

## Turkey's Role in Russia-Ukraine Tensions

By Karen Kaya  
OE Watch Commentary

In the aftermath of the recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, many discussed how Turkish drones and Turkey's military support to Azerbaijan brought about a decisive victory for Azerbaijan. With Russia amassing troops and weapons in the Donbas region, will Turkey do the same for Ukraine? According to Turkish expert Gönül Tol, the answer is no. In her commentary on *Medyascope*tv, an independent Turkish news analysis channel on YouTube, she argues that Ukraine has high expectations about this, but it is unrealistic because eastern Ukraine is "a completely different story [for Russia]" than the southern Caucasus. Specifically, she claims that Russia views eastern Ukraine as an extension of itself, making this a much more existential issue for Russia compared to the southern Caucasus. She claims that Turkey is taking a big risk and that if it conducts its military cooperation with Ukraine in a threatening way for Russia, it can find itself in a real crisis with Russia.

However, others believe that Turkey is willing to take this risk. In the second accompanying passage, Turkish expert Amberin Zaman discusses the outcome of Ukrainian President Zelensky's visit with Turkish President Erdoğan on 10 April. In her piece in *al-Monitor*, an independent news website with analysts from the Middle East, she notes that the two presidents signed a 20-point declaration calling for "an end to the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, a former Ottoman dominion that is home to the Muslim Tatars, by the Russian Federation" and the "de-occupation" of the Donbas in Ukraine's east. She notes that Turkey also reaffirmed its support for Ukraine's membership in NATO. On this issue, she writes that Turkey's position is in lockstep with the United States and its NATO allies against Russia.



Map of Donbas.

Source: Rgloucester via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_the\\_Donbass.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Donbass.png), Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

**“Ukraine’s expectations [from Turkey] are too high. Ukraine looks at what happened in the Caucasus, in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Azeris won a huge military victory thanks to Turkish drones. So Ukraine wants to use the same Turkish drones and military cooperation to gain control of its separatist regions, and expects to win the same success against Russia, that Turkey helped Azerbaijan win. But this is not a realistic scenario.”**

**Source:** “Transatlantik: Halkbank Davası, Ukrayna gerginliği ve Türkiye & Libya hükümetinin Ankara ziyareti (Transatlantic: The Halkbank Trial, tension in Ukraine and Turkey; Libya government’s Ankara visit),” *Medyascope.tv* (an independent Turkish news analysis channel on YouTube), 12 April 2021. <https://medyascope.tv/2021/04/12/transatlantik-halkbank-davasi-ukrayna-gerginligi-ve-turkiye-libya-hukümetinin-ankara-ziyareti/>

*Rusen Çakir: How does Turkey factor in to this [Russia-Ukraine] equation?... Turkey hosted the Ukrainian President recently... Isn’t this a risky thing for Ankara?*

*...Ukraine’s expectations are too high. Ukraine looks at what happened in the Caucasus, in Nagorno-Karabakh-- Azeris won a huge military victory thanks to Turkish drones. So Ukraine wants to use the same Turkish drones and military cooperation to gain control of its separatist regions, and expects to win the same success against Russia, that Turkey helped Azerbaijan win. But this is not a realistic scenario. Why? in the southern Caucasus, Russia allowed Turkey some area of maneuver. But eastern Ukraine is a totally different story. Russia views eastern Ukraine as an extension of itself. So it’s a much more existential issue for Russia... Also, in Karabakh, Russia had some logistical problems since it doesn’t have a border with Armenia. But in Donbas, [Ukraine and Russia] share a border, Russia is amassing weapons and troops there.*

*So it’s a totally different context. I think in this crisis, it is very risky for Turkey to raise its voice too much, or conduct its military cooperation with Ukraine in a threatening way for Russia. It can lead to a real crisis with Russia.*

## Continued: Turkey's Role in Russia-Ukraine Tensions

**Source:** “Amberin Zaman, “Turkey, US in rare position of unity over Ukraine,” *al-Monitor* (an independent news site with analysts from the Middle East), 12 April 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/turkey-us-rare-position-unity-over-ukraine>

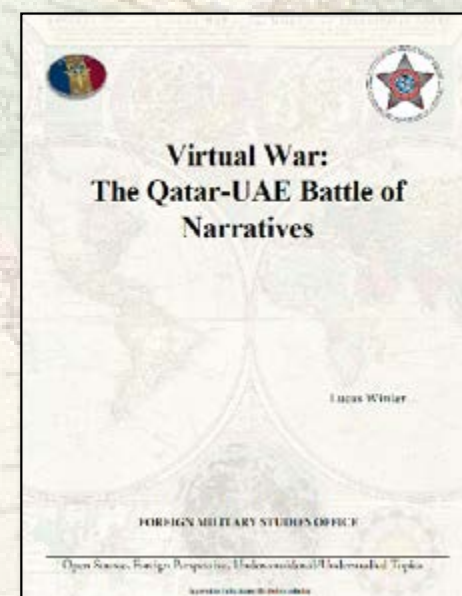
*Turkey's relationship with the United States is on the rocks, and the most immediate cause is Ankara's refusal to get rid of its newly acquired, Russian-manufactured S-400 missiles that Washington says threaten NATO's security. Yet when it comes to Ukraine, Ankara and Washington are in perfect lockstep vis-a-vis Moscow as witnessed by the outcome of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's April 10 meeting in Istanbul with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.*

*A 20-point declaration signed by the two presidents left no doubt as to Turkey's position. Notably, it called for an end to the “illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, a former Ottoman dominion that is home to the Muslim Tatars, by the Russian Federation” and the “de-occupation” of the Donbas in Ukraine's east, where Russian-backed Ukrainian separatists prevail. Turkey also reaffirmed its support for Ukraine's membership in NATO and “its intention to obtain a Membership Action Plan in the near future.”*

## VIRTUAL WAR: THE QATAR-UAE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

Lucas Winter  
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For much of the past decade, Qatar and the UAE have been engaged in a battle of narratives. Their ongoing dispute dates to 2011 and is rooted in foreign policy and ideological disagreements. Following a hack of the Qatari News Agency in 2017, the nature of Qatari-Emirati competition shifted from being primarily the purview of government officials, spokespeople, journalists, analysts and authors, to one where coders, influencers, trolls and cybersecurity experts played a vital role. Since then, both countries have worked to increase their capabilities in the cyber and informational domains. Their relationship in these domains has evolved into one of strategic competition. This paper looks at how these dynamics may affect the regional operational environment, with a particular focus on the cyber and informational domains.



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