



STRATEGIC
BRIEF

NOVEMBER 2025

TÜRKİYE, RUSSIA, AND THE UNITED STATES: MANAGING A STRATEGIC TRIANGLE

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Executive Summary

Since 2016, Türkiye's relations with Russia and the United States have evolved into a strategic triangle defined by both cooperation and constraint. This triangular structure reflects Türkiye's position as a NATO ally that simultaneously maintains extensive defense, energy, and diplomatic ties with Russia. Over the past decade, Ankara has used its engagement with Moscow to balance, bargain, and at times signal to Washington, while its continued dependence on U.S. financial systems, defense technology, and institutional legitimacy has limited the scope of this autonomy.

From the 2016 coup attempt through the 2025 Trump presidency, Türkiye's management of this triangle has gone through three phases. Between 2016 and 2021, rapprochement with Russia provided short-term relief from strategic isolation and became a tool for negotiating with the United States. Between 2022 and 2024, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the resurgence of

NATO discipline narrowed Türkiye's room for maneuver, leading to re-engagement with the transatlantic alliance. By 2025, under a second Trump administration, the triangle entered a phase of transactional normalization—renewed dialogue with Washington, continued pragmatism with Moscow, and an emphasis on stability over confrontation.

Throughout this period, the relationship with Russia has consistently affected Türkiye's dealings with Washington—sometimes as leverage, sometimes as liability. The cumulative outcome is a pattern of asymmetric autonomy: Türkiye preserves the ability to act independently in tactical domains, yet its strategic posture remains bounded by overlapping dependencies on both the United States and Russia. Managing this balance will continue to shape Ankara's diplomacy in the decade ahead.

INTRODUCTION: THE TRIANGULAR ARCHITECTURE OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

The period since 2016 has transformed Türkiye's foreign-policy environment more dramatically than any decade since the end of the Cold War. The failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, redefined national security priorities, catalyzed a shift toward presidential centralization, and accelerated a process of recalibration between Türkiye's Western alliances and its regional partnerships.¹ Russia emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity: a partner in energy and crisis management, a com-

petitor in Syria and the Caucasus, and a potential counterbalance to perceived Western overreach.²

In this process, relations with the United States and Russia have become interdependent variables. Cooperation with Moscow has often served to signal displeasure with Washington, while friction with Russia has reinforced Ankara's reliance on NATO. The United States have remained indispensable in financial, technological, and institutional terms, but its policies toward Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean, and sanctions have periodically strained the alliance.³

1 Akkoyunlu, K., 2021. The Five Phases of Türkiye's Foreign Policy under the AKP. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 88(2), pp.243-270.

2 Balta, E., 2019. From geopolitical competition to strategic partnership: Türkiye and Russia after the cold war. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 16(63), pp.69-86.

3 Alim, E., 2022. Strategic hedging in the Black Sea: The case of Türkiye versus Russia. *Comparative strategy*, 41(5), pp.459-482.

The triangular model captures this dynamic. At its core lies an asymmetry: Türkiye depends structurally on the United States for defense and finance, and on Russia for energy and regional access, while both major powers regard Ankara as a useful but secondary partner. For Türkiye, the strategic task has been to transform this asymmetry into leverage—to use engagement with one power to manage relations with the other without provoking alienation from either. This approach has sometimes resembled a hedging strategy, yet it differs from classical hedging in that Türkiye's dependencies are uneven and its actions are more transactional than risk-averse. Rather than seeking merely to insure against uncertainty, Ankara has aimed to convert its position between the two powers into diplomatic currency.⁴ The degree to which it has succeeded has varied over time, but the pursuit of this bounded, asymmetric autonomy has defined Turkish foreign policy since 2016.

2016–2021: MANAGED RAPPROCHEMENT AND STRATEGIC BARGAINING

The Coup Attempt and the Search for Strategic Flexibility

The immediate aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt marked the beginning of a pragmatic rapprochement with Russia. The perception that the United States had responded tepidly to the coup—and that it harbored Fethullah Gülen, whom Ankara accused of orchestrating it—created deep mistrust.⁵ Russia's early and explicit support for President Erdoğan provided political validation at a moment of domestic vulnerability.

This political solidarity soon translated into renewed cooperation across multiple domains. Economic sanctions imposed by Moscow after the 2015 jet crisis⁶ were lifted, tourism resumed, and channels for political dialogue reopened. In parallel, Ankara used this warming with Moscow to signal to Washington that it had alternative partners. The message was not a desire to exit NATO, but a warning that Türkiye would diversify its options if its strategic concerns were not addressed.

Syria, Leadership Diplomacy, and Tactical Coordination

The reconciliation with Moscow after the 2015 jet crisis was facilitated not only by mutual economic interests but also by Ankara's growing unease with U.S. collaboration with the Syrian Kurdish YPG; coordination with Russia thus became both a counterbalance to Western policy in Syria and a means to regain operational freedom along its southern border. The Astana Process, launched in 2017, symbolized the new cooperative framework. While Russia and Türkiye supported opposing sides in the Syrian conflict, both recognized the value of deconfliction and joint crisis management. Russia secured Türkiye's acquiescence to the Assad regime's survival; Türkiye obtained freedom of action against the Kurdish YPG along its border.

For Washington, the Turkish–Russian coordination complicated U.S. efforts to manage the Syrian conflict. Ankara's opposition to U.S. support for the Syrian Democratic Forces deepened tensions within NATO and reinforced the perception of divergence. At the same time, Türkiye's participation in the Astana Process was

4 Harunoglu, N.Ç., Sever, A. and Ersen, E., 2021. *Türkiye between the United States and Russia: surfing on the edge*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

5 Martin, L.G., 2025. Challenging friends: Türkiye-US relations. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 14(1), pp.3-19.

6 Türkiye shot down a Russian Su-24 near the Syrian border on 24 November 2015, prompting Moscow to impose sanctions, halt tourism, and freeze diplomatic channels. After President Erdoğan expressed regret in mid-2016, and following Russia's quick support after Türkiye's July 2016 coup attempt, the two leaders restored relations and opened the path to the later strategic rapprochement.

partly aimed at encouraging U.S. engagement: by demonstrating that it could act with Russia, Ankara sought to press Washington for greater consultation and flexibility on regional policy.⁷

Energy and Defense: Dual Channels of Dependence

During this period, energy and defense cooperation with Russia expanded markedly.⁸ The construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant and the completion of the TurkStream pipeline turned Russia into both Türkiye's principal energy supplier and a long-term investor in strategic infrastructure. These projects provided short-term economic benefits and reinforced Türkiye's role as an energy hub, but they also increased long-term dependency on Russian technology and financing.

The most consequential rupture in U.S.–Türkiye defense relations stemmed from Ankara's 2017 decision to purchase the Russian-made S-400 air-defense system. Conceived as both a signal of strategic autonomy and a reaction to Washington's refusal to authorize Patriot sales, the deal quickly became a litmus test of alliance trust.⁹ When the first components arrived in 2019, the United States suspended Türkiye from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program and froze the transfer of aircraft already produced for its air force. What followed was nearly two years of political deadlock: President Trump resisted congressional calls for punitive measures, arguing that Türkiye had been treated unfairly and that sanctioning a NATO ally would harm U.S. industry. Under growing bipartisan pressure, however, the administration finally imposed sanctions in December 2020 under the *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)*. The measures targeted Türkiye's *Presidency of Defense Industries (SSB)* and sev-

eral senior officials, restricting export licenses, loans, and access to U.S. defense financing.

The episode illustrated the limits of Ankara's balancing strategy: the S-400 deal deepened defense cooperation with Moscow but simultaneously constrained Ankara's room for maneuver within NATO. The S-400 issue became a structural tension in U.S.–Türkiye relations, limiting trust even on issues where interests converged, such as counterterrorism and Black Sea security.

Domestic Context and Signaling to Washington

The deepening of ties with Russia also had a domestic dimension. The narrative of sovereign independence, reinforced by rhetoric critical of the West, served to legitimize Türkiye's post-coup transformation. Yet Ankara never aimed to substitute one alliance with another. Throughout this period, Turkish officials repeatedly emphasized their commitment to NATO and sought transactional resolutions with the United States. The underlying strategy was to use cooperation with Moscow as a bargaining instrument—a way to draw Washington's attention to Ankara's security concerns and to increase its negotiation leverage.

Between 2016 and 2021, therefore, Türkiye's rapprochement with Russia was not an alternative to its Western alignment but a mechanism to rebalance it. The triangle functioned as a system of bargaining: Moscow offered tactical opportunities, Washington remained the indispensable partner, and Ankara sought to derive advantage from both.

7 Dalay, G., 2021. *Turkish-Russian relations in light of recent conflicts: Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh* (No. 5/2021). SWP Research Paper.

8 Erşen, E. and Çelikpala, M., 2019. Türkiye and the changing energy geopolitics of Eurasia. *Energy Policy*, 128, pp.584-592.

9 Yetim, H.T. and Hazar, A., 2023. S400s, sanctions and defiance: explaining Türkiye's quest for strategic autonomy and the US response. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 23(1), pp.179-199.

2022–2024: RECALIBRATION THROUGH CONSTRAINT

The Ukraine War and the Return of Alliance Discipline

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 transformed the strategic environment. The war revalidated NATO's relevance and placed Türkiye in a position where neutrality was no longer cost-free.¹⁰ Ankara's invocation of the Montreux Convention to close the Straits to warships underscored its commitment to Transatlantic Alliance. The move was widely interpreted in Washington as a sign that Türkiye still recognized its security interests as aligned with NATO's collective framework.

At the same time, Ankara maintained open communication with Moscow, enabling it to play a mediation role.¹¹ The sale of Bayraktar drones to Ukraine and Türkiye's facilitation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative demonstrated that constructive engagement with both sides could enhance Ankara's diplomatic profile. For the United States, Türkiye's role in the grain deal and its control of Black Sea access were essential to the broader Western effort to contain Russia's influence. The war thus reinforced Türkiye's institutional value to NATO. It also reminded Ankara of the alliance's enduring importance for its own security: cooperation with Russia could offer tactical flexibility, but engagement with Moscow never meant accepting Russian primacy in the Black Sea.

The Sanctions Economy and Financial Interdependence

After the invasion of Ukraine, US and the EU imposed unprecedented economic and financial sanctions on Moscow. Ankara, citing its

long-standing policy of aligning only with UN-mandated sanctions, chose not to participate in the measures, thereby asserting a form of non-alignment. This posture represented not mere non-compliance but an instance of normative contestation: a deliberate attempt to renegotiate the normative boundaries of the European sanctions regime.¹²

In practice, the sanctions economy offered short-term benefits to Ankara—expanded trade, investment inflows from Russian firms, and sustained tourism revenues—but also exposed Ankara to growing scrutiny from Washington and Brussels. By mid-2023, under the threat of secondary sanctions, the government tightened export controls, introduced restrictions on the re-export of dual-use goods, and strengthened monitoring of financial transactions. In other words, under increasing scrutiny from both Washington and Brussels, Ankara began to align its financial practices more closely with transatlantic standards, not through formal accession to the sanctions regime but through selective, case-by-case compliance.

This adjustment revealed a structural asymmetry often overlooked in political debates: while energy dependence links Türkiye to Russia, financial and institutional dependence binds it far more closely to Western systems. Access to dollar clearing, credit, and insurance remains indispensable for Türkiye's economy, meaning that its room for maneuver vis-à-vis sanctions is ultimately constrained by transatlantic interdependence.

The Erosion of Russian Regional Leverage

As the war strained Russia's resources, its capacity to project influence in Syria and the Caucasus

10 Balta, E. and Bal, H.B., 2025. How do middle powers act? Türkiye's foreign policy and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *International Politics*, pp.1-23.

11 Butler, M.J., 2024. Ripeness obscured: inductive lessons from Türkiye's (transactional) mediation in the Russia–Ukraine war. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 35(1), pp.104-128.

12 Renda, K.K., Özçelik, A.O. and Tabak, H., 2023. Türkiye's proactive contestation of EU sanctions against Russia: European normative order vs. geopolitical realities. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 23(4), pp.757-780.

declined. Türkiye used this opportunity to consolidate its own positions. In northern Syria, Ankara increased operations against YPG elements; in the South Caucasus, it supported Azerbaijan's efforts to assert control in Nagorno-Karabakh. These moves, while partly coordinated with Moscow, also underscored Türkiye's growing autonomy within Russia's near-abroad.

For the United States, the weakening of Russia's regional role had two implications. First, it reduced concerns that Türkiye might drift irreversibly into Moscow's orbit. Second, it reopened space for cautious re-engagement with Ankara on Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean security. The Biden administration's approach emphasized stability and institutional dialogue rather than confrontation, reflecting a shared recognition that Türkiye's cooperation was necessary for effective regional management.

Therefore, by 2024, the triangular dynamic had entered a new phase of constrained recalibration. Cooperation with Russia persisted in energy and trade, but its character changed: the relationship with Moscow, once a diplomatic instrument for signaling autonomy to Washington, evolved into a balancing constraint—one that anchored Türkiye's regional ambitions within the realities of alliance discipline and financial dependency.

In this period, public discourse has also evolved. In the immediate post-2016 period, anti-Western rhetoric reinforced the narrative of independence and solidarity with Russia. After 2022, the tone shifted toward pragmatic nationalism and regional cooperation. Public opinion remained cautious toward both major powers but increasingly favored balanced engagement. Cooperation with Moscow no longer provoked the domestic enthusiasm it once did, but nor does engagement with Washington invite political cost. The ideological polarization that once colored foreign policy debates has softened, enabling a more flexible approach to alliance management.

2025: TRANSACTIONAL NORMALIZATION UNDER TRUMP

A New Phase in the Triangle

Donald Trump's return to the White House in 2025 marked not a rupture but an adaptation in U.S.–Türkiye relations. The shift was less about policy innovation than about tone and process: the reemergence of a personalized, leader-driven diplomacy that privileged negotiation and tactical deal-making over institutional procedure. For Ankara, this created even a more flexible environment. For Washington, it offered a chance to re-engage Türkiye in a redefined Middle East and Black Sea order.

In fact, the new administration's global priorities (competition with China, energy security, and regional burden-sharing) was already reducing the centrality of traditional alliance disputes and importance of democratic credentials. This repositioning benefited Ankara. Türkiye's role as a NATO member capable of dialogue with Russia, and as a regional intermediary in Ukraine, Syria, and Gaza, was now seen in Washington less as divergence and more as utility. At the same time, Washington increasingly frames Türkiye as a forward-deployed enabling partner, a trusted regional actor through which elements of U.S. security posture and operational burden can be indirectly externalised.

Recalibrated U.S.–Türkiye Defense and Security Engagement

Under Trump's second presidency, defense and security relations between Ankara and Washington remained defined by long-standing constraints, yet the political climate became more accommodating. The CAATSA sanctions imposed in 2020 for Türkiye's purchase of the S-400 air-defense system stayed in place. Trump did, however, revive a channel for pragmatic negotiation conditional to solving the S-400s problem. The F-35 exclusion also endured, but the tone softened. Türkiye's parallel acquisition of F-16 Block-70 aircraft and modernization kits,

formally approved in January 2024 after Ankara's ratification of Sweden's NATO accession, moved forward in 2025. Trump publicly framed the implementation of this deal as a "win-win," highlighting alliance burden-sharing and industrial cooperation rather than past grievances.

Beyond fighters, aerospace and dual-use cooperation widened through Boeing contracts. During 2025, Turkish Airlines and private carriers finalized large civilian aircraft purchases that the Trump team promoted as a flagship export success. Although these deals were commercial, they doubled as symbolic instruments of diplomatic reassurance, demonstrating that trade and defense sectors could still anchor the relationship.¹³ Boeing's strong presence in Washington offered Ankara indirect access to congressional interlocutors otherwise skeptical of Türkiye. Operationally, the U.S. and Türkiye maintained close coordination on NATO air policing, counter-ISIS operations, and maritime security in the Eastern Mediterranean—activities that pre-dated Trump but benefited from restored leader-level communication.

In sum, the Trump period did not resolve the structural disputes embedded in CAATSA or the S-400/F-35 deadlock, but it de-politicized defense interaction through selective engagement focusing on trade.

Energy and Financial Interdependence: The 2025 Shift

Energy continued to define one of the most persistent axes of Türkiye's foreign-policy posture. Russia remained Türkiye's dominant gas supplier, and the operation of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, financed and built by Russia's

Rosatom, underscored the depth of Russian involvement in Türkiye's energy infrastructure. At the same time, Ankara pursued diversification—expanding LNG imports, strengthening pipeline links with Azerbaijan, and engaging Western investment in renewables. The United States publicly encouraged this gradual diversification, deeming a sudden severance from Russian energy impractical given Türkiye's scale of needs.

In 2025 the U.S. escalated its sanctions architecture against Russia in a way that raised new systemic implications for Türkiye's triangular position. In October, Washington imposed sanctions on Russia's two largest oil companies, Rosneft and Lukoil, and explicitly threatened secondary sanctions on foreign banks and traders facilitating their operations.¹⁴ This marked a strategic turning point: the risk of punitive measures against third-country actors involved in Russian oil trade became immediate and concrete. As a result, Türkiye faces heightened exposure to potential secondary sanctions, particularly in sectors where financial and energy transactions intersect.¹⁵ In other words, the significance of this evolution lies not just in energy flows but in their intersection with the Western financial system: Türkiye's import infrastructure, banking links, and trade facilitation channels could be targeted by U.S. enforcement measures even if Ankara itself was not directly sanctioned. Although diversification efforts (LNG, renewables, Azerbaijan linkages) were already underway, the 2025 sanctions wave triggered further financial coordination with U.S. and Western institutions.

The key development in 2025 was thus the re-writing of the cost-frame: cooperation with Russia remained, but its financial and reputational

13 Kanat, K.B. and Cetin, O.A., 2025. F-35: Rise and Fall of Defense Industrial Cooperation. In *Allies in Arms: Turkish-American Defense Relations* (pp. 119-162). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

14 Butler, G. (2025) *What's the significance of US sanctions on Russian oil?* BBC News, 23 October. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0qpne1pz3jo> (Accessed: 25 October 2025).

15 Atlantic Council (2025) 'How the new US sanctions on Russian oil will impact energy markets' *EnergySource* blog, 10 Oct. Available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/how-the-new-us-sanctions-on-russian-oil-will-impact-energy-markets/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed: 25 Oct. 2025).

costs within the West increased. In effect, the triangle between Ankara, Moscow and Washington shifted: Türkiye's energy ties with Russia retained their structural depth, but their policy buffer shrank as U.S. secondary-sanctions logic entered the equation.

*Regional Dynamics under Trump:
Syria, Gaza, and Strategic Signaling*

The regional dimension of Türkiye's foreign policy in 2025 was also defined by the interplay between its evolving coordination with Washington and the gradual disengagement of Moscow from the Middle East. Under Trump's second presidency, the United States adopted a lighter but more transactional regional posture—one that depended on reliable partners to manage crises without direct U.S. entanglement. This shift placed Ankara in a pivotal position: a NATO ally with operational presence on the ground and diplomatic channels open to Moscow.

In Syria, the post-Assad landscape became the primary testing ground for this triangular dynamic. With the Assad regime collapsed amid Russia's strategic overstretch and Iran's overextension, Türkiye emerged as the de facto security manager across much of northern and central Syria. Trump publicly credited Erdoğan as the "winner of Syria," a gesture that carried domestic political weight for both leaders.¹⁶ Yet behind this rhetoric lay a more pragmatic calculation: Washington viewed Turkish control as the most feasible mechanism to stabilize Syria, while Ankara regarded the arrangement as recognition of its regional primacy. Russia, unable to sustain its previous level of intervention, tolerated Türkiye's ascendancy but sought to preserve limited influence through energy and reconstruction diplomacy.¹⁷

In Gaza, the 2025 events coincided with the Trump administration's attempt to craft a new "stability deal" across the region. Türkiye's mediation—conducted in parallel with Qatar and Egypt—aligned with U.S. objectives of de-escalation. The U.S. encouraged Turkish humanitarian coordination and the management of reconstruction logistics. Moscow, by contrast, lacked the capacity to act beyond symbolic statements, underscoring the triangle's asymmetry: Washington and Ankara shared operational responsibility, while Russia receded to the diplomatic margins in the Middle East.

In Ukraine, Türkiye's intermediary role persisted but evolved under Trump's approach to the war. The White House prioritized cost-control and indirect engagement, relying on regional actors to sustain diplomatic corridors. Ankara's mediation in the 2025 renewal of the Black Sea Grain Initiative exemplified this model. While the U.S. publicly supported the deal, its enforcement depended on Türkiye's ability to maintain dialogue with both Kyiv and a weakened Moscow. For Russia, Türkiye remained the only viable bridge to Western financial and logistical systems amid expanding sanctions. For the U.S., this made Ankara an indispensable but closely monitored partner.

Across these theatres, Trump's presidency reshaped the geometry of the triangle. Washington no longer perceived Türkiye's dialogue with Moscow as a liability; rather, it was treated as an asset in outsourcing crisis management. Ankara capitalized on this permissive environment to project leadership in Syria and Gaza while sustaining its balancing act in Ukraine.

The Trump-Erdoğan partnership thus produced a new equilibrium: personalized diplomacy

16 Daily Sabah (2025) 'Erdoğan solved Syria crisis, in major victory for Türkiye, Trump', *Daily Sabah*, 25 Sep. Available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-solved-syria-crisis-in-major-victory-for-turkiye-trump> (Accessed: 25 Oct. 2025).

17 Reuters (2025) "Putin Offers Cooperation, Syrian Leader Backs Efforts to Stabilise Country", *Reuters*, 20 Mar. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-offers-cooperation-syrian-leader-backs-efforts-stabilise-country-2025-03-20/> (Accessed: 25 Oct. 2025).

underpinned by overlapping pragmatisms. Erdoğan gained renewed legitimacy as a regional broker; Trump showcased burden-sharing without boots on the ground. Yet, this arrangement also exposed its own contradictions: Türkiye's enhanced operational role deepened its dependence on U.S. security guarantees and Western financing, while Moscow's erosion of power reduced the very leverage that had once allowed Ankara to play both sides

CONCLUSION: THE NORMALIZATION OF ASYMMETRY

A decade after the 2016 rupture, the Türkiye–Russia–United States triangle has settled into a pattern of normalized asymmetry. What began as a balancing attempt has evolved into a structured condition of constrained interdependence. No single actor designed this equilibrium; it emerged through the accumulation of limits, dependencies, and pragmatic adjustments.

The years after 2022 were decisive. The Ukraine war re-anchored Türkiye within NATO and exposed the depth of its financial and technological dependence on the West, even as energy and regional security ties bound it to Russia. The return of a transactional U.S. administration in 2025 did not transform this geometry; it merely made it explicit. Diplomacy became less ideological and more instrumental, but the underlying structures—energy from the East, security from the West—remained stable. Trump's rhetoric of partnership and Erdoğan's appeals to autonomy altered tone, not substance.

Türkiye's engagement with Russia persists because the material foundations of cooperation—pipelines, reactors, tourism, trade—cannot be unwound without economic shock. Its dependence on Western markets, capital, and defense integration is even deeper. These cross-cutting ties constrain choice, but they also ensure that geopolitical rivalry remains bounded. The balance is maintained not by political mastery but by the inertia of interdependence: each

actor calibrates its moves in a path dependent way. As of now, for the United States, Türkiye's limited partnership with Russia is a manageable variable; for Russia, engagement with Türkiye is one of the few remaining avenues to the Western system; for Türkiye, the triangle itself is the framework within which survival and status must be negotiated.

The structural lesson of the decade is more paradoxical than comforting: autonomy pursued through diversification has yielded a denser, not looser, web of dependency. What endures today is not balance but inertia — a configuration sustained less by design than by the high cost of change. As long as energy, finance, and security remain cross-wired among Ankara, Moscow, and Washington, the triangle will persist, but as a system of containment rather than empowerment. Stability, in this sense, conceals stagnation: every layer of interdependence that prevents rupture also limits renewal. The challenge for Ankara is not only to govern this geometry more deliberately, but to question whether managing dependency can ever substitute for shaping order. Without institutional imagination and credible reform at home, the triangle risks becoming not a strategy but a trap — a durable equilibrium that normalizes constraint as a form of sovereignty.

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