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William HALE
Emeritus Professor, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University

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Uluslararası İlişkiler – International Relations
E-mail: uidergisi@gmail.com

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The Turkey-Russia Relationship in Historical Perspective: Patterns, Change and Contrast

William HALE
Emeritus Professor, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University
E-Mail: wh1@soas.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to offer a general analysis of relations between Turkey and Russia since the late eighteenth century. rather than new or original information. It proposes a model of the relationship based on three broad patterns: (i) a multipolar system with shifting alliances (1798-1841): (ii) alliance within a bipolar system (1841-78 and 1952-91): (iii) phases of uncertain détente (1878-1914, 1921-39 and 1991 to the present). In discussing the most recent period, it concludes that the Russian invasion of the Ukraine and the continuing war raises serious doubts about the viability of current Turkish strategy.

Keywords: Turkish-Russian Relations, straits, alliance, détente, multipolar

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Introduction

This paper does not aim to offer any new or original information on the history of the Turkey-Russia relationship over the past 250 years. Instead, it draws mainly on the existing scholarly literature, suggesting a three-pattern model which highlights the continuities as well as systemic shifts in a complex but strategically crucial story.

For over two centuries following the Ottoman defeat by Russia in the war of 1768-74, and the consequent establishment of Russian power on the northern shores of the Black Sea, the frontier between the Turks and Russians has been seen as the critical fault line in the politics of south-east Europe and the Near East. For the most part, Russia's prime objective was to gain control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, so as to achieve unimpeded naval access to the Mediterranean. To put the historical case at its simplest, since the western powers were determined to prevent a Russian takeover of the region, they saw an alliance with Turkey as central to this defensive strategy. For their part, the Turks were usually prepared to accept this alliance, and at times of danger actively sought it, as the best way of tipping the balance of power in their favour. Hence, their relations with the rest of Europe were relatively intense and complicated, while their relations with Russia were at best cautious, and frequently hostile. Remarkably, in large part, the strategic dilemmas of the nineteenth century carried on into the twentieth.

While the Ottoman and Romanov empires were seen as historical enemies, there were remarkable similarities between the two. In principle, both were absolute monarchies, although in practice the ruler's power could be limited by the capacity (more exactly, lack of it) of the incumbent. Domestically, the ruler's authority could periodically be challenged by powerful local power brokers and, in the Ottoman case, by his own soldiers. Both rulers based their legitimacy on their role as protectors of religion, although this was actually or potentially contested by the existence of large communities of the opposite faith within their respective borders.[1] Both empires faced the problem of backwardness compared with contemporary states in western Europe, although commentators in both empires mostly avoided comparisons with each other, seeking comparisons with the western states instead.[2] Russia was the first to address the problem seriously, under Peter the Great, in the early eighteenth century. The Ottomans did not follow suit until a century later, starting in the 1820s under Sultan Mahmud II. This gave Russia a head start.[3] Combined with the rise of irredentist nationalist movements in the Balkans, it meant that the relationship was asymmetric, with Russia normally able to win in a direct military collision between the two, as in 1768-74, 1828-9, 1877-8 (albeit not without some difficulty) and 1915. The Ottoman Empire's administrative and military resources were more effective and durable than nineteenth century European statesmen often assumed, but when Russia was strong, hostile, and could be identified as their main enemy, Ottoman-Turkish rulers had to look for allies to redress the balance of power. Throughout, Russia's relations with its southern neighbour were shaped by continental politics, rather than purely local disputes or convergences.

Historical conditions are seldom static, and this simplified model needs elaboration and detail to explain the twists and turns of Ottoman-Turkish policies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While there were frequent periods of hostile relations with Russia, there were also occasions of rapprochement, as the two sides combined against a third party. These changes can be crudely divided into three systemic patterns, applying to successive historical periods.

The first pattern can be seen as multipolar with shifting alliances, defined by Morton Kaplan as the 'balance of power' system, in which the relevant states '[a]ct to oppose any coalition or single actor which tends to assume a position of predominance with respect to the rest of the system'. Since the actors will 'negotiate rather than fight', they seek to maintain peace by constructing a deterrent alliance against a potential aggressor.[4]As alignments are only temporary, two states may be enemies in one situation, then allies in another, in a rapidly changing pattern of perceived threats or challenges from third parties.[5]

In the second, contrasting pattern, a particular actor – in this case, Russia - is seen as an imminent and lasting threat by other actors – more immediately Turkey, but also by the main

1 A more real challenge in the Ottoman than in the Russian case, since in Russia the large Muslim minority, largely of Turkic ethnicity, had relatively little contact with the Ottoman-Turkish state until recent times.

2 Samuel J.Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery: the Meaning of Soviet-Turkish Convergence in the 1930s", *Slavic Review,* Vol.72, No1, 2013, p. 36.

3 Kiril A.Fursov, "Russia and the Ottoman Empire: the Geopolitical Dimension", *Russian Studies in History,* Vol.57, No2, 2018, p. 100.

4 Morton A.Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics*, Colchester, ECPR Press, 2005, p. 35.

5 Ibid, p. 11.

western and central European states. In this case, alliances will be long-term and relatively stable, in what may become an essentially bipolar system. However, alliances may face challenges and internal conflicts, as well as problems for the weaker state in an asymmetric relationship.

The third pattern is less easy to define, but recognisable as periodic détente. On occasion, global changes may substantially reduce the external security threat, or even eliminate it altogether. Republican Turkey and its Ottoman predecessor benfitted from this pattern of relationships on occasions of Russian weakness or engagement in other theatres, when it was able to maintain a tolerable degree of security without alliance commitments (or with weakened commitments). In this environment, the Turks could potentially develop valuable economic as well as political ties with Russia, using this relationship as a counterweight to that of the western powers. By engaging with both sides, they could try to bid up their value to both.

To summarise a long and complicated story, Turkey's relationship with Russia since the end of the eighteenth century can be crudely fitted into this three-pattern model as follows: (1) the first pattern, between 1798 and 1841; (2) the second pattern, between 1841 and 1878, then between 1945 and 1991; (3) the third pattern, between 1878 and 1914, between 1921 and 1939, and lastly since 1991. This periodisation is admittedly crude and approximate, but is offered as a rough guide to the continuities and discontinuities of a long history. It also leaves out the years of the two world wars, in the first of which Turkey was actually at war with Russia between 1914 and the end of 1917, and in the second of which Turkey had tense relations with Russia but without an effective protective alliance. More broadly, it is striking that, since the 1840s, the highly fluid system of the first pattern has never repeated itself, and seems unlikely to do so. The reasons for this require investigation and discussion outside the scope of this paper.

Shifting Alliances in a Multipolar System (1798-1841)

During the first four decades of the nineteenth century – more precisely, between 1798 and 1841 – relations between the Ottoman and Tsarist empires serve as an apt example of Kaplan's multipolar 'balance of power' system in action, in which the Ottomans were periodically in reluctant alliance with Russia, then either neutral or at war with it. While control of the straits was the ultimate aim of Russia, it had no consistent policy for achieving it, varying between plans for a direct military takeover as part of a partition of the Ottoman empire, agreed with the other 'Great Powers' of Europe, versus the idea of reaching some sort of agreement with the Ottoman government which would provide for joint control, and agreed access for Russian warships to the Mediterranean.[6] Alternatively, periodically, the Tsar's government simply put the whole idea of gaining control of the straits on the shelf, allowing it to drop off the international agenda for a time. This reluctance was evidently based on the fear that if the Ottoman state disintegrated, then other powers – notably the Habsburg empire (hereafter 'Austria') and Britain - would seize its territories.

6 J.C.Hurewitz, "Russia and the Turkish Straits: a Revaluation of the Origins of the Problem", *World Politics,* Vol.14, No4, 1962, p. 609.

Until the late eighteenth century, Austria had been the Ottomans' main opponent in south-eastern Europe, with France serving as their traditional ally. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 abruptly reversed this relationship, prompting the Ottoman government to sign a treaty with Russia, to which Britain rapidly adhered. This lasted until 1801-2, but was then revived in 1805, producing an Ottoman-Russian agreement in September of that year, in which the two empires agreed to cooperate if they were attacked by a third country (read, France). However, this was never ratified by the Sultan's government, and denounced in 1806.[7]In the same year, the Ottoman government switched sides, by starting negotiations with France. In response, the British and Russian fleets made an unsuccessful bid to capture the straits in February-March 1807. This was followed by a dramatic reversal in July 1807, when Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I signed a peace agreement at Tilsit. This opened up the real danger for the Ottomans that the French and Russian governments might decide to partition the Ottoman empire between them. They were saved by the fact that Napoleon was determined to prevent Russia from occupying the straits, and concerned that Austria would be the main gainer from an Ottoman collapse in the Balkans. In 1809, the Ottoman government, already involved in a prolonged struggle with Russia for control of the provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia (today's Moldova and northern Romania), duly entered an alliance with Britain confirming that the straits would be closed in peacetime to all non-Ottoman warships. The fighting with Russia continued, with periodic ceasefires, until 1812, when Napoleon launched his fateful invasion of Russia. Forced onto the back foot, under the Treaty of Bucharest of May 1812, the Tsar's government conceded control of the disputed provinces to the Ottomans, who effectively dropped out of the Napoleonic wars thereafter.

In 1821, the scene of conflict shifted to Greece, with the start of a serious anti-Ottoman uprising. To deal with it, the weakened Ottoman forces had to call on the support of Mehmet Ali Pasha, the Sultan's nominal vassal, who had been appointed governor of Egypt in 1805. Having landed in Greece in 1825, Mehmet Ali's forces had suppressed the rebellion by the following year. This prompted the combined intervention of the British, French and Russian fleets, destroying the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet in the harbour of Navarino in 1827, and forcing Mehmet Ali to withdraw to Egypt. Meanwhile, in 1825, threatened by Russia with unilateral action on behalf of the Greeks, the Ottomans accepted the Convention of Akerman with Russia. This recognised Moldavia, Wallachia and Serbia as autonomous provinces within the Ottoman empire, and allowed the Russians freedom of navigation throughout its territory. However, following the defeat at Navarino, Sultan Mahmud II hardened his policy, and refused to implement the convention. This provoked a full-scale invasion by Russian forces in 1828. The Ottoman army suffered devastating defeat by the summer of 1829. However, the Russian army was ravaged by disease. In September 1829, the two sides signed the Treaty of Edirne, under which the Russian gains were limited to Moldavia and Wallachia.

7 This account of Turkish-Russian relations during the Napoleonic wars is based in the classic texts of M.S.Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923: a Study in International Relations*, London, Macmillan, 1966, p. 26-47; J.A.R Marriot, *The Eastern Question: an Historical Study in European Diplomacy,* 4th edn., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940, pp. 167-173. According to Russian sources, the 1805 agreement included a secret clause giving Russian warships free passage through the straits, and closing the Black Sea to warships 'of any power whatsoever', but this claim is a fraud: (see Hurewitz, "Russia and the Turkish Straits", p. 610, 612, 615: the quotation is from p. 612). Russian sources also wrongly claimed that under the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi of 1833, the Ottoman government agreed to close the straits to warships of third powers, unlocking them to those of Russia: ibid, p. 610.

Soon after the immediate Russian threat had been ended, Mahmud II's government faced a new one, this time from his nominal vassal Mehmet Ali. In April 1833, after the Egyptian army had advanced through Syria, Mahmud turned to Russia for support. Under the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi, the two empires agreed to aid one another against attack by a third party. By 1839, Mehmet Ali was established as the ruler of Syria, with France emerging as his main supporter. Mahmud decided to try to eject him from Syria, but in June of that year the Sultan's forces were roundly defeated at the battle of Nizip, just north of the present Turkish-Syrian border. At this crucial moment, the Sultan died, to be succeeded by his 16- year-old son Abdul Mejid. Fortunately for the Ottomans, in July 1840, the mechanism of the balance of power system came into play, as Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria united to oppose French ambitions by agreeing to protect the new Sultan's government against Mehmet Ali. This led to the bombardment of Beirut by the British fleet, and the consequent retreat of Mehmet Ali's army into Egypt.[8]

Bipolar Alliance, 1841-1878

The defeat of Mehmet Ali, and the emergence of Britain as the major naval power in the eastern Mediterranean marked a turning point, as from now on the British emerged as the leaders of the anti-Russian (in effect, pro-Ottoman) coalition. As a result, the complicated and constantly shifting multipolar international system of the pre-1841 era changed into what amounted to a bipolar system, with a lasting anti-Russian alliance between the Ottomans and the British (corresponding to the second pattern outlined earlier), supported periodically by other European powers. This was accepted by the Ottomans, although they did not always favour the British as their sole ally.

The new alliance system experienced its baptism of fire in the Crimean War of 1854-56. In November 1853, the Ottomans suffered a devastating defeat when their navy was destroyed in a Russian attack on the port of Sinop, on the southern shores of the Black Sea. Faced with the threat of an imminent Ottoman collapse, the British and French sent their fleets into the Black Sea in January 1854. With the eventual defeat of the Russian forces in the Crimea, the war ended in March 1856, when the combatants accepted peace under the Treaty of Paris. Under its provisions, the Black Sea was effectively demilitarised by being closed to warships of all nations, but for small vessels needed for coastal protection.[9]

After the treaty of Paris, the bipolar alliance system established a period of peace along the Russian-Ottoman fault line, which lasted for 21 years. Following a revolt in the Balkans, Sultan Abdul Hamid II declared war on Russia in April 1877. The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 was fought on two fronts, in the Balkans to the west, and the highlands of north-eastern Anatolia in the east. In the west, the Russian forces were held up by the stout Ottoman defence of Plevna (Pleven), in northern Bulgaria, but nonetheless they captured Kars in the east

8 Anderson, *Eastern Question,* p. 65-73, 77-87, 95-107; Marriot, *Eastern Question*, p. 183, 221-245.

9 Anderson, *Eastern Question,* p. 116-143; Marriot, *Eastern Question,* p. 256-278 . In 1871, an international agreement ended the demilitarisation of the Black Sea, allowing Russia to rebuild its Black Sea fleet, but in practice the Russian navy failed to do so until the 1880s.

in November 1877, then Edirne in the west in January 1878. The Russian victory was sealed by a treaty signed at San Stefano, now the Istanbul suburb of Yeşilköy, in March 1878. Had it been implemented, a 'Greater Bulgaria' would have been established, nominally tributary to the Sultan, but actually under Russian military occupation for the next two years, with territory extending west and south to the Aegean Sea.

In the crisis of 1878, what saved the day for the Ottomans was Russia's diplomatic isolation, with none of the other European powers prepared to accept the San Stefano Treaty. As previously, Britain opposed any settlement which would have allowed Russia to take over the straits. At the height of the crisis, the British fleet sailed through the Dardanelles towards Istanbul in February 1878, raising the danger of a head-on collision between Britain and Russia. With the need to avoid another European war recognised on both sides, and the German Chancellor Bismarck acting as a powerful peacebroker, the outcome was a conference in Berlin, where a peace treaty was signed on 13 July 1878. Its most important achievement was that the 'Greater Bulgaria' foreseen at San Stefano was broken up into two sections divided along the Balkan mountains, with the western section to be given autonomy under nominal Ottoman suzerainty, and the south-eastern section, known as 'eastern Rumelia' to remain under Ottoman rule, but with a Christian governor. Serbia, Romania and Montenegro were granted independence, with Russia gaining some territory in northern Romania and taking over the Ottoman provinces of Batumi, Kars and Ardahan in the east. Under a separate convention, Britain acquired Cyprus.[10]

Uncertain Détente, 1878-1914

Under the Berlin settlement, the Ottoman Empire secured another lease of life, but was left in a weakened position, with the loss of some of its most productive territories. Between 1878 and 1914, the Ottoman Empire suffered further losses of territory in Crete, North Africa and the Balkans, but avoided any direct confrontations with Russia. There was no entente in Russian-Ottoman relations, but what could be described as something of a 36-year détente. Part of the probable explanation for this transition is that the experience of 1878 had demonstrated to Russia that an outright attack on what was left of the Ottoman Empire could spark off an unwinnable war against the rest of Europe. On the Russian side, also, doubts began to be expressed about the wisdom of the aim of taking over the straits to gain access to the Mediterranean.[11] By the 1890s, Russia was acting to stabilise the situation in the straits, not upset it, as its eyes were set on the Far East. Later, due to Russia's defeat by Japan in 1904, and its dire domestic situation, this concern was intensified.[12]

On the Ottoman side, also, the course of events brought about a weakening of the alliance with Britain and a cautious rather than hostile attitude to Russia. With its occupation of Egypt in 1882, Britain acquired a vital base in the Eastern Mediterranean, which was not

10 Anderson, *Eastern Question,* p. 69-73, 178-217, 226. The two halves of Bulgaria were re-united in 1885, and the country gained official independence after the 'Young Turk' revolution of 1908.

11 See S.F.Oreshkova, "The Ottoman Empire and Russia in the Light of Their Geopolitical Demarcation", *Russian Studies in History,* Vol. 57, No2, 2018, p. 140.

12 A.V. Boldyrev, "Russia, Turkey and the Problem of the Black Sea Straits in 1898-1908", in ibid, p. 164, 176.

dependent on alliance with the Ottomans, but which also increased Abdul Hamid's suspicions about British ambitions in his Arab territories, as well as plans for a prospective Armenian state in Eastern Anatolia, under British protection (which was also opposed by Russia). Initially, in 1881-82, he sought to replace the alliance with Britain with one with Germany, as his best likely source of protection against Britain and Russia. However, Bismarck turned down the proposal, as he had recently put together the 'League of the Three Emperors' (*Dreikaiserbund*) with Austria and Russia, and did not want to upset his relations with St.Petersburg. Following failed approaches to Britain for a new alliance, Ottoman officials even produced the draft of atreaty of alliance with Russia, but this also fell by the wayside. In response, the Sultan adopted a policy of avoiding alliances with any of the European governments, relying on the balance of power between them, and Russia's preoccupation elsewhere, to provide security for his empire.[13]

In the years leading up to 1914, Turkish ultra-nationalist ideologues promoted a bizarre mixture of anti-imperialism and social Darwinism, which saw war as the path to liberation, and urged alliance with Germany against the Slavs.[14] However, this view was not universal, and this outcome was far from certain. Enver Pasha, as the leader of the 'Young Turk' triumvirate which ruled the empire from 1913, was its only member who supported alliance with Germany, but he and other members also negotiated unsuccessfully with France, Britain and even Russia for deals to secure Turkish neutrality, in return for territorial gains.[15]

By driving the empire into the First World War, Enver broke one of the ground rules of Ottoman diplomacy, that the Ottomans should not join a war between the European powers, in which there was no direct threat to their own territory. His mistake was to prove disastrous. In January 1915, at the height of the bitter Anatolian winter, the Ottoman Third Army suffered a devastating defeat at Sarıkamış, in the eastern highlands, allowing Russia to occupy Eastern Anatolia as far as, and including, Trabzon and Erzurum by April 1916. In the event, Turkey was saved by forces well outside its control, as the revolutions of February and October-November 1917 produced a general Russian collapse. This was formalised by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of December 1917, under which the Turks regained their territorial losses of 1915-16, as well as the provinces of Kars and Ardahan, lost to Russia in 1878.[16] As a corollary, the Bolshevik government published and denounced all the secret wartime agreements between the entente powers. In the west, however, defeat stared the Ottomans in the face, signalled by the Armistice of Mudros, signed with the British on 30 October 1918.

13 F.A.K. Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy: Abdulhamid II and the Great Powers, 1878-1888*, Istanbul, Isis, 1996, p. 50-51, 80- 84, 184-186, 189-191, 255-259.

14 Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: the Ottoman Empire and the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 15, 34.

15 Joseph Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914*, London, Cass, 1983, p. 134.

16 In practice, the provinces were occupied by Armenian forces until October 1920. Batumi was not returned, and remains in Georgia to this day. For a further account of Turkish-Russian relations during this period, see Michael Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*: *the Clash and Collapse of the Russian and Ottoman Empires, 1908-1919*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, Chs. 4-6.

The Second Détente, 1921-1939

The paradoxical effect of the Ottoman defeat of 1918 was that since Russia had also been defeated, the Russian threat to Turkey's security was removed for the following 21 years. This striking return to the third pattern of relations allowed what became the Turkish Republic in 1923 a high degree of flexibility in its relations with both Russia and the western powers. At first, the Bolshevik leaders appear to have believed that they could also gain control of Turkey through an internal revolution, but by March 1921, Lenin had changed tactics by signing a treaty of friendship with Ataturk's government(also referred to as the Treaty of Moscow), recognising the present frontier between them, and pledging not to support movements hostile to the other.[17]Under separate agreements, the Bolsheviks also agreed to supply financial support, to the tune of around 10 million gold roubles (the exact amount is disputed), and large quantities of arms and ammunition.[18] The gold grant is reported to have been enough to cover the Ankara government's budget for an entire year, as well as a quarter of the rifles and half of the ammunition used in the warin Anatolia.[19] It thus appears that Bolshevik support played a vital role in the victory against the Greeks, and was the foundation of the Russian-Turkish entente of the inter-war years.

This was not achieved without some divergence between Soviet and Turkish long-term aims. In December 1922, Georgy Chicherin, who was attending the peace conference in Lausanne between Turkey and the former entente powers, urged İsmet İnönü, the leader of the Turkish delegation, to continue to support the 'liberation movements of other Muslim peoples'. In response, he was told that Turkey could not continue to take up the revolutionary mission for other nations.[20] It appears that the Soviet government did not change its strategy until 1924-5, when Joseph Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin brought about a switch to the policy of 'socialism in one country'. This was signalled in December 1925 by a 'Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality' between the two countries, in which both agreed not to join alliances directed against the other, and was duly renewed in 1935.[21] From now on, the Soviet government recognised Turkey as a friendly country, but with a non-socialist government, and not part of any transnational revolution.

Turkish-Soviet cooperation continued into the 1930s, with mutual visits by Prime Minister İsmet İnönü to the USSR in April 1932, in which he obtained an $8 million loan

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17 Bülent Gökay, *A Clash of Empires: Turkey between Russian Bolshevism and British Imperialism, 1918-1923*, London, I.B.Tauris, 1997, p. 85-112; Bülent Gökay, *Soviet Eastern Policy and Turkey, 1920-1991: Soviet Foreign Policy, Turkey and Communism*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 20-24. The 1921 treaty was also significant in that it recognised the Ankara government as the *de facto* rulers of Turkey, as officially the Sultan's puppet government in Istanbul was still recognised as legitimate by the western powers.

18 For the details, see Stefanos Yerasimos, *Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri, Ekim Devrinden 'Milli Mücadele'ye*, Istanbul, Gözlem, 1979, p. 631-636.

19 Samuel J.Hirst and Onur İşçi, "Smokestacks and Pipelines: Russian-Turkish Relations and the Persistence of Economic Development", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 44, No5, 2020, p. 838.

20 Samuel J.Hirst, "Transnational Anti-Imperialism and the National Forces: Soviet Diplomacy and Turkey, 1920-23", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* Vol. 13, No 2, 2013, p. 221.

21 On the Turkish side, this was apparently adopted as a riposte to Britain and the League of Nations in the then-ongoing dispute over the province of Mosul in northern Iraq: Peter J.Beck, '"A Tedious and Perilous Controversy': Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926", *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 17, No2, 1981, p. 270.

to help finance Turkey's first five-year industrialisation plan (1934-8), and a return visit to Ankara by Kliment Voroshilov, Soviet Commissar for Defence, in October 1933.[22] The entente hit a bump in 1936 when the Montreux Convention allowed Turkey to re-fortify the straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. Russia, which would have preferred to keep the Black Sea closed to non-littoral states, eventually accepted the new arrangements.[23] These provided that non-Black Sea states could send a limited tonnage of warships into the Black Sea, but in time of war, if it were non-belligerent, Turkey should close the straits to warships of belligerent powers.. This was to be a crucial provision in the Second World War, as well as in the current war between Russia and Ukraine.[24]

The Montreux Convention also marked the start of a shift away from the third pattern of Turkish-Russian relations, as both Atatürk, and İsmet İnönü, his successor as president after Atatürk's death in 1938, sought an alliance with the western powers against perceived threats from fascist Italy, and then Nazi Germany. Thanks to British dithering and French reluctance, this was not achieved until October 1939 – after the outbreak of theSecond World War. The triple alliance committed Britain and France to aid Turkey if it were attacked by a third party, and committed Turkey to aid the allies if there were a war in the Mediterranean caused by an 'act of aggression by a European Power'.[25] However, during the long negotiations which preceded the tripartite treaty, İnönü and his government evidently expected that Soviet Russia could be brought in to the new security arrangements. This hope suffered a shattering reverse with the signature of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of August 1939: as the French Ambassador in Ankara, René Massigli records, the Turks were 'stupefied' by the news.[26] In an eleventh-hour attempt, Foreign Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu was despatched to Moscow in September 1939, but was met with the demand for a revision of the Montreux Convention. This would, in effect, have placed control of the straits in Soviet hands – a demand very similar to that made by Stalin in 1945 – which was totally unacceptable to the Turks.[27]

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22 Onur İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union During World War II: Diplomacy, Discord and International Relations*, London, I.B.Tauris, 2020, p. 15-22. There is a good deal of debate about the relationship between socialism – possibly Soviet-inspired – and the economic strategy of étatism adopted in Turkey in the 1930s, but the issue is a complex one: see William Hale, "Ideology and Development in Turkey, 1923-1945", *British Society of Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No 2, 1980, p. 100-117.

23 For the details, see Onur İşçi, "Yardstick of Friendship: Soviet-Turkish Relations and the Montreux Convention of 1936", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History,* Vol. 21, No4, 2020, p. 744-747.

24 It is sometimes suggested that this is an option for Turkey, but the wording of Article 19 of the Convention indicates that it may be considered an obligation. To quote the text: 'In time of war, Turkey not being belligerent, warships shall enjoy complete freedom of transit and navigation through the Straits.....Vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall not, however pass through the Straits' [except in certain conditions, notably allowing warships to return to their home base]: *1936 Convention regarding the Regimeof the Straits* (https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/1936-Convention-Regarding-the-Regime-of-the-Straits.pdf), p. 8-9. In 1944, the British complained to the Turkish government on the grounds that it had allowed six armed German merchant ships to pass through the straits in defiance of the Montreux Convention, so on this occasion closure was evidently regarded as an obligation: see Harry N.Howard, *Turkey, the Straits and US Policy*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins Press, 1974, p. 197-198.

25 The writer has described these events in greater detail in William Hale, "Turkey and Britain in World War II: Origins and Results of the Triple Alliance, 1939-40", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies,* Vol. 23, No 6, 2021, p. 824-836.

26 René Massigli, *La Turquie devant la guerre: mission à Ankara, 1939-1940*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1964, p. 248.

27 Feridun Cemal Erkin, *Les relations Turco-Soviétique et la question des détroits*, Ankara, Başnur Matbaası, 1968, p. 160-165, 168-169.

During 1940, the security situation became still worse for the Turks, thanks to the collapse of France in May-June, which left Britain fighting on its own on the far side of Europe, and quite unable to assist Turkey if either Italy, Germany, or Russia invaded it. When Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940, bringing it to the Mediterranean, İnönü's government told Britain and France that it could not carry out its obligations under the tripartite treaty. Hence, Turkey effectively became a *de facto* neutral until 1945.[28]

Throughout the war, a cardinal aim of Turkish diplomacy was to maintain a balance of power in Eastern Europe between Germany and Russia, which would prevent either of them from conquering Turkey. In this, Turkey sought to use both Germany and the western allies as a defensive weapon against Russia. The most critical danger it faced in 1940 was the precise opposite –that with Britain temporarily out of the picture, Hitler and Stalin might agree to carve up the near east between them (much as they carved up Poland), with Russia left in control of the straits. This was exactly the issue which was discussed between the German and Soviet foreign ministers, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov, in November 1940. Fortunately for Turkey, Molotov over-reached himself, by demanding the establishment of Soviet military and naval bases in the Turkish straits, as well as control of Bulgaria. This was too much for Hitler, since it would have encircled Germany from the south, and ruled out a possible German attack on the British in the Middle East. Following the failure of the Ribbentrop-Molotov talks, Hitler told Hüsrev Gerede, the Turkish ambassador in Berlin, of their outcome in March 1941, so the Turks were left in no doubt about Stalin's intentions..[29]As in 1856 and 1878, Turkey had been saved by Russia's diplomatic isolation in Europe.[30]Now reasonably confident that Hitler and Stalin would not combine against them, the Turks signed a non-aggression pact with Germany on 18 June 1941. Four days later, Hitler launched 'Operation Barbarossa', his invasion of the USSR, causing heartfelt relief in Ankara.[31]

On the Turkish side, there was some support for the German campaign from the pan-Turkists, who hoped for the defeat of Russia, leading to German support for the extension of Turkish power into the Turkic regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, İnönü, as ever, was cautious, and his caution paid off.[32] By 1943, as the eventual allied victory became clearer, the emphasis switched to Turkey's relations with the western allies, and Churchill's attempt (not supported by the Americans) to bring Turkey into the war as part of an allied offensive in the Balkans. Turkey's expectations that Stalin had post-war ambitions to take over

28 The Turkish government cited Protocol 2 of the alliance treaty, which stated that its treaty obligations 'cannot compel.. [Turkey] to take action having as its effect, or involving as its consequence, entry into armed conflict with the Soviet Union'. The British Foreign Office privately recognised that this was just a pretext, and that the real reason was the unexpected fall of France, but that there was nothing Britain could do about it: see Selim Deringil, "The Preservation of Turkey's Neutrality during the Second World War: 1940", *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 18, No1, 1982, p. 39; Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Diplomat in Peace and War*, London, Murray, 1949, p. 166-167.

29 A.L.MacFie, "The Turkish Straits in the Second World War, 1939-45", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No 2, 1989, p. 241-242; İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union,* p. 93-94.

30 There is also a remarkable parallel here with the relations between France and Russia after the Tilsit agreement of 1807.

31 It is recorded that on the night of 22 June, on hearing the news, Foreign Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu, who was enjoying drinks with colleagues in a Georgian tavern in Ankara, 'jumped on stage and danced to zeybek tunes until dawn': İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union,* p. 73, citing the memoirs of General Cemal Madanoğlu.

32 See İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union,* p. 126-137.

the straits, were born out at the Yalta Conference of February 1945, when the Soviet dictator demanded revision of the Montreux Convention in Russia's favour.[33] The threat was made clear in June 1945, when Molotov told Selim Sarper, the Turkish ambassador to Moscow, that the USSR could not renew the Treaty of Friendship of 1925 unless the Convention were altered to allow Russian warships free passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and their closure to non-Black Sea states, the establishment of Russian bases on the straits, and the return to Russia of the north-eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan. In this way, the stage was set for a half-century of confrontation between Ankara and Moscow, with Turkey guarding NATO's south-eastern flank, as a vital member of the anti-Soviet alliance. Clearly, the second pattern of Turkish-Russian relations had now returned with a vengeance.

Bipolar Alliance, 1952-1991

The story of Turkey's admission to the western alliance in 1952, and its integration into NATO's military defence structure is now a well explored topic. In May 1953, soon after Stalin's death, the Soviet government under Nikita Khrushchev announced that it had withdrawn the claims to Kars and Ardahan, but this produced no response from Turkey.[34] In 1958, faced with a severe economic crisis, Adnan Menderes' government sent a delegation to Moscow to discuss the possibility of Soviet economic aid, but without result. In early 1960, it was even announced that Menderes and Khrushchev would exchange visits, but Menderes was overthrown by the coup d'état of 27 May 1960, before anything could be achieved.[35] Soviet tactics at the time had changed in favour of pushing for the neutralisation (or 'Finlandisation') of Turkey, rather than outright takeover of the straits, [36] but this had little effect on Turkish foreign policy.

Following the Cuba-Turkey missile crisis of 1962, there was some relaxation in relations between the super-powers, and coincidentally a diplomatic collision between Turkey and the US over Cyprus in 1964. This led to the first serious advance in Turkish-Soviet relations since 1945, with a series of visits between the leaders of the two nations, beginning in 1965, and a diplomatic realignment in Moscow with a more pro-Turkish position on Cyprus. In 1967, Turkey received the first series of Soviet credits for industrial development projects since the 1930s.[37] During the first half of the 1980s, there was a marked reconvergence between Turkey and its western allies, as the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan reawakened American appreciation of Turkey's strategic importance, with the opposite effect on Turkish-Russian relations. The second half of the decade, with Mikhail Gorbachev now

33 The story of Turkey's relations with the western allies between 1942 and 1945 has been explained in detail in a number of studies: see in particular Nicholas Tamkin, *Britain, Turkey and the Soviet Union, 1940-45: Strategy, Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 76-150; Edward Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1943-1945: Small State Diplomacy and Great Power Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973 passim.

34 See Ferenc A. Vali, *Bridge across the Bosporus: the Foreign Policy of Turkey*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins Press, 1971, p. 174-175; Alvin Z.Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy towards Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan: the Dynamics of Influence*, New York, Praeger, 1982, p. 14-15.

35 William Hale, *The Political and Economic Development of Modern Turkey*, London, Croom Helm, 1981, p. 106-107.

36 See Kemal H. Karpat, "Turkish-Soviet Relations", Kemal H.Karpat et al., *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition*, Leiden, Brill, 1975, p. 86-87, and Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy,* p. 17.

37 Hirst and İşçi, "Smokestacks and Pipelines", p. 849-852.

favouring Russia's integration into the global economy, reversed this, producing a dramatic increase in trade between the two countries, from a total of $487 million in 1987 to $1.8 billion in 1990. Central to this trend was the beginning of natural gas exports from Russia to Turkey, initially via Bulgaria, starting a dependency that has continued to the present.[38]

Since 1991: the Renewed Détente and its Uncertainties

In retrospect, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War between 1989 and the end of 1991 can be seen as a dramatic shift from the second back to the third pattern of Turkish-Russian relations, although, as noticed, there had been signs of this in the preceding years. Initially, however, the new relationship between Moscow and Ankara was slow to develop. Part of this may have been due to the chaotic state of both countries' internal politics during the 1990s.[39]Part also derived from perceived competition between Russia and Turkey for influence over the newly independent 'Turkic' republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Turkey's bid was encouraged by Washington, with Secretary of State James Baker urging the new republics to adopt 'the Turkish model' of economic and political development.[40] However, the local rulers, whowere mostly inherited from the old Soviet *nomenklatura*, showed no sympathy for this idea. Before long, Turkish governments had to accept the fact that, in spite of its setbacks, Russia was still the dominant power in the region, both politically and economically.

In fact, economics, with a growing trade volume between Russia and Turkey – the supply of Russian natural gas, in particular – became the backbone of the Turkish-Russian relationship. By 2012, Russia had become Turkey's second biggest trading partner, with a total annual trade volume of $33.3 billion, or 8.6 percent of total trade (just behind Germany, with 9.8 percent). For Turkey, the main disadvantage of this relationship was the huge trade imbalance, with Turkey's annual imports from Russia running at $26.6 billion, against exports of $6.7 billion.[41] The rapprochement with Russia was heightened by the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was strongly opposed by Turkish public opinion, and the fact that accession negotiations with the European Union, which had started hopefully in 2004, were then blocked by opposition from the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, and conservative public opinion in France and Germany.[42] The split between Turkish and US policies was intensified in 2014, when the US re-cast its role in the Syrian civil war, by forming an alliance with the Syrian-Kurdish 'People's Protection Units'(YPG), which controlled north-east Syria. The YPG was condemned by the Turkish government as an offshoot of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), which had been responsible for a long-running campaign of terrorist attacks in Turkey.

38 Gareth M.Winrow, 'Gorbachev's New Political Thinking and Turkey', paper delivered to the conference of the British International Studies Association, University of Warwick, 1991.

39 In the case of Turkey, mainly during the second half of the decade.

40 Quoted in Philip Robins, "Turkey's Ostpolitik: Relations with the Central Asian States", David Menashri(ed.), *Central Asia meets the Middle East*, London, Cass, 1998, p. 135. See also Gareth M.Winrow, *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995.

41 OEC World Trade Data, *Turkey*, 2022, https://oec.world/en/profile/country/tur?yearSelector1.

42 For an analysis of Turkish public opinion on foreign policy issues, see Özgehan Şenyuva and Mustafa Aydın, "Turkish Public Opinion and Transatlantic Relations", Eda Kuşku-Sönmez and Çiğdem Üstün(eds.), *Turkey's Changing Transatlantic Relations*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2021, p. 265-282.

The rift with Washington provoked discussions on the Turkish side about a 'shift of axis' towards what was known as the 'Eurasian option', supported by populist-nationalists in Turkey, as Turkey became a 'dialogue partner' (albeit never a full member) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.[43] The link was fragile, however, and threatened by the fact that Turkey and Russia supported opposite sides in the Syrian civil war. Elsewhere, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan opposed Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014, voicing support for Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity. Russian-Turkish tensions reached a climax in November 2015, when the Turkish air force shot down aRussian SU-24 aircraft from Syria which had briefly over-flown Turkish territory. Relations were only restored when Tayyip Erdoğan made a u-turn by apologising for the incident. Significantly, Russia was able to achieve this by temporarily banning the import of fruit and vegetables from Turkey, interrupting Turkey's overland trade with Central Asia, and preventing Russian package tourists from visiting the country – aptly demonstrating Turkey's economic vulnerability The result was a remarkable turnaround, with Turkey's participation in the Russian-led Astana peace process for Syria, and Russia's tacit approval of Turkish incursions into northern Syria in 2016 and 2018 (operations 'Euphrates Shield' and 'Olive Branch').[44] The shift towards Moscow went further in September 2017, when Turkey signed an agreement to acquire the Russian S-400 missile defence system, which is incompatible with the NATO equivalent. This caused a serious breach with Washington, with the Trump administration excluding Turkey from the joint production and purchase of the fifth-generation F-35 fighter aircraft, followed by opposition in Congress to Turkey's proposed purchase of the F-16 aircraft, to add to its existing fleet.[45]

Shortly afterwards, the global crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 threatened to throw Turkey's delicate relationship with Russia back into the melting pot. Initially, it was suggested that the crisis could bring Turkey back to a 'new Atlanticism', since it was argued that NATO, and the US in particular, now needed the support of an important regional ally.[46] This issue was brought to the fore on 27 February 2022, when Turkey acted in line with the Montreux Convention by closing the Straits to Russian warships, thus preventing Russia from reinforcing its naval forces in the Black Sea, a condition accepted by Russia.[47] Tayyip Erdoğan had frequently and publicly proclaimed his support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence, and resisted Russian appeals for Turkey to recognise Russia's annexation of the Crimea. At the same time, he kept his lines of communication with Moscow open, and used his intermediate position between the two sides in attempts to act as a peace broker, most notably by hosting a meeting between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in Istanbul on 29 March 2022. The talks failed, and Erdoğan continued to suffer criticism in the west due to Turkey's failure to apply economic sanctions against Russia, and its objections

43 For a thorough and penetrating examination of Turkish 'Eurasianism', see Suat Kınıklıoğlu, *Eurasianism in Turkey,* Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP Research Paper 2022/RP07, 2022.

44 See William Hale, "Turkey, the US, Russia and the Syrian Civil War", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 21, No4, 2019, p. 27-32.

45 Murat Yetkin "F-16 Görüşmeleri Aralık'ta, ama F-35'e Dönüş Kapısı Kapalı", *Yetkin Report,* 9 November 2021, https://yetkinreport.com/2021/11/09/f-16-gorusmeleri-aralikta-ama-f-35e-donus-kapisi-kapali.

46 Sean Mathews, "Turkey was Nato's Wayward Member, then Came the Crisis in Ukraine", *Middle East Eye,* 28 January 2022, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-nato-wayward-member-then-ukraine-crisis-happened.

47 "Russia Appreciates Turkey's Stance Concerning Straits: Envoy", *Hürriyet Daily News,* 3 March 2022, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russia-appreciates-turkeys-stance-concerning-straits-envoy-171946.

to the admission of Sweden and Finland to NATO in June 2022 (how far this would be pursued remained uncertain).[48] Erdoğan was nevertheless able to restore relations with both sides in July 2022, when Turkey played a central role in negotiating an agreement, also brokered by the United Nations, between Ukraine and Russia, on the export of grain from the blockaded ports of the Ukrainian Black Sea coast.[49]

The Ukrainian grain deal was President Erdoğan's most successful diplomatic operation in the new environment. It led to hopes that he might still be able to broker a ceasefire in the Ukraine, but in the autumn of 2022 this still seemed a long way off. Given huge uncertainties over the outcome of the war, and its effects on east-west relations generally, there was still the real risk that relations between Russia and the western powers would return to something like their Cold War confrontation. In this case, straddling the gulf between the two sides would become extremely difficult for Erdoğan or his successors. If the Turkish economy, already weakened by a sharp fall in the value of the lira and consequent chronic inflation, suffered another collapse, Turkey would need to mend its political fences with Washington for a new rescue plan to be activated. In effect, Turkey might fall back into the second pattern of its relationship with Russia. Whatever happened, it was clear that relations with Moscow, as well as with Brussels and Washington, would stay at the top of Turkey's foreign policy agenda.

Conclusion

Clearly, history never repeats itself exactly, and there are fundamental differences between the global conditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, the outlines of a continuing pattern can be seen when comparing the two periods of Russian-Turkish confrontation between 1841 and 1878, then between 1945 and 1991, or the two period of détente between 1921 and 1939, and then 1991 and the present. There is a widespread expectation that the Russian invasion of Ukraine will lead to a second Cold War between Russia and the West, but it is still far too early to say how long this might last, or whether Turkey might be able to continue straddling the gap between the two sides.

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48 Charlemagne, "Nato's Loose Cannon", *The Economist,* 18 June 2022, p. 23: Patrick Wintour, "Turkey Threatens Year's Delay to Swedish and Finnish Entry to NATO", *The Guardian*, 14 June 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/14/turkey-threatens-years-delay-to-swedish-and-finnish-entry-to-nato.

49 Daniel Boffey et al., "Ukraine and Russia Sign UN-backed Deal to Restart Grain Exports", *The Guardian*, 22 July 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/22/ukraine-russia-sign-un-backed-deal-restart-grain-exports: Matt Murphy, "Ukraine War: First Grain Ship Leaves under Russia Deal", *BBC News,* 1 August 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-62375580.

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