

# The careful relationship between Turkey and Russia

Anna Johnson

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Signing Ceremony of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in Istanbul, 2022.

Anna Johnson - Russia's relationship with the West has never been stable. Negotiations typically take place through middlemen, and tensions have been addressed through proxy conflicts. In the months since Russia invaded Ukraine, even these go-through relationships have been in jeopardy. Historically, Turkey has acted as a middleman for relations with Russia. In 2022, Turkey brokered the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Though that agreement recently fell apart after Russia refused to renew it citing a [failure by the United Nations](#) to address systemic problems in agricultural exports.

A member of NATO, Turkey is caught between a strategic and historic relationship with Russia and upholding its commitments to the alliance. Turkey's fragile position reflects its situation within a complex web of interacting [geopolitical codes](#) based on shifting centers of power. A country's geopolitical code is its determination of how it interacts with the rest of the world - who its allies and enemies are and how it treats those parties. Geopolitical codes across the world are changing, including Turkey's relationship with Russia. In a move that shocked many in the West, Turkey dropped its long-held opposition to [Sweden's bid to join NATO](#). Turkey has made the geopolitical calculation that it is in its best interests to align itself more closely with the West in the months since Russia invaded Ukraine and NATO's regained relevance. In addition to supporting Sweden's NATO bid, Turkey broke the terms of a prisoner swap with Russia by returning five commanders to Ukraine. While these moves strengthen Turkey's relationship with NATO countries, they also jeopardize a valuable relationship

the West has relied on to negotiate deals like the Black Sea Grain Initiative which allowed the safe export of grain through the Black Sea to ease strain on the global food market. After Russia pulled out of the deal, global food prices [jumped 1.3%](#), threatening food access for vulnerable populations in [low- and middle-income states](#) like Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.

The deteriorating relationship between Russia and Turkey has consequences on a global scale. Without a middleman to negotiate with Moscow, Russia and the West have limited options for moving forward. Turkey's move puts them in a more stable position. However, when weighed against the power they held by acting as a broker for the West, the shift represents a significant loss of global power. In moving forward with negotiations, the UN, the United States, and other NATO member countries will have to rely on other relationships and tactics to navigate their convoluted relationship with Russia. Is this the moment for Saudi Arabia to increase its global geopolitical relevance?

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