near and yet so far. Throughout the period, for rapprochement with Russia, Ankara had several motivations including its desire to have better relations with its neighbours and foreign policy portfolio diversification (Çagaptay and Gencay 2005). In the political realm, relations were overwhelmed with tensions as a result of conflicting national interests, while in the economic realm the relations were defined by pragmatism. Despite the constant ups and downs in the political realm, trade relations and tourism steadily flourished. However, Russia's active military intervention in the Syrian Civil War brought bilateral relations to the verge of collapse. In the forthcoming sections, three case-specific events will be traced as empirical evidence to explore the causal mechanisms that shape the outcome of the relations between Turkey and Russia.

### **Event 1: Russian Air Campaign against the ISIL and Other Anti-Government Forces (September 30, 2015)**

Following a formal approval by the upper house of the parliament, on 30 September 2015, the Russian military started an air campaign in Syria. It was the first military operation of the Russian Federation outside the former Soviet Union territories (*The Guardian* 2016). Russian officials insisted that Syrian President Assad requested them to launch the military intervention. President Putin declared that Russia was acting "preventatively, to fight and destroy militants and terrorists on the territories that they already occupy, not wait for them to come to our house" ("Russia joins the war in Syria" 2015). While the Russian Defence Ministry argued that airstrikes just targeted ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), the Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov insisted that the campaign targeted "all terrorists" in Syria, not just ISIL. Russian officials denied the accusations about civilian deaths and underlined that targets were chosen together with Syrian military forces ("Russia joins the war in Syria" 2015). Almost one month after the Russian airstrikes, Assad visited Moscow to thank President Putin for Russia's efforts to save the country ("Assad shows up to thank Putin for the save" 2015). According to the records of the meeting, Putin told Assad that:

[W]e took the decision upon your request to provide effective aid to the Syrian people in fighting the international terrorists who have unleashed a genuine war against Syria... The Syrian people has been practically alone in putting up resistance and fighting these international terrorists for several years now, and has suffered great losses (Official Transcript as quoted by Calamur 2015: 1).

Only two months prior to Russian military intervention in Syria, on 29 August, Turkey actively participated in the air campaign that was led by the US. Thus, Ankara became part of the military intervention in the Syrian Civil War before the intervention of Russia. As stated by Erkmen and Yüksel (2015), the main reason behind Turkey's direct but limited intervention was the failure of Ankara's attempts to establish a secure zone between Northern Syria and Turkey. The Al-Nusra Front's separation from the coalition against ISIL, Democratic Union Party (PYD) / People's Protection Units (YPG)'s plans to move through the west of the Euphrates and the failure of the US-led air operations to stop ISIL's move through the Turkish border also led to Ankara's decision to join the American military intervention.

Furthermore, during the summer of 2015, the Turkish Armed Forces, particularly the land forces, were making preparations for a unilateral intervention in Northern Syria to push PYD/YPG back to the east of the Euphrates. Turkey's military deployment next to the Syrian border coincided with Russian military deployment inside Syria to support the Assad regime. Thus, both Ankara and Moscow had already decided to commence an active military intervention in Syria. However, tensions in domestic politics between June and November 2015 general elections and the rise of terror attacks during the summer of 2015 caused the Turkish government to concentrate its energy into internal affairs. Thus, Ankara's operation plans were defied by Russia's military intervention that started on 30 September.

Ankara's initial reaction to Russian military intervention was very negative. In an interview with *Al Jazeera*, President Erdoğan openly expressed his disappointment with Russian intervention:

I would like to express my disappointment with this. They need to reconsider this decision. As the leader of a country that has friendly ties with Russia, I will ask this to President Putin. Because, we are (the Turkish people) the ones who is suffering most in the region. Russia does not have a border with Syria. Why do they intervene in this affair? (President Erdoğan as quoted by Arslan 2015).

Besides the initial unofficial reactions, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced a joint warning statement signed by Turkey, US, Germany, UK, France, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to "immediately cease its attacks on the Syrian opposition and civilians and to focus its efforts on fighting ISIL" (MFA 2015a).

While Russia was extending its airstrikes during the first weeks of October 2015, it became a routine of Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to share statements regarding Russians' violations of Turkish airspace. Airspace violations were officially protested by Turkish officials. The Russian Ambassador to Turkey was invited several times by the Turkish Foreign Minister to pass Ankara's warning messages to Moscow. Following one notable incident, the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry summoned the Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Ankara to the Ministry and strongly protested a violation,

demanded that any such violation not be repeated and affirmed that, otherwise, the Russian Federation will be responsible for any undesired incident that may occur.

The Foreign Minister called the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov to reiterate the views stated above and express our reaction. The Foreign Minister also held telephone calls with his US, French, Italian and UK counterparts to evaluate the situation. The Foreign Minister will also consult with the NATO Secretary General and his German counterpart (MFA 2015b).

Despite tensions over Russia's violation of Turkish airspace, on 15 November 2015, President Putin and President Erdoğan met at the G-20 meeting. As the meeting took place only a couple of days after the ISIL attack in Paris, the main theme of the meeting was the global fight against terror. Throughout the meeting, both President Erdoğan and President Putin stressed the importance of fighting against terrorism as an international front. As Turkey was a staunch ally of the US in their coalition against ISIL in Syria, during the meeting, President Erdoğan complimented President Obama:

I've also had an opportunity to discuss with Barack the fight that we are conducting against Daesh in Syria. And we had an opportunity to assess the steps that we will continue to take with respect to our efforts within the coalition in this respect. As model and strategic partners, we will continue to show solidarity with each other with an understanding to work for global peace (Remarks by President Erdoğan at G20 Leaders Meeting 2015).

President Putin, on the other hand, supported his statement regarding “the finance of terrorism by individual businessmen from 40 countries, including from member states of G20” with presenting satellite images and aerial photos showing illegal trade of oil and petroleum by ISIL (“ISIL Financed by 40 Countries” 2015). During the G-20 meeting, Putin did not mention the names of the individual businessmen from the G-20 states whom he accused of engaging in oil trade with ISIL. In return, President Erdoğan did not reply to this remark at all. However, this particular issue became one of the major controversies between the two leaders after the jet crisis.

## **Event 2: The Russian Jet Crisis (24 November 2015)**

On 24 November 2015, a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian SU24 near the Turkish-Syrian border. Both pilots ejected themselves from the jet. However, one of them was killed within Syrian borders. Initially, Turkish officials stated that the jet was shot down as a result of its violation of Turkish airspace for 17 seconds despite warnings. On the other hand, Moscow insisted that the plane remained within the Syrian airspace. Both sides shared their evidence to justify their contradictory claims. Previously, a Syrian Mi-17 helicopter in 2013 and a MiG-23 warplane in 2014 were downed by Turkish air forces following the rules of engagement. In this context, on 19 November, Russia was warned via Ambassador Karlov regarding their operations around the Turkmen region. As the region is inhabited by the Turkmen – a kin people to the Turks – Turkish officials were particularly sensitive about the violent clashes in this particular region (Zeyrek 2015).

While President Putin condemned the Turkish act as a “stab in the back by terrorist accomplices” (“Turkey downing of Russia jet 'stab in the back'” 2015), President Erdoğan insisted that it was Turkey’s sovereignty right to defend its airspace (“Turkey's downing of Russian warplane” 2015). President Putin declined to talk with President Erdoğan since he was waiting for Turkey to apologise. In response, the then Turkish Prime Minister Davutoğlu stated that they would not apologise because it was their duty to protect their borders (“Turkey's downing of Russian warplane” 2015). The tension escalated rapidly. Within a couple of days, Russia suspended its visa-free regime with Turkey, banned charter flights to and from Turkey. Russian travel firms stopped selling Turkish holidays.

Furthermore, President Putin signed a decree to ban/limit imports from Turkey, including all fruit and vegetable imports. Escalation of tensions reflected itself in physical attacks on Turkish diplomatic missions and businesses in Russia. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the attacks and accused Russian officials of not providing security for Turkish diplomatic missions across Russia:

We sadly observe that Turkish diplomatic missions and businesses in the Russian Federation are recently exposed to physical attacks under the guise of demonstrations. ... In fact, the host country is legally obliged to ensure the security of foreign missions under all circumstances pursuant to international law (MFA 2015c).

While economic, political and diplomatic retaliation continued, the leaders of Turkey and Russia also started “a war of words”. During the UN Climate Change Conference, President Putin accused Turkey of downing the Russian jet to protect supplies of oil from ISIL, thus refused to meet with President Erdoğan during the summit. In response to this accusation, President Erdoğan highlighted Turkey’s commitment to fighting with ISIL. He said that Putin’s claim was immoral (Gotev 2015). In his speech at Bayburt province of Turkey, President Erdoğan warned Putin as “supporting [Assad's] regime that claims 380,000 lives in Syria and implements state terrorism, is also playing with fire” (“Erdoğan says Putin 'playing with fire'” 2015). PM Davutoğlu also accused Russia of conducting ethnic cleansing in Latakia and of strengthening ISIL (“Davutoğlu: Rusya, Suriye'de etnik temizlik yapmaya çalışıyor” 2015).

Following the terrorist attack on Istanbul Atatürk Airport which claimed 41 civilian lives on June 29, Kremlin found an opportunity to retaliate to the Turkish critique over Russia’s war on terror in Syria. In this context, a spokesperson of Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, stated that:

[O]ver the past years, Russia has informed our Turkish and European colleagues that people suspected of having links to terrorism, people who are suspected of planning to join terrorist groups, find shelter both in Turkey and in a number of European countries... To our regret, terror attack on Istanbul Atatürk airport may be a consequence of such disregard” (“Russia warnings to Turkey and EU” 2016).

As developments of the period show, “terror” appeared as a common ground for the revival of Turkish-Russian rapprochement. Tension over the jet crisis remained unchanged until June 2016. On 28 June, President Erdoğan sent a message to President Putin to express his “sympathy and deep condolences” to the family of the pilot, and “asked to be forgiven”



(“Erdoğan ‘sorry’ for the downing of Russian jet” 2016). However, official sources added that “the sorrow expressed in the letter was addressed not to the Russian state, but the pilot’s family”, thus Turkey’s position on Syria, Ukraine and Crimea did not change (“Kremlin replaces ‘apology’ with ‘excuse us’” 2016). Even though Turkish officials insisted that the letter did not aim at Russian state, it was a window of opportunity for reconciliation.

### **Event 3: The Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey (July 15, 2016)**

On 15 July, a rogue faction within the Turkish Armed Forces attempted a coup. Troops and tanks blocked the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul and government buildings including the Parliament, and the Presidential Palace was bombarded. The Turkish Radio Television was seized, and an anchor-woman was forced to read a statement prepared by the coup plotters. The then Chief of the General Staff Hulusi Akar was held hostage by the junta. Following President Erdoğan’s appearance on a TV channel, thousands of people went out streets and resisted the soldiers who were part of the coup attempt. Within less than 24 hours, the coup attempt was defeated by the protestors and the pro-government security forces (Mert 2016).

Initially, both the Europeans and Americans behaved hesitantly to congratulate President Erdoğan and the Turkish people for defeating the coup plotters. Instead, they called for the preservation of Turkish democracy. Then, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, explicitly warned the Turkish leadership to refrain from mass purges of its military officers that might weaken the fight against the ISIL. In response to the US critique of mass purges, President Erdoğan accused the US of being partially involved in the coup, since Fetullah Gülen, the leading figure of the coup, resides in Pennsylvania with a Green card (Lakstygál 2016). In contrast to the cold reception of the European leaders, President Putin was very sympathetic to Turkey. In his first statement that condemned the coup, President Putin highlighted his support: “We categorically reject the use of unconstitutional and violent methods against states. We offer our condolences for the losses and the wish for the restoration of constitutional order and stability in Turkey as soon as possible” (Department of Corporate Communication of the Presidency 2016: 29).

In response to President Putin’s supportive words, in a television program, Minister Cavusoğlu thanked President Putin for his unconditional support which was Turks’ expectation from the allies of Turkey (“Turkey thanks Putin” 2016). President Erdoğan, on the other hand, accused the coup plotters of also staging a plot to hurt Russian-Turkish relations by downing the Russian warplane in November 2015. Finally, on 9 August, President Putin met with President Erdoğan. The meeting marked the end of months of hostility between the two states. The trip was also President Erdoğan’s first trip abroad after the failed coup attempt. In St. Petersburg, President Erdoğan said that President Putin’s call immediately after the coup attempt “meant a lot psychologically”, and the friendship between the two states would be restored very soon (“Putin mends broken relations” 2016).

Last but not the least, failed coup attempt constituted an opportunity for President Erdoğan to create a new national myth. As stated by President Erdoğan in his message on the occasion of the 93rd anniversary of the signing of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, the heroic struggle of Turkish people to defend their constitution and democracy has become the core story of the myth of new Turkey:

The fact that our nation took a noble and determined stand against treacherous attempts by different circles is the clearest proof that our country will, in the upcoming period, advance on the path of democracy, freedom and development. No power or circle will be able to deter the Republic of Turkey, which has become the 6th biggest economy in Europe and 17th in the world in the 93 years that passed since then, from achieving its goals for 2023 and advancing towards its visions for 2053 and 2071.

This myth has become popular among the Turkish public. Yet, it still needed an external legitimacy. Thus, finding influential international actors that acknowledge the Turkish people's salvation from the ills of FETÖ (Fethullah Gülen Terror Organisation) was significant. In this regard, mending the relations with Russia means more than just tourism and trade but also a means for legitimising post-coup policies of Turkish leadership.

### **Concluding Discussion: The Two-Level Games Behind the Turkish - Russian Thaw**

June 2015 marked the beginning of a period of instability in Turkish politics. The results of elections, which took place on 7 June, caused the governing party to lose its parliamentary majority. As the Justice and Development Party (AKP) could neither form a majority government nor a coalition within six weeks, President Erdoğan called for the renewal of elections in November 2015. Competition and polarisation in the realm of domestic politics reflected in the economy and society. The escalation of terror and violence claimed around 200 lives between the two elections. Within this context, foreign policy actions of the period provided a solid base for the AKP in its consolidation of the constituency to gain a majority in elections in November 2015.

The Syria policy of the government was blamed for the escalation of terror in Turkey. ISIL was seen as a significant threat by the majority of the Turkish public. This situation provided a ground of legitimacy for Ankara's decision to join the US military intervention in Syria despite the existence of an anti-American public opinion. Furthermore, Russia's military intervention also provided a pretext for Ankara's military involvement in Syria. As highlighted by President Erdoğan following Russian air campaign in September 2015, it was Turkey who suffered the most, not Russia. Thus, it was Turkey's right to defend its country against ISIL and the other terrorist groups coming from Syria. President Erdoğan's securitisation of ISIL coincided with the macro securitisation of ISIL by other leaders including the American and Russian ones, which strengthened President Erdoğan's hand to persuade his constituency for the necessity of immediate military intervention. In his speech at the Turkish Grand National Parliament's Legislative Year Opening in October 2015, President Erdoğan pointed out the role Turkey plays for regional peace and stability, which are seen as one of the main conditions of internal security and stability:

Incidents taking place right next to us in Iraq and Syria have intensified and had different reflections on our country... What we call Syria and Iraq at present, were geographies no different to us than Mardin, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, and Hatay just a century ago. Despite everything, Turkey stands as an island of confidence and stability in a region where instability, clashes, and chaos is ever-increasing. Turkey has never looked at its neighbours and regional countries solely from the window of interests... We have never preferred short-term interests to values that make us who we are and we never will. We

are not in an effort to save the day, but we are in an effort to build a common future together with our brothers in the region (President Erdoğan's Speech at the Turkish Grand National Parliament's Legislative Year Opening, 2015).

Until the general elections of November 1, the necessity of fighting against terror both internally and externally was the main theme of the official election propaganda of the ruling party. In this regard, both the growing tension with Russia and failing coalition partnership with the US in Syria was described as external obstacles in front of the Turkish nation's security and stability. Since the summer of 2015, the Turkish public has felt the spillover effect of the war in Syria through terror attacks and firing of missiles to border provinces such as Kilis and Gaziantep. Besides that, Turkish airspace was often being violated by Syrian and Russian forces. The government needed to take action to ease public frustration regarding Syria originated security threats to their everyday lives.

Given the plethora of concerns, both internal and external, a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian SU24 after its violation of Turkish airspace. During the period following the downing of SU24, Turkish economy, particularly the tourism sector was negatively affected by the Russian embargo. According to the findings of Social, Economic and Political Research Foundation of Turkey's (TUSEM) report, the jet crisis with Russia cost Turkey around USD 11 billion in one year ("Rusya krizinin ekonomik maliyeti" 2015). As the promise of economic stability constitutes the backbone of the AKP rule, the Turkish government soon realised that the tension with Russia was not sustainable. The uncompromising discourse targeting Russia was gradually softened. Two unfortunate events throw two states to the path of reconciliation: the failed coup attempt in Turkey and the assassination of Russian Ambassador to Ankara.

The assassination of Ambassador Karlov was a reminder of terrorism as a common threat to both sides as stated in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' statement: "... This attack has displayed the most disgusting and barbarous face of terrorism. Turkey will resolutely continue by exerting every effort to struggle against terrorism together with Russia and all other partners" (MFA 2016). As opposed to the expectations, the assassination did not further complicate the relations between Ankara and Moscow, since the attack pointed out a common enemy for both: terror. In this occasion, both Russia and Turkey placed the blame for assassination on terrorists (Moore 2016). The assassination of the Ambassador Karlov meant to disturb normalisation process. However, both Ankara and Moscow prevented this attempt to be successful.

The failure of the US-led operations in deterring terrorist activities in Syria also made Ankara and Moscow find common ground to be involved in Syria. In this context, Russian and Turkish leaders left their grudge over the jet crisis and brokered an evacuation deal for Aleppo, and then they proposed initiating regional peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan without the involvement of the US and the UN. Initiation of Astana process brought the two sides one step closer to reconciliation, but the real ground-breaking event was the failed military coup in Turkey. By being one of the first leaders that visited President Erdoğan after the coup attempt and by unconditionally supporting Turkish government's actions following the failed coup attempt, President Putin gained President Erdoğan's trust, as compared with the

European and American leaders who condemned the coup attempt but also raised concerns about the democratic future of Turkey.

Terror attacks that threatened internal security and stability on the one hand and the pressure of economic stability despite the challenges of global economic conjecture on the other put pressure on the Turkish government to mend ties with Russia. Externally, particularly after the failed military coup, Turkey was losing ground with its Western allies including NATO. The EU institutions and leaders of the EU member states were harshly criticising President Erdoğan's way of dealing with post-coup affairs in Turkey. The EU's accusations of President Erdoğan's authoritarian tendencies coincided with President Trump's indifference to Turkey's internal affairs. In such an international conjecture Turkey was alienated from its Western partners. Feeling of isolation both from the West and from the Middle East as well as the political conjecture of international community pushed Ankara to reconsider its relations with Russia as a balancing act.

Even though the thaw with Russia does not require a formal ratification procedure, President Erdoğan's preoccupation with not losing ground among his constituency reflected his discourse and actions throughout the crisis with Russia. In this regard, for President Erdoğan, making the reconciliation with Russia credible in the eyes of the public was essential too. Thus, as evidence from the selected events reveals the path that followed the handshake between President Erdoğan and President Putin was a well-played two-level game on behalf of President Erdoğan. As a well-played two-level game, President Erdoğan not just persuaded his constituency for the necessity to reconcile with Russia, but also legitimised the signing of S-400 missiles deal, the signing of gas pipeline deal and the finalisation of the Akkuyu nuclear plant deal.

**Table 1. Turkey's Exports to Russia & Imports from Russia to Turkey (2017 - 1996)**

Year	Export Total	Import Total
2017	1 796 728	13 930 534
2016	1 732 954	15 162 386
2015	3 588 331	20 401 757
2014	5 943 014	25 288 597
2013	6 964 209	25 064 214
2012	6 680 777	26 625 286
2011	5 992 633	23 952 914
2010	4 628 153	21 600 641
2009	3 189 607	19 450 086
2008	6 483 004	31 364 477
2007	4 726 853	23 508 494
2006	3 237 611	17 806 239
2005	2 377 050	12 905 620
2004	1 859 187	9 033 138
2003	1 367 591	5 451 315
2002	1 172 039	3 891 721
2001	924 107	3 435 673
2000	643 903	3 886 583
1999	588 664	2 374 133
1998	1 348 002	2 155 006
1997	2 056 547	2 174 258
1996	1 510 005	1 921 139
Source:	Turkish Statistics Institute, Foreign Trade Statistics, <a href="http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046">http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046</a>	

**Table 2. The Number of Russian Tourists (2000 - 2016)**

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
947 ths	1.25 mio	1.6 mio	1.86 mio	1.84 mio	2.46 mio	2.88 mio	2.7 mio	3.1 mio	3.47 mio	3.6 mio	4.27 mio	4.48 mio	3.65 mio	866 ths

Source: [http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1072](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1072)

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