

Retired Brigadier General Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel

“Türkiye, Russia and China should cooperate against US encirclement”



Fahri Erenel graduated from the Military Academy in 1980 in the department of economics. He completed his BA in Sociology and International Relations; his MA in National and International Security; Educational Administration and Supervision; Occupational Health and Safety; and his PhD in Human Resources Management. Between 1980 and 2010, he served at various levels in the Turkish Armed Forces. He is a B-class occupational safety specialist. He became an Associate Professor in Management and Strategy in 2017. He held various positions on the administrative and academic staff at Altınbaş and Kent Universities. He is still working as a lecturer at Istinnye University, Department of Political Science and Public Administration. He is also the author of six books.

"America is doing the same, both in the South China Sea and in the Eastern Mediterranean. We can see that America's containment strategy also aims to block China's Belt and Road project. The fact that the Zangezur corridor will be opened means that Türkiye can use the middle corridor more easily through Central Asia while China can use it more easily through Türkiye, which the USA wants to avoid. As a soldier, I have been expressing for years that Türkiye should leave the NATO's military wing, but I think it should stay on the political wing as much as possible. There should be cooperation with Russia. The US's goal is to create a fault line between Russia and Türkiye and to cut off Türkiye's connection with Russia over the Black Sea. In a planned process where the Turkish Army stands strong, I think that Türkiye should take initiatives for the recognition of Cyprus independence with the support of China and Russia. There are critical theories and so on in international relations, but today I believe that all these problems can be solved in more realistic ways, namely by force. For this, close regional cooperation is needed. This is exactly what Türkiye should do. In this context, I consider the development of relations with Shanghai Cooperation Organization a very positive move."

Istinye University Lecturer Retired Brigadier General Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel answered BRIQ Managing Editor Onurcan Balci's questions.

What's your evaluation of the US's recent focus on boosting its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: The US has always been increasing activities in Eastern Mediterranean through terrorist organizations and proxy governments. I have also started to use the concept of the Eastern Mediterranean as the Extended Eastern Mediterranean. You know, there is a concept that America uses for its projects in the Black Sea, the Extended Black Sea. Likewise, in this regard, the Eastern Mediterranean should not be evaluated only as the east of the Mediterranean. The East-

ern Mediterranean issue also covers the regions included in the USA's strategic activities. It is necessary to consider the region from Iraq and Syria to Crete, the Greek islands and a part of the Aegean Sea, and even Egypt and the Red Sea. America's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean can also be seen as a continuation of the containment policy put forward by George F. Kennan.

In this context, America does the same thing in the South China Sea against China as it does in the Eastern Mediterranean. We know that the United States is engaged in similar activities against any actor that may pose a threat to its strategies.



Retired Brigadier General Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel (right), BRIQ Managing Editor Onurcan Balcı (left). (BRIQ 🇹🇷, 2022)

The basic logic here is not only to surround Türkiye but also to take advantage of Russia's concentration in Ukraine, to break Russia's increasing influence in Syria, Egypt, Libya, and especially in the Sahel region, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, in the Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, when we consider that Syria is also included in the Belt and Road project with a cooperation agreement signed by the Chinese Foreign Minister with Assad during his visit to Syria, and China's increasing investments in Damascus and Iraq, especially in the oil industry, we can see that this is also a strategy being pursued to thwart China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Preventing the Eurasianization of Europe

China's sea routes pass through the ports of Africa, and the USA is trying to prevent the Eurasianization of European countries by cutting these routes. You know, preventing the Eurasianization of European countries is a concept put forward by Alexandr Dugin in Russia. The USA has the idea of gaining an

America-based hegemonic power in the military industry and other fields by stopping the westward march of Russia and China and cutting the relations of the European Union countries with these countries, as it was during the cold war period.

With the detection of hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and the fact that new ones are being added to them every day, the importance of hydrocarbon resources in this region is increasing, especially in this period where energy exchanges between European countries and Russia are minimized. Therefore, if you notice, the USA announced that it withdrew its financial support from the line that would carry the gas to Europe when its relations with Türkiye slightly improved. However, when we look at the increasing activities of the USA, we see stimulating activities such as the lifting of the arms embargo on the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA), the signing of a cooperation agreement with the Greek Cypriot Administration last year, the increase in the activities in the port of Suda in Crete and the expansion of the port, the presence of two or three base areas here toget-

her with the Alexandroupoli base. There are defense cooperation agreements signed with Greece. This extends north, including Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland, and from there, the Baltic countries are also included in these activities.

The USA is currently using Poland as a proxy actor against Europe. Apart from that, there were concerns in America that Germany was secretly buying natural gas from Russia. Leaks in Nord Stream lines are very worthy of attention in this context.

Therefore, we see the steps of a line that excludes Türkiye. It may not seem very connected to the Eastern Mediterranean at the moment, but Poland is the key player in the US containment strategy. The increase in the number of American soldiers in Poland and the attitude of the Polish government towards Russia, as you know, aims to eliminate Poland's dependence on Russia by signing a natural gas agreement with Norway.

The USA is currently using Poland as a proxy actor against Europe. About 2-3 weeks ago, just as the countries were trying to come together and form a front against Russia, Poland demanded their reparations from the Second World War to be paid. Apart from that, there were concerns in America that Germany was secretly buying natural gas from Russia. Leaks in Nord Stream lines are very worthy of attention in this context. It is not a coincidence that Poland is at the forefront of Europe. Poland has always aimed to enlarge its territory with the concept of three seas: the Black Sea, the Adriatic and the Baltic Triangle, for a great Poland. Poland will never give up on this. When we talk about Poland, we're talking about a kingdom that includes parts of

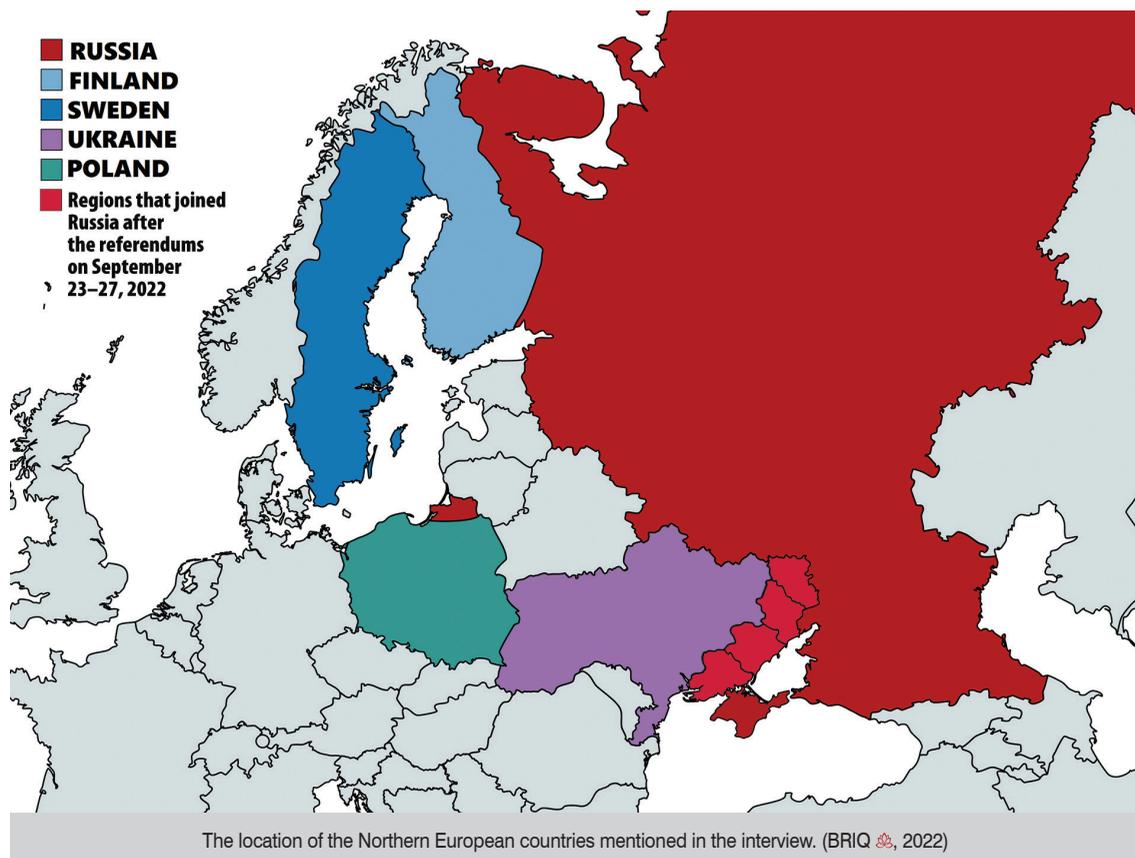
Ukraine and Lithuania. This is an important historical fact. In other words, Poland tends to be one of the most critical countries in Europe.

In fact, the Polish Foreign Ministers and the Romanian Foreign Ministers held two separate meetings with the participation of our Foreign Minister in Türkiye two months ago under the coordination of the United Kingdom. That was actually an agreement made for these lines; it was a meeting to persuade Türkiye as well. But Türkiye is not convinced about Alexandroupoli. Alexandroupoli is the most critical point of the line going north and south with Crete now that Cyprus has been added. As I mentioned, this region is important to prevent China's westward march. Why? Because the northern corridor is now closed through Ukraine. On China's main route, a middle corridor comes from the Caucasus and passes through Türkiye. We can say that the USA has the idea of closing this line by provoking the Armenia-Azerbaijan war again and supporting Armenia.

The Aim of the USA to Cut off the Mediterranean Connection and Imprison Russia in Its Own Region

Russia attaches great importance to the Eastern Mediterranean in the recently accepted naval doctrine. In the naval doctrine published by Russia in 2015, while the primary external threat was NATO's advance towards Russian lines, the main danger is recorded as "the USA and its allies" in the new document. How do you evaluate this?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: The new naval doctrine emphasizes the importance of Russia's dealing with all international problems outside the region and having a naval force that will protect Russian interests.



I also see this doctrine as one of the most important proofs that Alfred Mahan's concept of "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" is still valid. The increase in investments in the naval forces of China and Japan in the South China Sea is remarkable. In fact, regarding the question you asked, I think that one of the most important reasons for the US intervention in the Eastern Mediterranean is the naval doctrine announced by Putin. This doctrine enlarged the ports of Latakia in the Mediterranean and the ports of Tartus.

Considering the Ukraine war, we can also think that the USA plans to cut Russia's Mediterranean connection and push Russia back into its territory. I see the Arctic where Putin

mainly started to practice the naval doctrine. I do not think that Russia gained enough power during the Ukraine-Russia war, especially in the navy sharing of the Black Sea navy with Ukraine, with the ships coming from the Baltic and the Caspian navy. Especially if we consider that Sweden and Finland recently joined NATO, the Baltic and Arctic regions gain more importance.

In terms of future maritime trade routes, the USA thinks that the southern line has stopped. There is uncertainty in the Mediterranean, while in the Caucasus, the northern line is also blocked. The new route in the north, where the ice will melt, is gaining importance. Taking this fact into account, Putin

stated that Russia is increasingly focused on the Baltic navy and has accelerated this process by building new ships. In addition, we can see the training of soldiers resistant to -50 C in the Arctic region under the control of Russia and the increase in the number of bases there as steps towards ensuring the security of this region and the maritime trade routes that will pass through it. China and Russia also cooperate in the Arctic.

The fact that the Swedish and Finnish navies are organized in accordance with the situation and their ability to operate in cold climates is one of the main reasons for convincing these countries to join NATO.

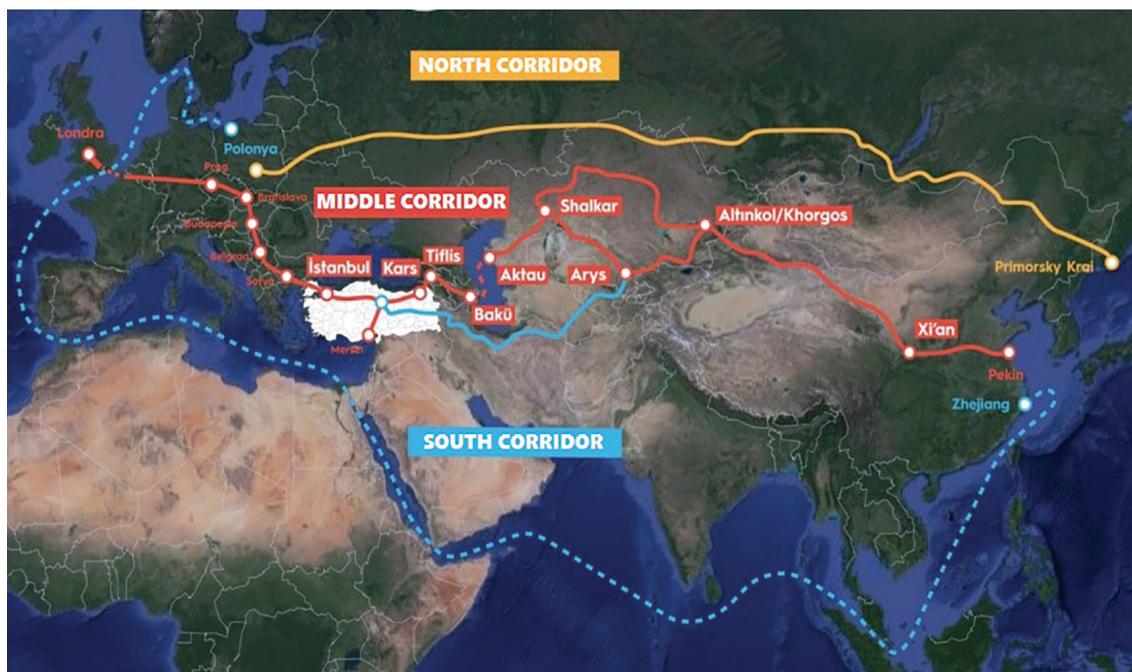
When we look at all this, we see that Russia has given its weight to the Arctic and wants to preserve its current gains in the Eastern Mediterranean. The USA must have realized this situation because the 11th American Division started training in Alaska about two months ago to fight in the cold climate. America has no power to fight Russia in the Arctic region. NATO has no such capacity. The fact that the Swedish and Finnish navies are organized in accordance with the situation and their ability to operate in cold climates is one of the main reasons for convincing these countries to join NATO. In other words, it can be said that the expectation of the USA here is to balance Russia's superiority with the help of Sweden and Finland if a NATO-Russia war takes place in the Arctic.

Türkiye-China Cooperation in the Middle Corridor

How do you evaluate China's relationship with the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and the region within the Belt and Road Initiative framework?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: Relations between China and Syria are not new. In Syria, we can think of Xi Jinping's statements about Syria, the visit of the Foreign Minister later, and the increasing Chinese investments in the Damascus region. Iran also has serious investments there. We know that there is an agreement between Iran and China. Some situations include opening an energy corridor to China in the south of Iran. China is operating hydrocarbon resources there, transferring these resources directly to China's industrial zones via Pakistan at discounted prices, and Chinese security forces protect the region. Considering the recent conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, I think that China should give the Syrian issue more importance.

We can currently use the Arctic as a transit route for 18–20 days because the ice has not yet melted to the required extent. The northern corridor was closed by the Ukraine-Russia war. In fact, it killed two birds with one stone. Türkiye's cooperation is required for the middle corridor to be used more actively. Azerbaijan has completed building 57% of the corridor's land roads within its territory. Think about it; it is possible to reach Europe directly from China using this line. Another line passes through the South but is not preferred by China due to the chaotic structure in Iraq and Syria. It was difficult to use the line safely and sustainably due to the continuing turmoil in Iraq, the conflict among the Sunnis, the presence



Trade routes of the Belt and Road Initiative. (T.R. Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2021)

of PKK and ISIS, the presence of the United States in the region, and the inability to form a government.

Considering these, the southern line passing through Syria is more reliable. We can say that China-Syria relations have developed in this context. At the same time, China-Israel relations are also important. According to the latest data, between 5,000 and 7,000 Chinese engineers cooperate with Israel in several fields, including the defense industry. Regarding Middle East policy, we can consider the visit of Biden to Saudi Arabia right after Xi Jinping and the cooperation agreements between the United Arab Emirates and China over the last two years. In this regard, allegations were made that the United Arab Emirates gave a secret base to China. Likewise, before

the Ukraine war, Putin visited these regions and explained the doctrine about the gulfs. I think China and Russia are one step ahead in the Middle East. Both, especially Russia, have serious investments in northern Iraq. China also has very serious investments, especially in the Persian Gulf region, which continue to increase. Most of these investments are related to oil production.

On the other hand, China will take the oil to the east because the oil transported through Latakia would be difficult for China. But the oil transported from Iran, from the Persian Gulf, would be able to meet China's needs more securely. That's why there is a railway line in the agreement. You know, Iran wanted it to pass through Iran, from the south of the Caspian Sea, then to connect to Türkiye from there or to the Mediterranean

via Iraq and Syria. I think China is doing as Iran hoped, but the middle lane is still open. As long as the US is east of the Euphrates, I'm not sure if China can activate these rail lines. Frankly, I don't think China will invest more before the region is stabilized to a certain degree. Of course, the US has other plans.

The fact that the Zangezur corridor will be opened means that Türkiye can use the middle corridor more easily through Central Asia while China can use it more easily through Türkiye, which the USA wants to avoid.

After taking the Golan Heights, America established a huge base at the junction of Jordan, Syria, and Israel called Al-Tanf and has been massing forces for the past months. What is the significance of this base? The US planned to pass the oil extracted from northern Iraq and Qamishli through northern Iraq and Syria when the region was under PKK control. But since they saw this was impossible, they tried to create a new line from the south. That's why they keep El Tanf strong. They are trying to establish a line connecting the Golan Heights from El Tanf to the Mediterranean via the Druze. After establishing this line, I think the USA will gradually cut off its relations with elements such as the PKK and concentrate these forces on the route through which the pipeline and highway lines will pass. Of course, it should be stated that the naval forces of Russia and China in this region are insufficient to protect it from the sea.

Türkiye Should Leave NATO's Military Wing

What kind of strategy do you think Türkiye should follow, considering the US's containment strategy, Russia's measures, and China's policies?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: The United States was progressive on containment. In general terms, Türkiye's cooperation with Azerbaijan and its influence in the Caucasus were reconstructed with the Second Karabakh war. In addition, the railway line from China bypassing Armenia and entering Türkiye via Baku, Tbilisi, and Kars is an extremely important detail. Of course, the fact that the Zangezur corridor will be opened means that Türkiye can use the middle corridor more easily through Central Asia while China can use it more easily through Türkiye, which the USA wants to avoid. That's why the US re-entered this region, recognizing its importance. But in this region, I think Azerbaijan, Türkiye, China, and, because of its relations with China, Iran have a clear advantage over the USA.

On the other hand, measures of Armenia to completely eradicate its relationship with Russia, which supplies 80% of its nuclear energy from a poorly functioning power plant with 600 Russian employees, brings the necessary uranium from Russia by planes and cannot pay its debts to the Russians even if it gives all its underground resources, will also fail. Another aspect of the events is the use of Greece as a proxy. This is not new. I think it was 2018 when the American Naval Academy discussed a war scenario in this region. In military exercises, we call it the "red-blue states." The USA has used the names Türkiye and Greece openly for the first time here, and in fact, we can see that the problems we are experiencing in the Aegean right now when this scenario is



read in detail, are within those assumptions. In other words, we can say that the current situation for the USA is deliberate rather than the current geopolitical or global circumstances that have arisen spontaneously.

Considering that this is a book written with the foreword of the Naval War College and the Commander of the Naval Forces, we can say that the strategic plan of the USA is reflected here. In the scenario, the tension between Türkiye and Greece gradually rises. Eventually, Türkiye sinks one of the Greek ships, and the USA intervenes in Türkiye based on its Defence Cooperation Agreement with Greece. It intervenes not only in the Aegean but also in Cyprus and attacks Türkiye's military units with long-range missiles

with ships off Cyprus. While doing all this, the economic situation in Türkiye is expected to make Türkiye unmanageable with turmoil by scratching the polarizations in civil society and causing a civil war in Türkiye by using all the actors in its hands, especially the PKK, in the south. It supports an idea that we call the Megali Idea in Greece, ensuring that Greece has a certain line. All of these have been revealed in the scenario we are discussing.

Greece has been arming the islands for 40 years. So far, I think we haven't reacted as we could because of our relationship with NATO and the idea that relations in the process of joining the European Union should not be strained or stopped. As you know, Türkiye needs a vote from

Greece in order to enter the European Union. Greece also takes advantage of this. In this sense, the USA made a mistake by including Türkiye and Greece in NATO at the same time. However, this mistake was not made regarding the European Union, and even the Greek Cypriot part was admitted to the EU, bringing the problems between Southern Cyprus, Greece, and Türkiye to an unsolvable point. As it provides a wall for immigrants, as Frontex suggests, Greece is more reliable for the EU than Türkiye.

There should be cooperation with Russia. The US's goal is to create a fault line between Russia and Türkiye and to cut off Türkiye's connection with Russia over the Black Sea.

Moreover, it is bound by the financial resources from Germany and the EU when it is in trouble. The method of sending immigrants to the borders, which Türkiye did two or three years ago, seriously worried the European countries. I think this is one of the biggest reasons why relationships get strained. That's why, in the tension between Türkiye and Greece, you know that the EU univocally expressed its support for Greece. Therefore, Greece may lose these islands within a few days if a real war occurs in the islands, including Chios, Lesbos, and Samos. Since Greece knew this, it made a provocative move by expressing that the armored vehicles given by the USA were deployed to some islands recently. In addition, the world's 4th largest air base, established in Bulgaria, is also noteworthy.

At this point, Türkiye should take advantage of Russia's blacklisting of Greece and the Greek

Cypriot Administration and act together with Russia to formulate regional policies. Some say, "Can we act against NATO?" It is not in NATO's history how any force against NATO or behavior contrary to NATO agreements was dealt with. If necessary, Türkiye can leave its military wing and maintain its presence in its political wing. Because if it leaves its political wing, the first country to join NATO will be the Greek Cypriot Administration, and then Israel. Thus, America will complete its siege by including NATO. As a soldier, I have been expressing for years that Türkiye should leave the military wing, but I think it should stay on the political wing as much as possible.

Partnership with Russia and China in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean

There should be cooperation with Russia. The US's goal is to create a fault line between Russia and Türkiye and to cut off Türkiye's connection with Russia over the Black Sea. The same is done in the Caucasus. The US is trying to undermine Türkiye-Russia relations through Armenia. Türkiye, Russia and China are also affected by the same process. I think Türkiye should put all its weight on Cyprus here. The Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus are the soft underbelly of Greece. Since America knew this, it thought and lifted the embargo on the Greek Cypriot Administration. Because if we consider our military power there, our ability to intervene quickly and at a distance of 70 kilometers from Türkiye and the practice of an event that took place in 1974, Türkiye is more advantageous. The Aegean Sea is an area where Greece gathers power under the influence of the USA. Unless the US intervenes, Greece cannot be a threat whatsoever.

The Turkish Armed Forces may also suffer some damage against Greece, but Greece has no chance of success in the Aegean.

Considering the current situation, taking action against Türkiye is difficult, but Cyprus is not like that. In Cyprus, there is a ceasefire, and as in Armenia, the ceasefire could break at any time. Therefore, in a planned process where the Turkish Army stands strong, I think that Türkiye should take initiatives for the recognition of Cyprus independence with the support of China and Russia, and if this is not possible, the TRNC should take a decision to join Türkiye with a referendum as Russia did in Donetsk and Luhansk. The USA never intends to give Cyprus to Türkiye. It neither consents to a federation nor a two-state structure. Due to the increasing importance of Cyprus, the USA wants Cyprus to be under the control of the Greek Cypriot Administration and, therefore, Greece. Because the way of the siege and the US domination of the Eastern Mediterranean passes through Cyprus, which is like an unsinkable aircraft carrier. Let's not forget that the British have military bases in Agratur and Dhekelia, which the USA can use. And, of course, Türkiye should also cooperate with Syria and China. Here, measures must be taken to seize the presence of America in the region. This siege needs to be broken, and the US presence in Iraq should be stopped by including Iraq and Iran in cooperation.

The size of the carriers no longer matters. The US has 11 large carriers, but carriers have become vulnerable with current missile systems. For example, a Russian missile called Sarmat can reach 6 thousand kilometers in a very short time. It can go at a speed of about Mach 20 (Mach 1=1235~km/h), and you can

see where it fell after being shot. They even hit Russia's cruiser with shore-fired missiles. The 6th and 7th fleets of the USA do not pose a great danger in this context. We can say that today's systems create a weakness for the navy. For this reason, the use of unmanned sea vehicles in the navy is increasing. Türkiye is also advantageous in this respect.

Türkiye should cut its relations with the EU and NATO in this context. They already have many practices, such as keeping Turkish trucks waiting and not giving visas. NATO will somehow remove Türkiye from NATO. Today they say, "We signed the Washington agreement; no one can remove us from NATO if we don't want to". No one implements international agreements. Why did the USA not implement the Minsk agreement against Russia? Why did they not intervene and allow the war to happen despite the three UN Security Council resolutions between Armenia and Azerbaijan? For the Washington agreement, they will say, "Yesterday is yesterday, today is today." Whom will you complain to? The era of international agreements in the world is over. Nobody follows the rules. If they had been followed, Israel would have come under the control of the UN today. There are about 20–25 Security Council and United Nations resolutions on Palestine and the occupation of the Arabs. There are critical theories and so on in international relations, but today I believe that all these problems can be solved in more realistic ways, namely by force. For this, close regional cooperation is needed. This is exactly what Türkiye should do. In this context, I consider the development of relations with Shanghai Cooperation Organization a very positive move. 🌸