

**Akimova Zh. B., Kilybayeva P.K.**

*Kazakhstan, Nur-sultan*

## **U.S.-Turkey Relations: A History of Relationships**

For seven decades, Turkey has been a key element of the US strategy in Eurasia and the Middle East. Having joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952 - just three years after its founding - Ankara became the only Muslim country in the Western military alliance. During the Cold War, Turkey was central to the United States' defense and security policy, serving both as a Western outpost on the borders with the Soviet Union and as a conduit for US interests in the Middle East.

In general, the Middle East theme occupied one of the main places in cooperation between the countries. In the 90s. XX century. Turkey was entrusted with an important mission to contain the regional influence of Iran and Iraq, develop military-political ties with Israel within the framework of Tel Aviv's "peripheral strategy", and implement the United States' energy policy in the region. However, already in those years, trying to maintain a balance between its own regional priorities and the interests of the United States and NATO, the country's leadership has repeatedly demonstrated that Turkey's national aspirations in the region prevail over bloc solidarity. In particular, the military bases located on its territory could not be involved in US or NATO military operations without the special permission of Ankara.

The collapse of the bipolar world forced Turkish politicians and experts to start developing a new regional policy that would make it possible to make a strategic turn to the East and increase their influence there. The country achieved significant success in this area after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. Turkey began to position itself as an independent regional and global player, which often displeased its Atlantic ally [1].

All this aggravated the disagreements of the parties on Middle East problems that had arisen earlier and created new areas of divergence of interests, which inevitably had to be reflected in bilateral cooperation. The deterioration of relations

took place already in 2003, after the US military intervention in Iraq, which was negatively perceived by the leaders of the main Turkish parties and the population of the country. Then Ankara used non-military instruments of pressure on its Atlantic ally and prohibited the American military from using the Incirlik airbase. At the same time, anti-American sentiments began to grow in Turkish society. If in 2000, according to polls by the Pew Research Center, 52% of Turkish citizens were positive about the actions of the United States in the international arena, then in 2003 their number dropped to 15%, and in 2007 - to 9 %. This was the lowest rate among the states where the studies were conducted [2]. The political turmoil in the Middle East caused by the Arab revolutions has made the conflict between the United States and Turkey even more pronounced over regional security issues. This concerned the Syrian crisis, the fight against radical Islamist groups, and US support for Kurdish paramilitaries. As a result, since the mid-2010s. the list of mutual claims was constantly growing.

The purchase by Turkey in the summer of 2019, contrary to the objections of the United States, of the Russian S-400 complex and the military operation undertaken in October of the same year in the northeast of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) marked a systemic crisis between Ankara and Washington. Last but not least, these problems are associated with a change in the strategic priorities of both countries and their approaches to ensuring regional security. Constant domestic political disputes in the United States about reducing the presence in the Middle East, offshore balancing and weakening American leadership demonstrate to the Turkish authorities the insecurity and inability of Washington to fulfill its obligations. As a result, the United States has to look for ways to put pressure on its longtime ally, who no longer wants to follow in the wake of American interests and increasingly speaks out for building a new system of international relations that rejects the "hegemony of a single power" [3].

All these processes actualize the issue of the prospects for further interaction between states. Will the current crisis lead to a final strategic disengagement or will the parties be able to come to a compromise and find a new model of cooperation? In

order to provide answers to these questions, it is necessary to consider the reasons for the divergence of US-Turkish interests and outline the conditions under which a "reset" of relations is possible.

During the first presidential term of Barack Obama, cooperation between the United States and Turkey, according to the American leader, was in the nature of a "model partnership" [4]. At the initial stage of the Arab revolutions, Ankara and Washington had common interests and similar views on the events taking place in the region. The White House supported the desire of the Turkish authorities to play a leading role in the change of the ruling regimes in North Africa and Syria, since Turkey was viewed by the American leadership as an example of a Muslim country that managed to build a democratic system of government on the Western model.

In turn, Turkish strategists also positively assessed the rapprochement with the United States on the Middle East track, since it was supposed to enhance Ankara's influence in the changed geopolitical space of the region. However, subsequently, the protracted nature of the Syrian conflict and the turn in the policy of President Barack Obama in the direction of seeking political solutions in Syria in September 2013 changed the situation and led to an increase in contradictions between the countries. American media began to accuse Turkish leaders and personally R.T. Erdogan of supporting jihadists, infringing on the democratic rights of citizens and authoritarianism. Journalists called Turkey a "sworn friend" and "lost ally" and concluded that it was necessary to revise the principles of bilateral interaction. For its part, Ankara refused to join the international anti-ISIS coalition created by the United States in September 2014, despite active pressure from the White House. For Turkey, the task of paramount importance remained the fight against the regime of Syrian President Assad, so Turkish leaders were disappointed with the shift in the focus of attention of Washington and the international community from Damascus to the fight against terrorism. It took active US diplomatic efforts, bilateral meetings and negotiations to at least get Turkey's permission to use the Turkish Incirlik airbase for air strikes on ISIS positions. In fact, Turkey's policy towards the SAR in these years was based on the desire of R.T. Erdogan to strengthen his position within the country

by supporting radical Islamist groups fighting against official Damascus. Ankara has become the center of the Syrian opposition in exile and a conduit for a steady stream of foreign jihadist fighters heading to Syria. All this drew criticism from both the US Congress and the White House, and the American media.

As the Arab crisis escalated, the Turkish leadership faced new challenges. At the regional level, the ongoing Syrian conflict negatively affected the country's economy and the situation in the border areas. After the AKP lost its parliamentary majority for the first time in more than a decade in 2015, R.T. Erdogan broke a long-term truce with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), formed an alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party and initiated large-scale military actions against Kurdish militants. , who were entrusted with the responsibility for destabilizing the situation in the country. Only after the start of this operation, Ankara allowed the Americans to use Incirlik for reconnaissance flights in the fight against ISIS. In August 2015, after repeated calls by the United States to join the anti-terrorist coalition, the Turkish Air Force for the first time in its composition took part in air strikes against the militants of this group in Syria. Despite the development of Turkish-American military cooperation due to the fight against ISIS, the differences between the states continued to grow. Ankara's support for radical Islamists in the SAR became the reason for the Pentagon's wary attitude towards Turkey, accusing it of failing to prevent the spread of jihadism. In turn, the Turkish authorities saw the origins of the growth of radicalism in the lack of sufficient US support for the moderate Syrian opposition [5]. At the end of Barack Obama's presidency, RT Erdogan defined his policy in the Middle East as "muddy and indistinct." According to him, the position of the United States on Syria and the Arab-Israeli conflict has become the reason for the destabilization of the situation in the region and an increase in the number of victims, including among civilians. [6].

Relations between the countries have aggravated even more after the attempted military coup in Turkey in the summer of 2016. As believed in Ankara, the conspirators acted with the tacit support and approval of Washington. The US refusal to extradite the Turkish preacher F. Gulen, whom the Turkish leaders considered the

main instigator of these events, exacerbated these suspicions. For its part, the White House administration was concerned about the actions of the Turkish authorities after the attempted putsch: the initial arrests of conspiracy suspects turned into an unprecedented purge and persecution of R.T. Erdogan's political opponents. The case went as far as the arrests of American citizens accused of having links with the Gulenists. The arrest in 2016 of the American pastor E. Branson, which provoked a diplomatic scandal between the countries, received a particularly wide response. The coming to power of Donald Trump and the change of the American administration caused expectations of renewed cooperation in Turkey and a solution to the problems that arose during the presidency of Barack Obama. However, the Turkish leadership's hopes for a quick "reset" of relations with the United States were not justified. Despite the intensification of high-level contacts, the differences between Washington and Ankara continued to deepen.

#### References:

1. US strategy in the Middle East: Change of tactics, withdrawal or defeat? / A.V. Glazova, I.A. Svistunova, R.Sh. Enikeev, A. Ya. Khizriev // Problems of national strategy. 2016. No. 4 (37). Pp. 9-30.
2. Losing Turkey: A Key US Ally Moves Away // Pew Research Center. 2010. 5 June, available from <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2010/06/05/losing-turkey-a-key-us-ally-movesaway/> (accessed December 11, 2021).
3. Oualaalou D. The Last Time I Checked, Turkey Was Still a Member of NATO // The Huffington Post. 2017. 31 July, available from [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-lasttime-i-checked-turkey-was-still-a-member\\_b\\_597fb8c2e4b0d187a5968fad](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-lasttime-i-checked-turkey-was-still-a-member_b_597fb8c2e4b0d187a5968fad) (accessed December 10, 2021).
4. Joint Press Availability with President Obama and President Gul of Turkey // The White House. Official website. 2009. 6 April, available from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/joint-press-availability-with-president-obama-and-president-gul-turkey> (accessed December 13, 2021).
5. Cagaptay S. How the U.S. Military Lost Its Favor for Turkey // The Washington Institute. 2015. 24 September, available from

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-the-u.s.-military-lost-its-favor-for-turkey> (accessed December 12, 2021).

6. Crowley M. Did Obama get Erdogan wrong? // Politico. 2016. 16 July, available from [https:// www.politico.com/story/2016/07/obama-turkey-225659](https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/obama-turkey-225659) (accessed December 12, 2021).