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August 20, 2026

Jim Zanotti
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

Clayton Thomas
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

SUMMARY

U.S. relations with Turkey (Türkiye), a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally, have alternated between close cooperation and notable division. Despite Turkey's NATO membership and close trade and investment relations with the European Union (EU), Turkey appears to be one of a host of "middle powers" inclined to diversify their foreign relationships within a more multipolar global system. Turkey's increasingly assertive foreign policy is buttressed by its growing defense industry, which supplies combat-proven drones and other equipment to many other countries. Turkey's regional influence has grown considerably during the 23-year-rule of President (and previously Prime Minister) Recep Tayyip Erdogan, amid a number of controversial domestic policy developments.

During the past decade, the United States and Turkey have differed sharply on some major issues, including the U.S. military's former partnership with Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) against the Islamic State organization, Turkey's 2019 procurement of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system, and U.S. actions in response to the acquisition (suspending a sale of F-35 fighter aircraft to Turkey and imposing sanctions in 2020 under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA). These U.S.-Turkey rifts appear to have somewhat diminished given U.S. and Turkish efforts to (1) strengthen NATO and Ukraine since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine; and (2) work with a new, generally pro-Turkish, Sunni Arab-led interim government in Syria after the 2024 fall of Bashar Al Asad. In January 2026, the U.S. partnership with the SDF effectively ended as Syrian government forces took control of northern Syrian areas previously governed by the SDF.

As of August 2026, Turkey seeks F-35s from the United States, along with the removal of CAATSA sanctions. During the current Trump Administration, some U.S. officials have cultivated close working relationships with Turkish counterparts on diplomacy regarding Iran, Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza. Analysts debate whether potential strategic and economic advantages from U.S. partnership with Turkey should incline the Trump Administration and Congress toward greater engagement, or whether Turkey's hedging behavior, energy and economic ties with Russia, differences with some other U.S. partners, or domestic controversies should give U.S. policymakers and lawmakers pause on closer cooperation.

Members of Congress may consider legislative and oversight options regarding Turkey, including on possible arms sales and how to address existing sanctions and legislative conditions. For example, U.S. legislation currently prohibits the transfer of F-35s to Turkey unless Turkey no longer possesses the Russian-origin S-400 system (or other associated items). President Donald Trump has expressed openness to an F-35 sale to Turkey, but the State Department reportedly informed some Members of Congress in July 2026 that Turkey has "not yet met" the conditions for an F-35 transfer. A Turkish sale of the S-400 system to a third country could be subject to Russian approval or generate additional U.S. security concerns. A U.S. transfer of F-35s to Turkey could decrease any relative military advantages that other countries possessing or seeking to acquire F-35s (including Israel and Greece) might have.

The 2026 U.S./Israel-Iran conflict and its impact on the Middle East balance of power could have consequences for U.S.-Turkey cooperation. Turkey strengthened defense ties with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in August 2026 via the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement. Increased Turkey-Israel tensions and greater Israeli closeness with Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, and the United Arab Emirates could reinforce Turkish efforts to partner more closely with other countries in the region (including Egypt and Qatar). Turkey and Israel continue vying for influence in post-civil war Syria—further straining relations that were already worsened by Turkey's continuing support for the Palestinian Sunni Islamist group Hamas after its October 2023 attacks and hostage-taking in Israel, and actions by Israel's military and government in Gaza.

After the steady consolidation of power by President Erdogan and his Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP), Erdogan's government has arguably taken its strongest actions to date against Turkey's political opposition over the past two years. Those moves include the 2025 imprisonment of Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, perhaps Erdogan's most popular potential rival, and the court-ordered ouster in 2026 of Ozgur Ozel as the leader of the Republican People's Party. Ozel established the Yeni (New) Party in July 2026; the party's prospects of mounting credible electoral opposition to the AKP are unclear. Turkey also faces some economic challenges, including official annual inflation of over 30%.

In parallel with these developments, Erdogan is pursuing an effort to end a decades-long insurgency by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), perhaps partly in hopes of gaining Kurdish voters' support for constitutional changes in Turkey and/or another presidential term for Erdogan. Elections are legally required by May 2028. The PKK has taken some steps toward demobilization, and Turkey's parliament has empowered a commission to verify PKK disarmament and approve the repatriation and effective amnesty of thousands of PKK members or supporters based in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere.

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Key Considerations for U.S. Policy

General Background

U.S. relations with Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 1952, have been complex, alternating between close cooperation and notable division or tension. The United States has valued Turkey's geopolitical importance to and military strength within the NATO alliance, as its second-largest military force, while viewing Turkey's NATO membership as helping anchor Turkey to the West.[1] Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (who became prime minister in 2003, was elected president in 2014, and then reelected twice) has probably been the most consequential political figure for the Turkish republic since its founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Turkey's regional political, military, and economic influence has grown considerably during his rule, which has included a number of controversial domestic policy developments.

Despite Turkey's NATO membership and close trade and investment relations with the European Union (EU),[2] Turkey appears to be one of a host of "middle powers" inclined to diversify their foreign relationships within a more multipolar global system.[3] Turkey's increasingly assertive foreign policy is buttressed by its growing defense industry, which supplies combat-proven drones, as well as naval vessels, artillery shells, and other equipment, to many other countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Factors motivating Turkish leaders in strengthening Ankara's relationships in surrounding regions may include maximizing self-reliance, deterring other militaries or non-state groups that may present threats, and preventing active conflicts or political disputes near Turkey (such as in Ukraine, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Cyprus) from undermining Turkish national security or domestic stability.

U.S.-Turkey Economic Ties

Turkey's economy—the 16th-largest in the world (according to World Bank data for 2025)—presents attractions and challenges for potential U.S. trade and investment partners. The United States and Turkey have various bilateral agreements to promote economic cooperation, though no free trade agreement. Bilateral trade volume for 2025 (according to the Commerce Department) was estimated at $49 billion. In 2019, the first Trump Administration set a goal with Turkish counterparts to expand this volume to $100 billion.[4]

U.S.-Turkey economic ties account for a small fraction of U.S. international trade and investment. Turkey—the 29th-largest U.S. trading partner—has a far closer economic relationship with the EU (with which it has had a customs union on manufactured goods since 1995). In 2025, for merchandise trade, U.S.-based commercial partners comprised 6.0% of Turkey's exports and 4.9% of its imports (according to the Turkish Statistical Institute). For purposes of comparison, in the same year the EU bloc comprised 42.8% of Turkey's exports and

[1] State Department, *Integrated Country Strategy: Turkey*, May 13, 2022.

[2] The EU continues to be Turkey's largest trading partner and accounts for 70% of its foreign direct investment. "European Union Countries Biggest Investors in Türkiye," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 13, 2024.

[3] Ben Hubbard, "In Turkey, Middle Powers Ponder Diplomacy with a Rogue U.S.," *New York Times*, April 20, 2026. In November 2024, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group reportedly offered Turkey "partner country" status, short of full membership. Turkey became a "dialogue partner" with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2013.

[4] White House, "Remarks by President Trump and President Erdoğan of Turkey in Joint Press Conference," November 13, 2019, at https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-erdogan-turkey-joint-press-conference/. During the Senate Foreign Relations Committee nomination hearing for Ambassador (then Ambassador-designate) Barrack, he said, "I believe that we can reach the stated goal [of] President Trump and President Erdogan to try and get to $100 billion in shared trade on a bilateral basis a year." Congressional Quarterly transcript of April 1, 2025, hearing at https://plus.cq.com/doc/congressionaltranscripts-8211947?3.

31.7% of its imports. From 2003 to 2025, EU countries provided more than 50% of foreign direct investment in Turkey, the United States supplied 7.9%, and Arab Gulf countries furnished 7.1%.[5]

During the past decade, the United States and Turkey have differed sharply on some major issues, particularly

- Turkey's 2019 acquisition of an S-400 surface-to-air defense system from Russia, and U.S. measures in response, including limits on the transfer of F-35 Lightning II fighter aircraft to Turkey, and sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (P.L. 115-44) (see text box).
- The U.S. military's former partnership with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which has links to a militant group rooted in Turkey (the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or Kurdish acronym PKK, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, or FTO), against the Islamic State organization (IS/ISIS).[6] A May 2025 decision by a PKK congress to disband the PKK and end its armed struggle against the Turkish government led to PKK-Turkish government negotiations that have resulted in legislation to initiate a process of PKK demobilization and effective amnesty under certain conditions.

These U.S.-Turkey rifts appear to have somewhat diminished given U.S. and Turkish efforts to (1) strengthen NATO and Ukraine since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and (2) work with a new, generally pro-Turkish, Sunni Arab-led transitional government in Syria after the 2024 fall of Bashar al Asad (alt. Assad). In January 2026, the United States effectively ended its partnership with the SDF as Syrian government forces under interim President Ahmed al Sharaa took control of northern Syrian areas previously governed by the SDF, and U.S. officials announced that "the original purpose of the SDF as the primary anti-ISIS force on the ground has largely expired."[7] These steps appear to have greatly reduced the source of previous U.S.-Turkey tensions in Syria.

For additional background, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey (Türkiye): Background and U.S. Relations*; and CRS In Focus IF10487, *Turkey (Türkiye)-U.S. Relations: Timeline and Brief Historical Context*. See **Figure 1** for a map and basic facts about Turkey.

[5] Turkish Presidency, "FDI in Türkiye," available at https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/whyturkey/pages/fdi-in-turkey.aspx.

[6] In a July 2025 briefing, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and then-Special Envoy for Syria Tom Barrack said, "SDF is YPG [Kurdish acronym for People's Defense Units, a Syrian Kurdish militia]. YPG is a derivative of PKK…. But this is a huge thing in Türkiye, right. The PKK-Türkiye dilemma is really complicated. And YPG was a spinoff of PKK that we allied with to fight ISIS." State Department, "Strengthening U.S.-Türkiye Relations and Advancing Relations with Syria," July 11, 2025.

[7] X, Ambassador Tom Barrack (@USAMBTurkiye), January 20, 2026, 10:32 AM, https://x.com/USAMBTurkiye/status/2013635851570336016. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11930, *Syria and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard; and CRS Report RL33487, *Syria: Transition and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

Figure 1. Turkey at a Glance



Geography	*Area:* 783,562 sq km (302,535 sq. mile), slightly larger than Texas
People	*Population:* 87,685,000 (2025) Most populous cities: Istanbul 15.8 mil, Ankara 6.0 mil, Izmir 4.5 mil, Bursa 3.3 mil *% of population 14 or younger:* 21.0% (2025) *Ethnic groups:* Turks 70%-75%; Kurds 19%; Other minorities 6%-11% (2016) *Religion:* Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), Others (mainly Christian and Jewish) 0.2%
Economy	*GDP per capita (at purchasing power parity):* $53,198 *Real GDP growth:* 2.4% *Inflation:* 31.8% (as of July 2026) *Unemployment:* 8.3% *Budget deficit as % of GDP:* 3.6% *Public debt as % of GDP:* 25.1% *Current account deficit as % of GDP:* 3.0%

Sources: Graphic created by CRS. Map boundaries and information generated by Hannah Fischer using State Department Boundaries (2011); Esri (2014); ArcWorld (2014); DeLorme (2014). Fact information (2026 projections unless otherwise specified) from United Nations; U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom; Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* (previous data retrieval); Economist Intelligence Unit; and Turkish Statistical Institute.

Developments During the Trump Administration

The current Trump Administration has cultivated close working relationships with Turkish counterparts on diplomacy regarding Iran, Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza. President Donald Trump hosted Erdogan at the White House in September 2025, and visited Ankara for the July 2026 NATO summit. During the 2026 U.S./Israel-Iran conflict, U.S./NATO efforts have sought to bolster Turkey's air defense protection from Iranian missiles.

Deal to End U.S. Criminal Case Against Turkey's Halkbank[8]

In March 2026, the Justice Department reportedly reached a deal with Turkish government-controlled Halkbank to apparently end a U.S. federal criminal case against the bank for allegations that it helped launder some $20 billion of Iranian funds during the 2010s in violation of U.S. sanctions. As part of the deal, Halkbank reportedly agreed to refrain from transactions benefitting Iran and accept monitoring for future compliance. The case reportedly threatened to implicate President Erdogan and members of his inner circle in wrongdoing, and he had allegedly sought for years to have U.S. counterparts quash the matter. Turkey's role in helping obtain the release of hostages from the Gaza Strip in an October 2025 Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal reportedly contributed to the case's resolution. At the end of a 90-day compliance period in June 2026, prosecutors sought and received the case's formal dismissal.

Resolving U.S.-Turkey defense cooperation controversies? U.S.-Turkey efforts are ongoing to resolve issues related to Turkey's 2019 S-400 acquisition, with Turkey calling for the U.S. sale of at least 40 F-35s to Turkey and an end to U.S. CAATSA sanctions. As noted above, Section 1245 of the FY2020 NDAA prohibits the transfer of F-35s to Turkey unless the executive branch certifies that Turkey no longer possesses the Russian-origin S-400 system. For more on this issue, see "U.S.-Turkey Defense Cooperation and CAATSA Sanctions."

Other issues that could present obstacles to future U.S.-Turkey arms transfers include continued Turkish economic and energy cooperation with Russia, decades-long Turkish disagreements with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus (ROC), and growing tension between Turkey and Israel over the future of the Middle East (including Syria, Gaza, and Turkey's support for the Palestinian Sunni Islamist group Hamas, another FTO). Israel operates a large fleet of F-35s, and U.S. F-35 sales to Greece could occur in coming years.

Iran conflict, Turkey-Israel tensions, and regional order. The 2026 U.S./Israel-Iran conflict and its impact on the Middle East balance of power could have consequences for U.S.-Turkey cooperation. Turkey has shown signs of increasing security cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Pakistan, and Egypt[9] amid regional uncertainties that include more assertive Israeli and Iranian actions; domestic instability in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon that could empower sub-state actors like Kurds and Islamist militants; and arguably greater political and economic marginalization for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In light of disruptions to global commerce with the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz during 2026, Turkish officials have promoted Turkey's availability as a possible alternative hub for energy transit, other trade, and tourism.[10]

The recent increase in Turkey-Israel tensions, alongside Israeli moves to cultivate closer defense and economic ties with Greece, the ROC, and other countries like the United Arab Emirates and India, could accelerate or reinforce Turkish efforts to partner more closely with some other Sunni Muslim-majority countries, depending on U.S. actions and other factors (see text box below). For

[8] Sources for this text box include Dan Ennis, "DOJ, Halkbank Agree to End Iran Sanctions Case," *Banking Dive*, March 10, 2026; Ragip Soylu of *Middle East Eye* at https://mailchi.mp/middleeasteye/how-erdogan-shut-down-a-us-court-case-that-threatened-his-inner-circle?e=b82e8edad4; Devlin Barrett, "U.S. Reaches Tentative Deal Ending Prosecution of Turkish Bank," *New York Times*, March 9, 2026; "Judge Formally Ends US Prosecution of Turkey's Halkbank After Trump Deal," Reuters, June 17, 2026.

[9] Ezgi Akin, "Pakistan's Air Chief in Ankara as Islamabad Touts Regional Alliance Talks," *Al-Monitor*, May 19, 2026.

[10] Giorgio Cafiero, "The Geopolitics of Reviving the Hejaz Railway," Arab Gulf States Institute, July 1, 2026; Sinan Ciddi, "Turkey's Corridor Dream Won't Beat IMEC—But It Could Still Reshape Eurasian Trade," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, May 11, 2026; Ragip Soylu, "'Pipe Dream': Turkey's Plan to Redraw Middle East Energy Routes After Iran," *Middle East Eye*, April 14, 2026; Timothy Ash, "Gulf Crisis Promises Long-Term Gains for Türkiye, Yet Major Hurdles Remain," *Türkiye Today*, May 20, 2026.

example, Turkey has boosted defense transactions with Arab Gulf states possibly looking for alternatives to Western suppliers.[11]

Mecca Joint Defense Agreement: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan

In August 2026, Turkey entered into the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. While the agreement's text has not been publicly released, a trilateral statement read: "The agreement is intended to strengthen collective deterrence against any act of aggression, and stipulates that any armed attack against any one of the three states shall be regarded as an attack against them all. It further provides for the enhancement of all aspects of defense cooperation among the three states."[12] Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has said that the pact is not directed against any particular country, and that other regional countries may subsequently join, naming Egypt specifically as a possible future candidate.[13] Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had previously signed a bilateral defense pact in September 2025. President Trump has voiced support for the Mecca Agreement, saying that it shows "how Countries will finally be able to defend themselves in a more meaningful way."[14]

Some analysts assess that the three countries have sought to signal greater closeness partly to counterbalance Iran and Israel in light of recent conflict that has engulfed the region, and partly to explore security partnerships that might supplement or provide an alternative to their traditional alignment with the United States.[15] During the 2010s, Saudi Arabia and Egypt appeared to be gradually moving toward closer alignment with Israel, in part to counter Turkish support for Islamist-friendly populist movements in the region. Nevertheless, subsequent developments have fostered Turkish rapprochement with both countries, and recent conflict and changes involving Iran, Syria, Gaza, and Lebanon appear to have reinforced the countries' renewed closeness. One Israeli analyst has argued that the Mecca Agreement makes Israel-Saudi normalization and Turkey-Israel rapprochement less likely.[16] Egypt may have reservations about any formal defense alignment with Turkey given Erdogan's past political support for Muslim Brotherhood actors in Egypt, as well as Turkish tensions with Israel, Greece, and Cyprus that could affect Egypt's strategic and economic options in the Eastern Mediterranean.[17]

The Mecca Agreement also may help bolster defense industrial cooperation among its participants in a manner that influences their future strategic orientation and ability to affect the balance of power. A former British diplomat has been quoted as saying, "In practice, it is inconceivable that Turkey or Saudi Arabia would get involved in a conflict with India if the latter came to blows with Pakistan again, as is more or less inevitable on a regular basis. The extension of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent to cover Saudi against Iran or Turkey in any circumstances looks equally implausible. But defense industrial collaboration may flesh out the substance of the alliance over time."[18]

Armenia. Azerbaijan-Armenia peace treaty talks and a Turkey-Armenia normalization process have proceeded in parallel since Azerbaijan seized control of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region from Armenia via successful military campaigns in 2020 and 2023, using material support

[11] Jacob Wirtschafter, "Ankara Markets Drones, Air Defense to States Looking to Reduce Reliance on U.S. Weapons," *Washington Times*, July 5, 2026; Agnes Helou, "After Iran Attacks, Turkish Industry Seeing Increased Gulf Interest in Air Defense Platforms," *Breaking Defense*, May 27, 2026.

[12] Saudi Press Agency, "Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Pakistan Issue Joint Statement of the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence," August 7, 2026.

[13] "Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia Defence Pact Technically Same as NATO's Article 5, Turkish Minister Says," Reuters, August 8, 2026.

[14] Truth Social, Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), August 16, 2026, 5:04 PM, https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/117107211893196124.

[15] "How Saudi-Turkey-Pakistan Pact Puts Iran's Regional Strategy to Test," *Al-Monitor*, August 8, 2026; Matthew Shea, "New Defense Pact Between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan Concerns U.S. National Security Experts," *Jewish Insider*, August 7, 2026; David Hearst, "Why the Mecca Agreement Is a Necessary Show of Force," *Guardian* (UK), August 10, 2026.

[16] Gallia Lindenstrauss of the Institute for National Security Studies in Amberin Zaman, "'A Claim to Be Tested': Can Saudi Arabia-Turkey-Pakistan Defense Pact Deter Iran?" *Al-Monitor*, August 7, 2026.

[17] Amberin Zaman, "Fidan Heads to Egypt amid Questions over Saudi Arabia-Turkey-Pakistan Pact," *Al-Monitor*, August 12, 2026.

[18] Edmund Fitton-Brown in Shea, "New Defense Pact Between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan Concerns U.S. National Security Experts."

from Turkey and Israel. In August 2025 at the White House, Azerbaijan and Armenia initialed a peace agreement (apparently subject to future signing and ratification), and signed a joint declaration regarding their meeting.[19] The joint declaration references a project (known as the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, or TRIPP) that could provide geopolitical and economic benefits to the United States and Turkey—including via direct commercial links from Turkey to the energy-rich Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia. Various political and military obstacles remain, potentially including actions by Iran or Russia. Without the signing and ratification of the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace deal, full Turkey-Armenia normalization may not be likely. In the meantime, Turkey and Armenia have taken some steps toward normalization, including the resumption of direct airline flights from Turkey to Armenia and trade via third countries.[20]

Outlook

Analysts have provided varying perspectives on whether potential strategic and economic advantages from partnering with Turkey should move the Trump Administration and Congress toward greater engagement, or whether Turkey's hedging behavior, its increased "autocratic tendencies" over President Erdogan's 23 years in power, or specific regional issues should give U.S. policymakers and lawmakers pause about closer cooperation.[21]

During the current Trump Administration, U.S.-Turkey coordination on various foreign policy and defense issues seems to have been a greater focus for the bilateral relationship than questions affecting Turkish democracy or human rights[22]—possibly continuing an apparent trend in U.S.-Turkey relations that began during the Biden Administration following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. President Erdogan's government has arguably taken its most repressive actions to date against Turkey's political opposition in 2025 and 2026, which could have implications for Erdogan's prospects at another term after the current one ends by May 2028 (see "Domestic Issues" below). In an April 2026 interview, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Tom Barrack, in explaining earlier remarks he made that month, stated

> When I said that 'powerful leadership regimes,' whether benevolent monarchies or the kind of monarchical republics seen elsewhere in the region, are the only structures that have actually worked in the Middle East, I was speaking from decades of hard-earned observation, not ideology….
>
> Turkey, operating as a presidential republic with regular multiparty elections, also demonstrates how strong, centralized leadership under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has delivered stability, economic dynamism and assertive regional influence, though critics have described it as a hybrid regime with strong authoritarian tendencies.

[19] Text of peace agreement at https://mfa.gov.az/files/Birge%20Beyanname-ABS/Initialed%20Peace%20Agreement%20(EN).pdf. Text of joint declaration at https://mfa.gov.az/files/Birge%20Beyanname-ABS/JD_AZE_ARM_final_witness%20signature.pdf.

[20] "Turkish Airlines Launches Yerevan Flights Amid Armenia-Turkey Thaw," Agence France Presse, March 11, 2026; "Turkey, Armenia Complete Preparations to Launch Direct Trade in Push for Normalization," *Turkish Minute*, May 13, 2026.

[21] Morgan Phillips, "Trump Eyes Lifting Sanctions, Potential Sale of Prized Fighter Jet to Turkey," Fox News, March 21, 2025. See also Sinan Ciddi and Jonathan Schanzer, "America's Ambassador to Turkey Is Undermining U.S. Interests," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, April 24, 2026; Pinar Dost, "How Energy and Trade Are Redefining US–Turkey Regional Cooperation," Atlantic Council, October 9, 2025.

[22] Murat Yesiltas, "Ankara and Washington Can Build on Recent Groundwork to Improve Relations and Stability," Atlantic Council, March 11, 2026; Dorian Jones, "Trump Offers Turkey Fresh Hope for US Fighter Jets Despite Israel's Opposition," Radio France Internationale, January 4, 2026.

> This is not a change in U.S. policy away from supporting democratic governance and human rights. It is a realistic assessment of what produces stability so that human rights and prosperity can take root.[23]

As major developments evolve with implications for bilateral relations, U.S. policy on Turkey could be shaped by the following considerations:

- **Potential benefits and drawbacks of closer partnership.** What are potential benefits from maintaining and/or strengthening relations with Turkey and the U.S./NATO military presence there, given Turkey's geopolitical centrality to key areas of conflict and strategic land and maritime corridors; its demonstrated ability and potential to affect military, political, and economic developments in several surrounding regions; and the potentially greater options regional powers like Turkey may have in an era of intensifying great-power competition? What are potential drawbacks to easing restrictions on and deepening partnership with Turkey when Turkey may still be unwilling to give up certain aspects of its cooperation with Russia; support and perhaps host Hamas while taking political and economic action against Israel; and maintain longtime disagreements with Greece and the ROC on various political-military, geographic, and energy issues?
- **Impact of Turkish leadership on key issues.** To what extent do Turkish policies that differ from U.S. preferences reflect Turkish national consensus, and to what extent might they be more specific to President Erdogan (such as on support for Hamas or the level of cooperation with Russia)? What U.S. approaches to Turkey might cultivate more or less productive bilateral ties, either with Erdogan or other potential leaders?
- **Turkey-Israel regional dynamics and the Mecca Agreement.** In Syria and the broader region, can Turkey and Israel minimize their disagreements and pursue presumed common interests (like reducing Iran's influence), or do tensions that have intensified over Gaza, Syria, and Iran foreshadow greater contention between Turkey and Israel over their respective roles in the regional order? What is the significance of Turkey's entrance into the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan for the balance of power in the Middle East?
- **Risks of Turkish alignment with U.S. rivals.** What, if anything, could lead to greater Turkish alignment with U.S. rivals like Russia or the People's Republic of China (PRC)? U.S. unwillingness to share advanced defense technology with Turkey, or disagreements with Turkey on key foreign policy issues? Russian or PRC initiatives to bolster Turkish military or economic strength? Domestic Turkish developments toward authoritarianism or instability? If Turkey became more adversarial to U.S. interests, what would be the regional and global consequences?

Congress may face decision points on Turkey relating to possible F-35 sales or review of executive action on CAATSA sanctions. Additionally, Congress may take further action on legislative proposals with relevance for U.S.-Turkey relations, including some that may resurface in some form from bills or resolutions introduced previously.[24] During 2026, the Senate Foreign

[23] Efrat Lachter, "Trump Envoy to Turkey Doubles Down After Backlash, Pushes 'Peace Through Strength' Policy," Fox News, April 22, 2026.

[24] See, for example, Turkey Diplomatic Realignment Act (H.R. 1890) and Condemning Turkey for Its Illegal Occupation of Cyprus and Encouraging President Trump to Make the Resolution of the Cyprus Problem a Top Foreign

(continued...)

Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee each have reported a version of the Eastern Mediterranean Gateway Act (S. 4443 and H.R. 3307). While the bill does not explicitly mention Turkey, it would promote various activities that appear calculated to bolster U.S. relations with other Eastern Mediterranean countries, which could arguably work against Turkish interests in the region.

Domestic Issues

Political Developments Under Erdogan's Rule

As President Erdogan and his Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP) have steadily deepened their control over the country's populace and institutions, U.S. and EU officials have expressed a number of concerns about authoritarian governance and erosion of rule of law and civil liberties in Turkey.[25] Many observers describe Erdogan as a polarizing figure, and elections have reflected roughly equal portions of the country supporting and opposing his rule.

2016 Coup Attempt and Erdogan's Further Consolidation of Power

In 2016, rogue military officers in Turkey staged a coup attempt in which hundreds were killed and thousands injured, after which the government detained tens of thousands, enacted sweeping changes to military and civilian agencies, and took over or closed various businesses, schools, and media outlets. Erdogan has argued, with considerable popular support, that the Fethullah Gulen movement orchestrated the coup attempt,[26] which military forces and citizen groups loyal to the government ultimately thwarted. Some leading opposition figures in Turkey have accused Erdogan of planning, controlling, and/or using the failed coup to suppress dissent and consolidate power.[27] Erdogan then formed a coalition with Turkey's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and adopted more aggressively populist tactics in both domestic and foreign policy contexts. Erdogan cemented Turkey's shift from a prime ministerial to a presidential system of governance through victories in a 2017 constitutional referendum and 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections. In 2023 elections reelecting Erdogan and the AKP-led coalition, international observation missions asserted that limits on freedom of expression and other measures affecting media coverage appeared to give Erdogan and the AKP an "unjustified advantage."[28]

The AKP was dealt a setback in March 2024 local elections. The main opposition and secular-leaning CHP retained control over key mayoralties it won in 2019, won additional mayoralties, and captured a larger share of the nationwide vote, reportedly with considerable support from Kurdish political actors and voters.

Policy Priority (H.Res. 17) from the 119th Congress; and Countering Turkish Aggression Act of 2024 (S. 5643) from the 118th Congress.

[25] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024*, Turkey (Türkiye); European Commission, *Türkiye Report 2025*, November 4, 2025.

[26] Gulen (who was a permanent U.S. resident from the 1990s until his death in 2024) and the Gulen movement made common cause with Erdogan during his first decade in power, before a major falling out over corruption charges brought by Turkish prosecutors (possibly aligned with the Gulen movement) in late 2013 against ministers in Erdogan's government. For more on Gulen and the movement, see CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas. Partly because of Gulen's residence in the United States in the final decades of his life, many Turks reportedly subscribe to conspiracy theories about possible U.S. involvement in the 2016 coup attempt.

[27] Gareth Jenkins, "Five Years After July 15: Erdogan's New Turkey and the Myth of Its Immaculate Conception," *Turkey Analyst*, July 15, 2021; Dorian Jones, "Turkey Looks Back at Failed Coup," Voice of America, July 15, 2019.

[28] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: Election Observation Mission Final Report: Republic of Türkiye—General Elections 14 May and Presidential Election, Second Round 28 May 2023* (published September 29, 2023).

Kurdish Peace Process and Recent Legislation

Erdogan and his nationalist coalition partners may be courting Kurdish political actors and voters anew in hopes of obtaining supermajority support in parliament and potentially allowing Erdogan to make constitutional changes and/or seek another presidential term in May 2028 or earlier. Since the PKK began its on-and-off insurgency against Turkish authorities in the early 1980s, the Turkish military's approach to neutralizing the PKK has routinely been criticized by Western governments and human rights organizations for being overly punitive toward ethnic Kurds, who constitute roughly 18%-20% of Turkey's population.[29] Turkish authorities have imprisoned thousands and displaced or disrupted the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of others for suspected PKK involvement or sympathies.[30] An initiative at Kurdish reconciliation under Erdogan broke down with the end of a Turkey-PKK ceasefire in 2015.

Since 2024, the Turkish government has reportedly engaged with imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in talks to get the PKK to renounce violence, possibly in exchange for the formalization of certain Kurdish rights in Turkey. In 2025, Ocalan called for the PKK to disarm and dissolve. In response, the PKK declared a ceasefire, and a PKK congress decided to disband the organization and end armed struggle against the Turkish government. Turkish officials welcomed the news while awaiting "practical steps" such as the potential disarmament and demobilization of PKK fighters in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.[31]

In February 2026, a Turkish parliamentary commission approved a roadmap that envisions PKK disarmament alongside the parliament's enactment of legal reforms to broaden civil liberties and reintegrate former militants into society.[32] In August 2026, the parliament and President Erdogan enacted legislation with Ocalan's support to create a new commission (to be comprised of leading Turkish officials) empowered to verify disarmament and approve the repatriation and effective amnesty of up to thousands of PKK members or affiliates who are not identified as having engaged in violent acts.[33] The law passed by a 468-88 vote;[34] Erdogan may hope to mobilize a similar coalition to change Turkey's constitution or permit him to pursue another presidential term.

Legal Measures Against Erdogan's Main Political Rivals

In March 2025, Istanbul's CHP mayor and Erdogan's likeliest presidential rival (at the time) Ekrem Imamoglu was arrested on various corruption-related charges, removing him from office at least temporarily and exacerbating political and economic uncertainty that prompted hundreds

[29] UK Government, *Country Policy and Information Note: Kurds, Turkey, July 2025 (accessible)*, August 8, 2025.

[30] See, for example, Cengiz Candar, *Turkey's Mission Impossible: War and Peace with the Kurds*, Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Lexington Books, 2020. See also Amberin Zaman, "Turkey Hands Kurdish Leaders Heavy Sentences, Dimming Hopes of Democratic Change," *Al-Monitor*, May 16, 2024.

[31] Elvan Kivilcim and Sudarsan Raghavan, "Kurdish Militant Group PKK to End Four-Decade Conflict with Turkey," *Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 2025.

[32] "Turkish Lawmakers Back Plan Advancing PKK Peace Process," Reuters, February 18, 2026.

[33] "Turkey's Erdogan Signs Law Offering Conditional Pardon for Thousands Of PKK Militants," Associated Press, August 18, 2026; Amberin Zaman, "How Turkey's PKK Amnesty Law Entwines Kurds' Hopes with Erdogan's Ambitions," *Al-Monitor*, August 5, 2026; "Bill Aiming for Peace Between Turkey and Kurdish Fighters Goes to Parliament," Associated Press, August 5, 2026.

[34] Ben Hubbard and Safak Timur, "Turkey Moves to Advance Peace Process with Kurdish Militants," *New York Times*, August 10, 2026.

of thousands of Turks to protest nationwide.[35] Two CHP district mayors in Istanbul, along with other municipal staff, journalists, and private sector businessmen, were also detained in March 2025.[36] Imamoglu's arrest came days before a CHP primary officially selecting Imamoglu as the party's candidate, and a day after Imamoglu's university degree (required for any Turkish presidential candidate under the constitution) was invalidated. Imamoglu and other CHP leaders denounced his arrest as politically motivated and encouraged nonviolent protests. In response, Erdogan's government insisted that Imamoglu's detention came from an independent investigation, and arrested more than 2,000 protesters while blaming the CHP for fomenting instability.

Erdogan may see parallels between Imamoglu's rise and his own, having leveraged his status as Istanbul's mayor during the 1990s to become the country's most popular political figure. One Turkish journalist wrote that the timing of Imamoglu's arrest may have stemmed from a relative lack of U.S. concern about Turkish domestic developments, a possible unwillingness by pro-Kurdish leaders to confront the government amid efforts toward Turkey-PKK rapprochement, and a calculation by Erdogan that he had time to recover from any effect the arrest and its fallout could have on his popularity.[37]

In response to the arrests of Imamoglu and others, the State Department spokesperson said that "we're following the events" in Turkey, referred the media to Turkey's government for "comments on internal judicial matters," and stated "it's important that Türkiye protect the freedoms and human rights of all of its citizens consistent with the country's constitution and in line with our shared values and democratic traditions."[38] Secretary of State Marco Rubio later said that the Administration does not like to see "these things happening inside countries that we hope to partner with on a bunch of things," and that U.S. concerns are balanced with an interest in working with Turkey on various issues.[39]

A corruption trial against Imamoglu—which he and his supporters continue to maintain is politically motivated—and more than 400 other defendants began in March 2026.[40] According to one April 2026 estimate, at least 30 elected mayors or co-mayors have been removed from office since the March 2024 local elections, with 13 municipalities run by state-appointed trustees.[41] Additionally, Ankara's CHP mayor Mansur Yavas, who is a likely presidential candidate if Imamoglu is disqualified, is under investigation regarding the use of municipal vehicles during

[35] Ben Hubbard, "Turkey Jails Istanbul Mayor Who Was Expected to Run for President," *New York Times*, March 23, 2025; "Gezi Protests in 2013 Are Erdoğan's Nightmare, Protesters' Inspiration," *Turkish Minute*, March 25, 2025. At the time of Imamoglu's detention, he was already appealing a criminal conviction from December 2022 for insulting members of Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council that he and some observers characterized as politically motivated. Istanbul's CHP-controlled municipal council elected CHP member Nuri Aslan to serve as interim mayor while Imamoglu is in prison.

[36] "2 Other Mayors, Journalists, Businessmen Among Detainees in Probe Targeting İmamoğlu," *Turkish Minute*, March 19, 2025.

[37] Ragip Soylu, "What's Erdogan's End Game with Imamoglu's Arrest?" *Middle East Eye*, March 24, 2025.

[38] State Department Press Briefing, March 21, 2025.

[39] State Department, "Secretary of State Marco Rubio Remarks to the Press," March 28, 2025.

[40] "Jailed Istanbul Mayor Goes on Trial in Huge Corruption Case Slammed by Supporters as Political," Associated Press, March 9, 2026. For a breakdown of various cases involving Imamoglu, see Yildiz Yazicioglu, "19 Mart'ın yıldönümünde, İmamoğlu'nun 'yargı' süreçleri," *Stüdyo recap*, March 19, 2026.

[41] Diego Cupolo, "Coveting All the Bases," *Turkey recap*, April 2, 2026.

the 2023 campaign. The Ankara municipal government has described the probe as "an attempt to intimidate and discredit Yavas despite the lack of concrete evidence."[42]

Another legal development affecting the CHP occurred in May 2026, when a Turkish appeals court nullified the November 2023 CHP party congress that installed Ozgur Ozel as chair. The ruling "provisionally" replaced Ozel and the CHP executive board, who presided over the party victory in March 2024 local elections and have rallied public opposition to Imamoglu's prosecution. The previous party leaders returned to their positions, including Kemal Kilicdaroglu—the CHP's unsuccessful 2023 presidential candidate—as chair.[43] Ozel called the ruling a "judicial coup."[44] One analyst has asserted that with Ozel's ouster, Turkish authorities have moved from repressing to reshaping the political opposition, writing that Ozel's "more combative and electorally successful" CHP leadership "has been removed by judicial order, while the leadership that Erdogan spent years describing as harmless has been restored to its place."[45]

New Main Opposition Party Splits from CHP

After Ozel determined that he did not have legal recourse to reverse the May ruling or hold a new CHP party congress, he established the Yeni (New) Party (YP) in July 2026. More than 90 of the CHP's 135 lawmakers moved to the YP, as it supplanted the CHP as Turkey's main opposition party.[46] The prospects for the YP to mount a challenge to the AKP in future elections may depend on a number of factors, including its ability to attract and maintain the CHP's voter base and expand its appeal to Turkey's population in the face of political divisions, as well as its vulnerability to potential legal challenges or other adverse measures from the government. It is unclear whether Ankara mayor Yavas might join or partner with the YP, and whether he or Ozel could mount a serious electoral challenge to Erdogan.

Economic Issues

For more than a decade, Turkey's currency (the lira) has been trending downward relative to the dollar, with its decline probably driven in part by broader concerns by foreign investors about Turkey's policymaking and economy.[47] It has lost more than 92% of its value against the dollar since 2018, with much of the decrease coming after major interest rate cuts that President Erdogan backed from 2021 to 2023. Official annual inflation reached a 24-year peak of 86% in October 2022.[48] Turkey also faces some economic challenges; while official inflation in Turkey has dropped considerably since then, it remains far higher (over 30%) than in any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country.[49]

[42] "Turkey Allows Investigation into Ankara Mayor over Alleged Use of Municipal Vehicles at Rally," *Turkish Minute*, April 14, 2026.

[43] Amberin Zaman, "Erdogan's CHP Move Raises Early Poll Prospects as Iran War Bleeds Turkey's Economy," *Al-Monitor*, May 22, 2026.

[44] "Turkey Opposition Vows to Resist Court Ruling as Political Crisis Deepens," Reuters, May 23, 2026.

[45] Salim Cevik, "Erdogan Is Forcibly Designing His Own Opposition," *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2026.

[46] Halil Karaveli, "What Challenges Await Erdogan's New Rival and Turkey's New Opposition Party?" *Al-Monitor*, July 25, 2026.

[47] Justin Keay, "Turkey's Positive Prospects," *Global Finance*, March 14, 2024.

[48] Jared Malsin and Elvan Kivilcim, "Erdogan Faces Big Vote Test as Turkish Economy Suffers," *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2023.

[49] OECD, "OECD Headline Inflation Eased to 4.2% in June 2026, Reflecting a Temporary Decline in Energy Inflation," August 4, 2026.

The currency and inflation crisis in Turkey has dramatically affected consumers' cost of living and the cost of international borrowing (mostly conducted in U.S. dollars) for banks and private sector companies. Turkey's manufacturing-based economy has remained relatively resilient and is anchored by its customs union with the EU for most non-agricultural goods.

Turkey's large population, relative lack of domestic hydrocarbon resources, and Eurasian geography make it an important global energy consumer and transit country.[50] The Turkish government seeks to diversify both the mix of its energy sources and its import partners. Turkey receives much of its oil and natural gas via pipelines from Russia and other countries, with some of it transiting Turkey to other destinations, including Europe. A Russian-owned company is assisting Turkey with its first nuclear power plant—currently scheduled to go online in 2026—on the Mediterranean coast at Akkuyu. During the 2020s, Turkey has increased liquefied natural gas imports from the United States and other countries, and broader U.S.-Turkey cooperation may be possible on a variety of energy initiatives. Turkish disputes persist with neighboring countries over offshore energy rights and Eastern Mediterranean energy transit routes. Meanwhile, Turkey began production in 2023 from the offshore Sakarya natural gas field in the Black Sea.

Selected Foreign Policy and Defense Issues

U.S./NATO Strategic Relationship and Military Presence

Turkey's proximity to conflict in the Middle East and Eurasia has made the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the United States and NATO. In addition to Incirlik Air Base near the southern Turkish city of Adana, other key U.S./NATO sites include an early warning air defense radar in eastern Turkey and a NATO ground forces command in Izmir (see **Figure 2**). Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through the Bosphorus (alt. Bosporus) and Dardanelles Straits (the Straits).

For Turkey, NATO's traditional importance has been to mitigate Turkish concerns about encroachment by neighbors, such as the Soviet Union's aggressive post-World War II posturing leading up to the Cold War. In more recent arenas of conflict like Ukraine and Syria, Turkey's possible interest in countering Russian objectives may have partly motivated Turkey's military operations and arms exports.[51] In April 2024, Turkey suspended its obligations under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, joining other NATO allies who had previously taken this step after Russia withdrew from the agreement in 2023.[52]

NATO security guarantees compensate Turkey for a dearth of certain nationally owned strategic defense and deterrence capabilities.[53] One media report has said that Turkey "lacks its own fully fledged missile defences and relies heavily on NATO's systems and fighter jets."[54]

During the U.S./Israel-Iran conflict in March 2026, four Iranian ballistic missiles reportedly heading for targets in Turkey were reportedly intercepted by U.S. ship-fired missiles from the

[50] Commerce Department's International Trade Administration, *Turkey Country Commercial Guide* at https://www.trade.gov/knowledge-product/turkey-oil-and-gas-equipment-lng-and-lng-terminals-upstream-downstream.

[51] Dimitar Bechev, "Russia, Turkey and the Spectre of Regional Instability," Al Sharq Strategic Research, April 13, 2022.

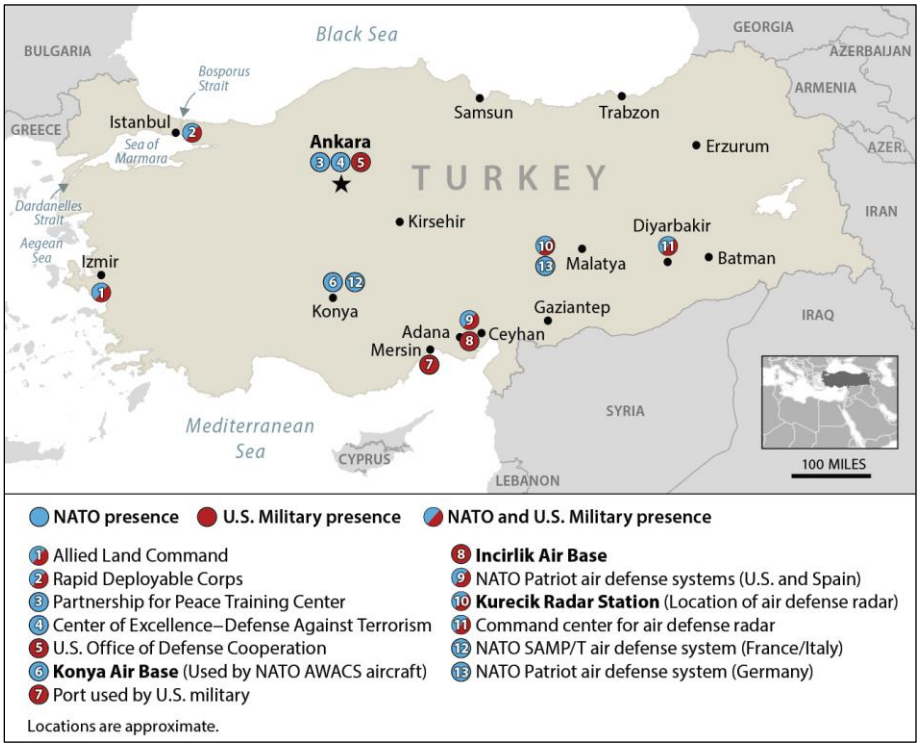
[52] Selcan Hacaoglu, "Turkey Joins NATO Allies in Suspending Europe Arms Treaty," *Bloomberg*, April 5, 2024.

[53] Can Kasapoglu, "Turkey," *The Nations of NATO: Shaping the Alliance's Relevance and Cohesion*, Thierry Tardy, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 97.

[54] "Turkey Says NATO Adjusting to Security Landscape, US Not Withdrawing," Reuters, June 30, 2026.

Eastern Mediterranean as part of NATO's air defense system.[55] NATO also reportedly deployed two U.S. Patriot air defense systems—one near Incirlik Air Base (which hosts U.S. forces), and one near the NATO air defense radar in eastern Turkey (to extend air defense coverage to all of Turkish territory)—and a Franco-Italian SAMP/T system in central Turkey.[56] In June, a German Patriot battery reportedly replaced the U.S. system in eastern Turkey.[57]

Figure 2. Map of U.S. and NATO Military Presence in Turkey



Sources: Created by CRS using data gathered from the Department of Defense, NATO, and various media outlets since 2011.

Note: All locations are approximate.

Some of Turkey's actions in the 2020s have arguably undermined NATO unity. While seeking to persuade or compel other alliance members to distance themselves from PKK-linked Syrian Kurds that Turkey has viewed as adversaries, Turkey delayed the following NATO initiatives before ultimately agreeing to them:

- Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership applications, which came shortly after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.
- A NATO defense plan proposed in 2020 for Poland and the Baltic states.

[55] Ezgi Akin, "Turkey Says NATO Defenses Intercepted Fourth Missile from Iran," *Al-Monitor*, March 30, 2026; Selcan Hacaoglu, "Iran Tests NATO's Boundaries with Missiles Fired at Turkey," *Bloomberg*, March 15, 2026.

[56] Linus Holler, "Germany to Deploy Patriot Battery to Turkey, Relieving US Forces on NATO's Southeastern Flank," *Defense News*, May 19, 2026; Ragip Soylu, "Iranian Missiles Might Be Testing Nato Air Defences in Turkey to Target Crucial Radar Base," *Middle East Eye*, March 10, 2026; Paul Iddon, "Turkey's Air Defense Future Takes Shape with No Role for Russian S-400," *Forbes*, July 6, 2026.

[57] "Germany Deployed Patriot to Turkey, Replacing US Battery at Kurecik," *Mezha*, June 26, 2026.

Tensions between Turkey and other NATO members over the past decade have fueled internal U.S./NATO discussions about the continued use of Turkish bases. Some reports have suggested that expanded or potentially expanded U.S. military presences in places such as Greece, Cyprus, and Jordan might be connected with concerns about Turkey.[58]

During the current Trump Administration, Turkey has taken some steps that appear aimed at demonstrating increased commitment to key NATO objectives:

- In June 2025, an unnamed Turkish defense ministry source was cited as saying that Turkey supports NATO's decision to "more than double its defense spending benchmark to 5% of GDP by 2035 and is already exceeding the previous 2% benchmark."[59]
- In March 2026, the Turkish defense ministry stated that NATO would establish a multinational corps in southern Turkey near Adana. Reportedly, the corps' headquarters are planned to be ready by 2028 and the corps would come under the command of a Turkish general.[60] Other NATO multinational corps are based in Poland and Latvia to deter and defend against threats and maintain a high level of readiness.
- In July 2026, Turkey formally agreed to contribute toward bolstering NATO's strategic capabilities in domains including air and missile defense, long-range strike, space surveillance, critical raw materials, and unmanned systems.[61]

U.S.-Turkey Defense Cooperation and CAATSA Sanctions

Overview

U.S.-Turkey efforts are ongoing to resolve issues related to Turkey's 2019 S-400 acquisition, with Turkey calling for the U.S. sale of at least 40 F-35s to Turkey and an end to U.S. CAATSA sanctions. One media report said that unnamed U.S. officials "expected Mr. Trump to at least signal his intent to get the fighter jets into Turkey's hands—though it is uncertain when."[62] During the July 2026 NATO summit, President Trump said "we're going to be taking the sanctions off" and "certainly we would consider" selling F-35s to Turkey.[63]

Turkey was an original member of the U.S.-led consortium formed to contribute to the development and manufacture of the F-35, but was removed in July 2019 due to its procurement of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system.[64] In announcing the removal, Department of

[58] Aaron Stein, "At the Seam of Three Regions: The Case for More Basing and Access in Greece and Cyprus," *War on the Rocks*, July 29, 2022; Dorian Jones, "US Military Base in Turkey Has Uncertain Future," Voice of America, November 26, 2019.

[59] "Turkey Backs NATO's 5% Defence Spending Goal, Plans Nationwide Air Shield, Source Says," Reuters, June 26, 2025. The 5% benchmark includes at least 3.5% for "core defence requirements," with the remainder for security-related infrastructure and preparedness. NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," June 25, 2025.

[60] Ragip Soylu, "Nato to Set Up New Corps in Turkey as Ankara Eyes Regional Deterrence," *Middle East Eye*, March 27, 2026.

[61] Alp Ozen, "Turkey Wants a Bigger Role In NATO. Its Defense Industry Will Be Key," Atlantic Council, August 11, 2026.

[62] Tyler Pager and David E. Sanger, "Trump Expected to Tell Turkey He Is Ready to Restore Access to F-35 Jets," *New York Times*, July 6, 2026.

[63] "Remarks: Donald Trump Holds a Bilat with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey in Ankara—July 7, 2026," *Roll Call*.

[64] CRS Report R47493, *Turkey (Türkiye): Possible U.S. Sale of F-16 Aircraft*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

Defense[65] officials cited concerns about possible Russian use of the S-400 to collect intelligence on F-35 stealth capabilities. The officials also stated that Turkish companies would miss out on more than $9 billion (not adjusted to date for possible inflation) in projected work share related to them being removed from making more than 900 parts for the F-35.[66]

In December 2019, Congress enacted a provision (Section 1245) in the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, P.L. 116-92) prohibiting the Department of Defense from transferring F-35s to Turkey unless the President certifies that Turkey no longer possesses the S-400 (or other associated items), with certain waivers available in that case. Six Turkish-owned F-35s reportedly have remained in storage in the United States, with the $1.4 billion paid for the F-35s apparently still in U.S. hands.[67]

Turkey's S-400 acquisition also led the first Trump Administration to impose some sanctions in December 2020 under CAATSA on a Turkish defense procurement agency and associated officials for their role in the transaction.[68] Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan reportedly stated in April 2025 that the sanctions had to that point obstructed the procurement of around $20 billion in spare parts for F-16s by entities involved with Turkey's defense industry.[69] One analyst has indicated that lifting CAATSA sanctions on Turkey may be a precondition for reopening U.S.-Turkey defense industrial cooperation and bolstering Turkey's defense industry, because many of Turkey's flagship defense systems, "including the KAAN fighter, helicopters, missiles and naval systems, still depend on US-origin technologies or export approvals."[70]

A few weeks after the imposition of CAATSA sanctions, Congress enacted another provision (Section 1241 in the FY2021 NDAA, P.L. 116-283) relating to the S-400 transaction and the possible imposition and termination of sanctions under CAATSA.

Lifting CAATSA Sanctions?

Under Section 236 of CAATSA, the President can either waive the application of sanctions if the President determines it is in the U.S. national security interest, or terminate sanctions with respect to a person (or party) by submitting a notice and justification to Congress, along with a notice that

- the person is not engaging in the activity that was the basis for the sanctions or has taken significant verifiable steps toward stopping the activity; and
- the President has received reliable assurances that the person will not knowingly engage in activity subject to sanctions under this part in the future.

Under Section 216 of CAATSA, a waiver or termination of sanctions pursuant to Section 236 would be subject to congressional review for a period of either 30 or 60 days (depending on the date the waiver or termination notice is filed), during which time the President is prohibited from taking those actions. An enacted joint resolution of disapproval (any resolution would be subject to presidential veto power) would prevent the waiver or termination.

[65] Since President Trump issued Executive Order 14347 on September 10, 2025, the Department of Defense has been "using a secondary Department of War designation."

[66] Department of Defense, "Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen M. Lord and Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy David J. Trachtenberg Press Briefing on DOD's Response to Turkey Accepting Delivery of the Russian S-400 Air and Missile Defense System," July 17, 2019.

[67] Selcan Hacaoglu et al., "Turkey in Line to Receive Six F-35 Jets If Trump Unblocks Sale," *Bloomberg*, July 8, 2026.

[68] CRS Insight IN11557, *Turkey: U.S. Sanctions Under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

[69] Barin Kayaoglu, "With F-35, Eurofighter Jets on Table, Turkey Cools Off on F-16 Deal," *Al-Monitor*, April 13, 2025.

[70] Gonul Tol of the Middle East Institute, quoted in Rosaleen Carroll, "Why Trump Bid to Lift CAATSA Sanctions on Turkey Faces Complicated Path," *Al-Monitor*, July 7, 2026.

A separate "modified waiver authority" under Section 231 (added via Section 1294 of P.L. 115-232) authorizes a national security waiver that is not subject to congressional review. This authority would require the President to certify (among other things) that the otherwise sanctionable activity "would not significantly increase the risk of compromising United States defense systems and operational capabilities."

In 2024, the Biden Administration signed a letter of offer and acceptance with Turkey for 40 new advanced F-16s,[71] but future implementation remains unclear given Turkey's interest in F-35s and its 2025 agreement with some European countries to purchase 20 new and possibly 24 second-hand (from Qatar and/or Oman) Eurofighter Typhoons.[72] (Qatar reportedly paused an initial transfer of 12 Typhoons to Turkey in spring 2026 amid regional security concerns during the U.S./Israel-Iran conflict.[73]) A Turkish acquisition of Typhoons would follow a practice that several other U.S. partners in the region—including Greece and a number of Arab states—have established in diversifying their Western suppliers of combat aircraft.[74]

The Turkish deployment of some F-16s to Turkish Cypriot-administered areas of northern Cyprus in March 2026 during the U.S./Israel-Iran conflict reportedly raised questions from a former congressional staffer related to the status quo in Cyprus, and possibly also to compliance with U.S. law.[75]

F-35 Aircraft and F110 Jet Engines

Section 1245 of the FY2020 NDAA permits the executive branch to waive the prohibition on transferring F-35s to Turkey 90 days after it certifies to Congress that Turkey

- no longer possesses the S–400 air and missile defense system or any other equipment, materials, or personnel associated with such system;
- has provided credible assurances that the Government of Turkey will not in the future accept delivery of such system; and
- has not, since July 31, 2019, purchased or accepted delivery of defense equipment from the Russian Federation in addition to the S–400 air and missile defense system that would increase the risk of compromising the capabilities of the F–35 aircraft and its associated systems.

While it is unclear what actions regarding the S-400 might lead to the executive branch to waive the prohibition on F-35 transfers and/or seek to waive or terminate CAATSA sanctions, possible options discussed in open sources include "dismantling and transferring the S-400 systems to the US-controlled section of Incirlik Air Base on Turkey's Mediterranean coast or to a Turkish military facility abroad," or transferring the S-400 to a third country (which could require Russian approval).[76] A media report has stated that Turkey may be in talks with Russia about a possible

[71] State Department Press Briefing, June 6, 2024.

[72] Paul Iddon, "Aside from Israel, Trump Wants to Sell Around 100 F-35s to Middle East," *Forbes*, January 2, 2026; "Oman fades out, Qatar fades in with 12 more Eurofighters," *TurDef*, January 22, 2026.

[73] Peter Suciu, "The Eurofighter Typhoon Is Set to Soar in Turkey," *National Interest*, August 3, 2026.

[74] Paul Iddon, "Turkey Questions the Wisdom of Having an All-American Air Force," *Forbes*, February 6, 2023.

[75] Damian Murphy, quoted in Lena Argiri, "Turkey's F-16 Move in Occupied Northern Cyprus Violates US Arms Export Rules," *Kathimerini*, March 16, 2026.

[76] Jared Szuba and Ezgi Akin, "Trump Hints at F-35 Breakthrough with Turkey Ahead of NATO Summit," *Al-Monitor*, June 25, 2026; Sarantis Michalopoulos and Bjorn Stritzel, "Israel, Greece on Alert as Turkey's Return to F-35 Heats Up," *Euractiv*, June 30, 2026; Daniella Cheslow et al., "Will Trump Deliver F-35s to Turkey over Congress?" *Politico*, July 7, 2026.

resale of Turkey's S-400 system to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[77] A transfer of the S-400 to the UAE might raise questions about the security of U.S. military technology in that country.[78]

Possible Sale of U.S.-Origin F110 Jet Engines

Turkey is developing a domestically produced fighter (known as Turkish Fighter (TF) Kaan or TF-X) with some stealth capabilities; it reportedly seeks to have operational versions of the Kaan ready for delivery by 2028-2029.[79] Current versions of the aircraft depend on U.S.-origin General Electric F110-GE-129E/F engines. According to some June 2026 sources, the Trump Administration reportedly chose to formally notify Congress of its intent to provide export licenses for a sale to Turkey of roughly 80 F110 engines for the TF Kaan, apparently overriding an informal hold on the transaction from House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Gregory Meeks.[80] In July, nine U.S. Representatives seeking to block the sale co-sponsored a joint resolution of disapproval (H.J.Res. 200). The potential engine sale may not be subject to CAATSA sanctions; one media report states it is expected to be conducted directly with Turkish Aerospace Industries rather than the entity under sanctions (Turkey's main defense procurement agency).[81]

Military Balance: Israel and Greece

A sale of F-35s to Turkey could decrease any relative military advantages that other countries possessing or seeking to acquire F-35s might have. Israel was the first foreign country to actively employ F-35s in military combat, and already operates 50 F-35s, with another 25 on order and expected to be delivered in 2027 or 2028.[82] Greece is reportedly scheduled to receive an initial delivery of 20 F-35s between 2028 and the early 2030s,[83] with the option to purchase an additional 20. If U.S. and Turkish officials resolve the S-400 issue, Turkey could potentially receive the six already-purchased F-35s within weeks or months,[84] with others coming years later.

Israeli and Greek officials have both reportedly communicated concerns about a U.S.-Turkey F-35 deal to U.S. counterparts.[85] According to one source, Greece is calling for any possible U.S. sale of advanced weapons systems to Turkey "to be accompanied by clear safeguards and assurances" that the systems cannot be used against another NATO member.[86]

One source has reported that amid Turkey-Israel rivalry for Middle Eastern influence, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sought to dissuade President Trump from an F-35 deal with Turkey by arguing that Turkish F-35s would threaten Israeli regional air superiority and that President Erdogan and Foreign Minister Fidan have made a series of "deeply troubling" remarks

[77] Ragip Soylu and Levent Kemal, "Russia Open to Turkey Selling S-400 Air Defence Systems to UAE, Sources Say," *Middle East Eye*, July 10, 2026.

[78] Sarantis Michalopoulos and Pietro Guastamacchia, "Turkey's S-400 Gulf Sale Plan Raises Security Concerns," *Euractiv*, July 13, 2026.

[79] Bea Castaneda, "TAI TF KAAN: Guide to Turkey's Next-Gen Fighter Jet," *Defense Post*, April 19, 2026.

[80] Clement Charpentreau, "US Notifies Congress of $700 Million Engine Sale to Turkey for KAAN Fighter," *AeroTime*, June 26, 2026; House Foreign Affairs Committee, "Meeks Issues Statement on State Department Bypassing Congress on Arms Sale to Turkey," June 24, 2026; "US to Move Forward with Turkey Jet Engine Sales Ahead of NATO Summit, Sources Say" Reuters, June 24, 2026.

[81] Sean Mathews, "No 'Magic Wand': Trump Faces Layers of Resistance on Turkey F-35 Deal," *Middle East Eye*, July 7, 2026.

[82] Ben Caspit, "Trump's F-35 Push for Turkey Runs into CAATSA—and Israel," *Al-Monitor*, July 7, 2026.

[83] Amichai Stein, "Trump's F-35 Offer to Turkey Alarms Greece, Athens Warns of Aegean Military Imbalance," *Jerusalem Post*, July 7, 2026.

[84] Selcan Hacaoglu et al., "Turkey in Line to Receive Six F-35 Jets If Trump Unblocks Sale," *Bloomberg*, July 8, 2026.

[85] Stein, "Trump's F-35 Offer to Turkey Alarms Greece, Athens Warns of Aegean Military Imbalance."

[86] Foteini Doulgkeri, "US Congress Battles over Allowing Turkey to Return to the F-35 Programme," *Euronews*, July 13, 2026.

about Israel.[87] Netanyahu has made similar arguments opposing transfers to Turkey of F-35 and F110 jet engines in U.S. television interviews.[88] During 2026, President Erdogan and other Turkish officials have asserted that they promote greater regional stability and that Israeli actions fuel instability and conflict.[89] One analyst has assessed that even in the best-case scenario for Turkish combat airpower, it is unlikely to outmatch Israel for years to come.[90] In the event U.S. officials approve F-35 transfers to Turkey, Israel reportedly may seek "a comprehensive American compensation package that would include additional precision-guided munitions, advanced weapons systems, expanded security and technological cooperation, and U.S. limitations on Turkey's military entrenchment in Syria."[91]

Congressional Views

Perspectives from Members of Congress vary regarding a prospective U.S. sale of F-35s to Turkey. Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) Chairman Jim Risch has stated hope that "Turkey will finally agree to end their possession of the S-400s and put this issue behind us."[92] SFRC Ranking Member Jeanne Shaheen and Senator Mike Rounds have welcomed giving Turkey access to the F-35 if Turkey resolves concerns about the S-400's possible misappropriation of F-35 technology.[93] Senator Chris Coons has argued that deploying the S-400 somewhere else would not resolve the underlying national security concerns regarding possible technology misappropriation.[94]

In July 2026, some Members of Congress registered concerns directly with the Trump Administration. A group of 10 Representatives wrote a letter to President Trump arguing, "With President Erdogan's continued aggression toward our greatest partners along with his troubling defense partnerships with our adversaries, it is not in the best interest of our country to sell them F-35s."[95] A group of 10 Representatives reportedly sent a different letter to President Trump stating that his possible willingness to lift sanctions and provide F-35s to Turkey "without substantial concessions raises serious questions about your Administration's personal dealings with the Turkish government."[96] In a reported response to this second letter, the State Department (on behalf of the President) wrote that Turkey had "not yet met" the conditions for F-35 transfer

[87] Caspit, "Trump's F-35 Push for Turkey Runs into CAATSA—and Israel."

[88] "Netanyahu Warns Turkey Should Not Get F-35s, Citing Erdoğan's Hostility Toward NATO Allies," Fox News, July 6, 2026; "Exclusive: Netanyahu Tells CNN He Opposes US Sale of F-35 Jets to Turkey as He Downplays Divisions with Trump," CNN, July 7, 2026.

[89] "Erdogan Says Israel's Attacks on Syria, Lebanon Threaten Turkey Too," Reuters, June 10, 2026; Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Press Conference by Foreign Minister H.E. Hakan Fidan Following the Informal Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Turkic States, 7 March 2026, Istanbul."

[90] Paul Iddon, "Israel Opposes Turkey F-35 Sale as Russia Prepares Iran Su-35 Delivery," *Forbes*, July 7, 2026.

[91] Yoni Ben Menachem, "Israel and Turkey Compete for Regional Hegemony," Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, July 14, 2026.

[92] Ezgi Akin and Jared Szuba, "Trump 'Undecided' on Turkey's F-35s as Congress Seeks Answers on S-400," *Al-Monitor*, July 8, 2026.

[93] Daniella Cheslow et al., "Will Trump Deliver F-35s to Turkey over Congress?"

[94] Akin and Szuba, "Trump 'Undecided' on Turkey's F-35s as Congress Seeks Answers on S-400."

[95] Text of July 2, 2026, letter at https://lawler.house.gov/uploadedfiles/f35letter.pdf.

[96] Purported text of July 10, 2026, letter at https://image.jewishinsider.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/09213508/7.10.26-Letter-to-POTUS-on-Erdogan-With-Watermark.pdf.

eligibility under U.S. law, and that the Department is committed to a process to resolve the issue that is "transparent, lawful, and consistent with the US national security interests."[97]

Additionally, a group of 18 Representatives wrote a letter to House Majority Leader Steve Scalise and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries requesting that they introduce a joint resolution of disapproval under CAATSA if the Administration seeks to readmit Turkey "to the F-35 program through means that circumvent or waive the statutory requirements of CAATSA without a credible legal basis."[98]

Air and Missile Defense Options

With the S-400 seemingly not part of Turkey's permanent defense architecture against ballistic missiles, Turkey has an apparent need for an alternative while it continues domestic development of its Steel Dome integrated air defense system.[99] NATO's apparent effectiveness in helping defend Turkey during the 2026 U.S./Israel-Iran conflict may have influenced Turkey's stated willingness to consider purchasing either U.S. Patriot or Franco-Italian SAMP/T air defense systems. Defense Minister Yasar Guler has expressed a preference for options featuring technology sharing and joint production.[100]

Turkey-Israel Tensions and Rivalry

Gaza and Hamas

Since the October 2023 Hamas-led attacks and hostage-taking in Israel, and ensuing war, Turkey-Israel ties have come under strain. Despite maintaining diplomatic relations to date, Israel withdrew its diplomats from Turkey in October 2023 amid the renewed difficulties with Turkey, and Turkey withdrew its ambassador from Israel in November 2023.[101] Turkey and Erdogan had been improving relations with Israel prior to October 2023, and Turkey had said that the countries were contemplating closer energy cooperation.[102] Tension between Turkey and Israel on Palestinian issues flared up previously on a number of previous occasions, including in 2010 when Israeli commandos killed ten Turkish citizens in clashes aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, part of a private Turkish flotilla seeking to provide relief supplies to the Gaza Strip despite Israeli maritime restrictions.

The Turkish and Israeli governments have grown further apart over the past three years. In response to Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza, Turkey officially suspended its trade in goods with Israel until "a permanent cease-fire is established and uninterrupted humanitarian aid is allowed into Gaza."[103] In 2025, Israeli trade data and other open sources reportedly revealed that

[97] Lena Argiri, "Turkey Doesn't Meet Legal Conditions to Rejoin F-35 Program, State Department Tells Congress," *Kathimerini*, July 22, 2026.

[98] X, Dina Titus (@repdinatitus), July 7, 2026, 12:02 PM, https://x.com/repdinatitus/status/2074524496938065960; "18 Members of Congress Speak Out Against Turkey's Reinstatement in the F-35 Program," *Oema*, July 7, 2026.

[99] Can Kasapoglu, "Air Defense in the Age of Saturation: Europe After the Post-Cold War Peace Dividend Illusion and Turkey's Steel Dome," Atlantic Council, March 11, 2026.

[100] "Turkey Says NATO Adjusting to Security Landscape, US Not Withdrawing," Reuters, June 30, 2026; Ezgi Akin, "As It Hosts NATO, Turkey Eyes France's SAMP/T System, F-35 Progress with Trump," *Al-Monitor*, July 6, 2026.

[101] The countries' ambassadors had arrived at their respective posts less than a year before, in December 2022, after having previously withdrawn on a reciprocal basis in 2018.

[102] "Erdogan Says Turkey, Israel to Take Steps in Energy Drilling Soon, Media Report," Reuters, September 21, 2023.

[103] Gulsin Harman and Ben Hubbard, "Turkey Halts Trade with Israel amid Deteriorating Relations," *New York Times*,

(continued...)

exports from Turkey to Israel may have continued at a reduced level via third countries.[104] Some reports suggest that ships from the Turkish port of Ceyhan may still supply Israel with oil piped from Azerbaijan, possibly comprising around 45% of Israel's oil imports.[105]

Adding to strains with Israel, Turkey has provided consistent political support to Hamas, and has hosted Hamas political officials from time to time. Turkey also maintains ties with Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, who administers partial PA self-rule in the West Bank[106] and heads Hamas's secular rival faction Fatah.

A Department of the Treasury official visited Turkey in November 2023 and raised concern about Hamas's ability to operate in Turkey to fund potential future attacks; Turkish officials reportedly responded that while they do not consider Hamas to be a terrorist group, Turkey "would not tolerate violations of domestic laws including money laundering and direct funding of violent acts."[107] Since October 2023, Treasury has imposed sanctions on several Turkey-based Hamas operatives or Hamas-linked companies.[108]

Turkey, along with Egypt and Qatar, helped the United States mediate the October 2025 Israel-Hamas ceasefire in Gaza. While U.S. officials have continued to involve Turkey in efforts to convince Hamas to help implement the U.S. 20-point plan for Gaza that the UN Security Council endorsed in Resolution 2803 (November 2025), Israeli leaders have sought to minimize both Turkey's and Qatar's level of involvement in implementation, citing concerns about their pro-Hamas views and actions.[109] In June 2026, an Israeli media report cited Israel's Shin Bet security agency (formally known as the Israel Security Agency) as saying that Hamas personnel based in Turkey help direct and implement militant operations in the West Bank and Israel.[110] In August 2026, after Israel initially rejected a roadmap set forth by the President Trump-led Board of Peace for completing implementation of the 20-point plan for Gaza, Turkey and seven other Muslim-majority countries issued a statement that condemned Israel's action as obstructing U.S.-led peace efforts, and denounced any attempt to deny or foreclose Palestinian statehood.[111]

May 3, 2024. In August 2024, Turkey submitted a declaration of intervention to the International Court of Justice in support of the case filed by South Africa against Israel under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Some other countries have also intervened.

[104] "Turkey's Exports To Israel Hit $393.7 Mln in Early 2025 Despite Official Embargo," *Turkish Minute*, July 2, 2025.

[105] "Israel's Imports of Azerbaijani Oil via Turkey Jump Despite Ankara's Trade Ban," Reuters, January 21, 2026; "Iran Threat to 'Enemy Oil Lines' Raises Fear over Azerbaijan-Turkey Pipeline Supplying Israel," *Middle East Eye*, March 3, 2026.

[106] The U.S. Board on Geographic Names and Department of State refer to the territory as the West Bank. See https://fam.state.gov/FAM/05FAH03/05FAH030410.html. Some U.S. lawmakers and some Israelis refer to the territory as "Judea and Samaria," the biblical names for the region. Recognizing Judea and Samaria Act (S. 384 and H.R. 902); Ephrat Livni, "U.S. Evangelicals Press for Annexation of West Bank," *New York Times*, March 10, 2025.

[107] "U.S. Presses Sceptical Turkey to Curb Hamas Fundraising," Reuters, November 30, 2023.

[108] See, for example, Treasury Department, "Treasury Disrupts Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas Financial Networks," July 23, 2026; "U.S. and UK Target Additional Hamas Finance Officials and Representatives," December 13, 2023.

[109] Balig Sladeen, "The Real Story Behind Israel's Gaza Plan 'Rejection'—And Where It Goes from Here—Analysis," i24 News, August 13, 2026.

[110] Elisha Ben Kimon, "Dozens of West Bank Terror Attacks Directed by Turkey-Based Hamas Operatives Foiled, Shin Bet Says," *Ynetnews*, June 21, 2026.

[111] Turkish Foreign Ministry, "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Türkiye, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE, 16 August 2026."

Syria and Broader Region

The apparently deepening rivalry between Turkey and Israel is probably most visible in Syria. Since Sunni Islamist figures came to power in Syria in late 2024, Israel has sought to counter Turkey's growing influence with Syria's government and a continued Turkish military presence in northern Syria, with some Israeli military operations reportedly undertaken to prevent Turkey's transfer of major weapons systems to Syrian bases.[112] Israel's military has controlled some areas of southern Syria since shortly after the late 2024 change in power.[113] In August 2025, Turkey and Syria signed a "joint training consultancy memorandum of understanding [MOU]" as an apparent step toward a substantive military cooperation deal.[114]

In August 2026, Israeli aircraft reportedly struck an airbase in northern Syria shortly after a visit from a Turkish military delegation, leading one analyst to conclude that the strike was intended to dissuade Turkey from using the base to project influence in Syria.[115] Open sources referenced various statements or reported comments from Israeli, Turkish, and Syrian officials on the Israeli strike and the extent of past or potential future Turkish military involvement at the base.[116] Ambassador Barrack, who is also Special Presidential Envoy for Syria and Iraq, expressed concern that the Israeli attack was "an unnecessary escalation that does not advance regional stability,"[117] and said that U.S. officials are discussing the possible relaunch of a deconfliction cell between Israel and Syria, with Turkey as a potential "direct or indirect participant."[118]

According to a Turkish analyst, direct Turkey-Israel confrontation "remains unlikely because both sides recognize its potentially severe costs. However, their respective red lines are becoming increasingly sensitive. Turkey prioritizes Syria's territorial integrity and supports the strengthening of state institutions, while Israel seeks to maintain a security buffer and operational freedom in southern Syria."[119] A European analyst has said, "I don't think either Turkey or Israel is in the mood for conflict any time soon. But the longer-term trajectory is worrying. Hostile, threatening rhetoric is becoming normalized, and their respective spheres of influence aren't well delineated."[120]

The mutual suspicions and threat perceptions of Turkey and Israel seem to have become more open-ended, extending to the Eastern Mediterranean and Horn of Africa as each vies for advantages by building regional relationships to encircle or counter the other, and by attempting

[112] Francesco Salesio Schiavi, "Why Syria's T4 Airbase Could Become a New Flashpoint in Turkey and Israel's Rivalry," *The New Arab*, April 8, 2025.

[113] CRS Report R44245, *Israel: Major Issues and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

[114] Ragip Soylu, "Turkey-Syria Defence Deal Covers Training and Weapons Supply," *Middle East Eye*, August 14, 2025.

[115] Muaz Al Abdullah, "Did Israel Strike a Syrian Airbase to Block Turkey's Military Ambitions?" Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, August 18, 2026.

[116] X, Prime Minister of Israel (@IsraeliPM), August 18, 2026, 4:19 PM; Ragip Soylu and Levent Kemal, "'Playing with Fire': Israel's Syria Strike Tests Turkey After Mecca Defence Pact," *Middle East Eye*, August 19, 2026; Barak Ravid, "Syrian Foreign Minister to Axios: Israeli Bombing of Airbase Was Unjustified," Axios, August 19, 2026; Barak Ravid, "Israel Defends Strike on Syria as U.S. Frustration with Bibi Grows," Axios, August 18, 2026.

[117] X, Ambassador Tom Barrack (@USAMBTurkiye), August 18, 2026, 6:44 AM, https://x.com/USAMBTurkiye/status/2089664751584288836.

[118] Amichai Stein, "Israel's Syria Strike Risked Scrambling Turkish Jets, Military Escalation, US Envoy Tells 'Post,'" *Jerusalem Post*, August 19, 2026.

[119] Hande Ortay of KTO Karatay University, quoted in Giorgia Valente, "How Turkey Views Its Post-Iran-War Strategic Relationship with Israel," *Media Line*, June 25, 2026.

[120] Aron Lund of Century International, quoted in Barin Kayaoglu, "Erdogan-Netanyahu War of Words Signals Deeper Rivalry for Regional Influence," *Al-Monitor*, June 14, 2026.

to influence U.S. views and actions. According to an Israeli journalist, Turkey seeks Washington's backing for its "desire to serve as the principal counterweight to Iran instead of Israel."[121] One Turkish analyst has indicated that "Israel sees Turkey as a different kind of challenge because [unlike Iran] Ankara is both regionally assertive and embedded in Western structures."[122] Another has written that in forging closer ties with countries like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt, Turkey is intent on "building a wider coalition of capable states that can hedge Israel's military dominance and resist Israeli diplomatic pressure," and that "full strategic alignment" with these states appears to be less of a Turkish priority than "preventing the emergence of an Israeli-led, anti-Turkey bloc in the Mediterranean or the Middle East."[123]

Russia and Ukraine

U.S. and Turkish interests may overlap to some extent in countering Russian aims in its ongoing war with Ukraine. Turkey has helped strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities in parallel with other NATO countries (even assisting with U.S. arms manufacturing),[124] closed the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits to belligerent warships,[125] and helped facilitate Ukrainian grain exports. Amid international efforts to facilitate a ceasefire, Ukraine has openly sought Turkish security guarantees for Ukraine (alongside similar efforts to procure U.S. and EU guarantees), with a potential leading role for Turkey in Black Sea maritime security.[126] In August 2026, the Russian foreign ministry warned that a possible delivery by Turkey of U.S.-origin missiles and cluster munitions to Ukraine could harm Russia's bilateral relations "with Washington and Ankara."[127]

Turkey-Ukraine Defense Cooperation

Turkey and Ukraine have strengthened their relations since Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014. In 2017, a Turkish security analyst attributed these closer ties to growing mutual interests in countering Russian influence in the Black Sea region and in sharing military technology to expand and increase the self-sufficiency of their respective defense industries.[128] Since 2020, the two countries have signed multiple agreements signifying closer cooperation, including a 2022 free trade agreement that came into force in August 2024.[129]

[121] Caspit, "Trump's F-35 Push for Turkey Runs into CAATSA—and Israel."

[122] Mustafa Metin Kaslilar of the Turkish Foreign Policy Research Center, cited in Valente, "How Turkey Views Its Post-Iran-War Strategic Relationship with Israel."

[123] Asli Aydintasbas, "Turkey's Search for a Middle East Order," Brookings Institution, June 16, 2026.

[124] Doug Cameron, "How a Texas Factory Is Emerging as a Key Ammo Supplier for the U.S., Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 2024.

[125] Turkey generally closed the Straits to belligerents (affecting Russia far more than Ukraine because of the disparity between their Black Sea naval contingents) pursuant to Article 19 of the 1936 Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits (the "Montreux Convention"). In March 2022 correspondence with CRS, a Turkish official explained that Turkey had advised all countries to refrain from sending warships through the Straits, but had not formally closed the Straits to non-belligerent states. This stance toward non-belligerents generated debate over whether Turkey was putting NATO countries at a disadvantage. CRS Insight IN11885, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Turkey's Response and Black Sea Access Issues*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

[126] Ragip Soylu, "Turkey Edges Closer to Leading Black Sea Mission Under Ukraine Security Guarantees," *Middle East Eye*, January 6, 2026.

[127] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Comment by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova regarding plans by the United States and Türkiye to supply arms to Kiev," August 15, 2026. See also Levent Kenez, "Turkey's Western-Backed Ukraine Arms Deal Tests Ties with Russia," *Nordic Monitor*, August 19, 2026.

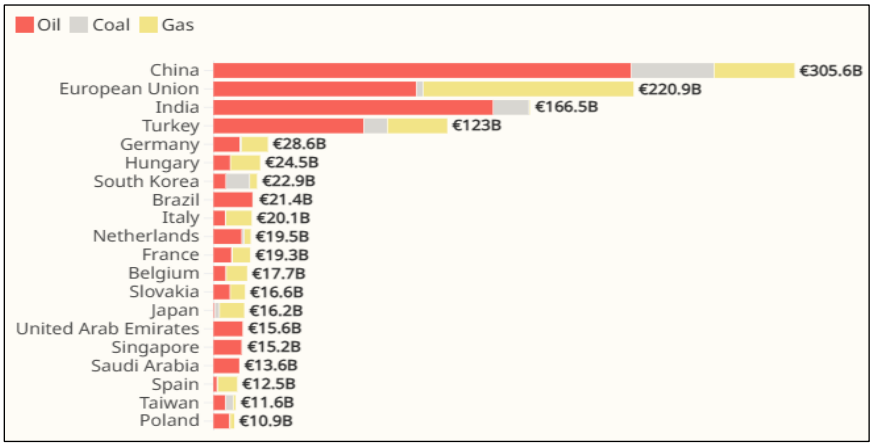
[128] Metin Gurcan, "Turkey-Ukraine Defense Industry Ties Are Booming," *Al-Monitor*, May 1, 2017.

[129] "Free trade Agreement Between Turkey and Ukraine Comes into Force," Platts, August 5, 2024.

In line with these agreements, Turkish and Ukrainian companies have engaged in or planned a significant expansion of defense transactions, including a number of joint development or co-production initiatives.[130] Turkish expertise with drone and other aircraft and naval platforms complements Ukrainian skills in designing and constructing aerospace engines and missiles.[131] As part of the deepening bilateral defense cooperation, Turkey has sold armed drones to Ukraine,[132] and Turkish drone manufacturer Baykar Technology was reportedly close to beginning production at a newly built factory in Ukraine when the facility was reportedly struck by Russian forces in August 2025.[133] Additionally, Turkey is helping establish Ukraine's naval capabilities by producing corvettes (small warships) for export.[134]

Turkey retains close energy and economic ties with Russia (see **Figure 3**), which is a major oil and natural gas supplier to Turkey. Pipelines through Turkey are currently the main route for Russian natural gas to European markets, and other pipelines through Turkey carry non-Russian gas to Europe from the Caspian Sea basin. To avoid being targeted by U.S. sanctions against Russia's Gazprombank, Turkey reportedly arranged to route its payments for gas imports via the Russian subsidiary of an Austrian bank, with an unnamed senior Turkish official cited in May 2025 as saying that "Washington was comfortable with this solution."[135]

Figure 3. Top Buyers of Russian Energy Since February 24, 2022



Source: *Newsweek* (March 2026), with underlying data from Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

While Russia remains the largest energy exporter to Turkey, the share of Russian oil and gas imported by Turkey in 2025 dropped below 50% for oil and 40% for gas.[136] A June 2026 *Foreign*

[130] Can Kasapoglu, "Turkish Drone Strategy in the Black Sea Region and Beyond," Jamestown Foundation, October 12, 2022; Pinar Dost, "The Ukraine-Turkey defense partnership with the potential to transform Black Sea and Euro-Atlantic security," Atlantic Council, March 5, 2024.

[131] Kasapoglu, "Turkish Drone Strategy in the Black Sea Region and Beyond."

[132] Ivan Khomenko, "Ukraine's Bayraktar TB2 Returns to Combat—Why Now, and Where Has It Been?" *United24 Media*, June 26, 2025.

[133] "Russian Strike Hits Turkish Drone Maker Baykar's Factory in Kyiv," *Türkiye Today*, August 28, 2025; Maria Tril, "Russia Strikes Bayraktar Drone Factory in Kyiv for Fourth Time in Six Months," *Euromaidan Press*, August 28, 2025.

[134] Kate Tringham, "Update: Turkey Launches First Ada-Class Corvette for Ukraine and Cuts Steel for Second," *Janes Navy International*, October 3, 2022.

[135] Ragip Soylu, "Turkey Taps Austrian Bank for Russian Gas Payments to Skip Sanctions," *Middle East Eye*, May 24, 2025.

[136] "Turkey Boosts Oil Imports 6% In 2025, Supplies from Russia Decrease 10%," Interfax, February 13, 2026; Eser Ozdil, "Turkey's Gas Diversification Strategy and Rising Share of LNG," Atlantic Council, March 3, 2026.

Affairs analysis described the following recent Turkish steps to reduce dependence on Russian energy:

> In 2025, it [Turkey] held talks with Iran to increase the flow of gas from Turkmenistan and accelerated plans to boost imports of liquefied natural gas from the United States and other non-Russian suppliers. Ankara quietly shelved plans first proposed by [Russian President Vladimir] Putin in 2022 to establish a Russian gas hub in Turkey, which Western governments had warned could allow Moscow to evade import restrictions by blending its gas with that of other supplies. Last year, Turkey extended expiring Russian gas contracts by only one year—but agreed to a 15-year deal to purchase roughly 1,500 LNG cargoes from the United States.... And after U.S. President Donald Trump urged Erdogan during a September 2025 White House meeting to reduce Turkey's purchases of Russian energy, the country's largest refineries started buying crude from Iraq, Kazakhstan, and other non-Russian producers, contributing to a more than 60 percent drop in Russian oil exports to Turkey in October.[137]

U.S. and European Union sanctions imposed on Russian energy since 2025 may further affect Turkey-Russia oil trade.[138]

Some sources have suggested that some Russian "shadow fleet" oil tankers seeking to evade Western sanctions have traversed the Bosphorus strait without full scrutiny from Turkish authorities, and with the participation of Turkish sailors specially qualified to navigate the strait. In late 2025, Ukrainian drone attacks on three tankers in the Black Sea region apparently triggered Russian strikes on three Turkish-owned cargo ships in Ukrainian ports.[139]

Turkey has not joined Western economic sanctions against Russia. Turkish leaders have said they do not consider Turkey bound by other countries' sanctions against Russia, but would prevent the use of Turkish jurisdiction to evade sanctions. In February 2025, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Justice Department investigators found that Russian transfers of more than $5 billion to banks in Turkey in 2022—ostensibly for Turkey's first nuclear power plant, which Russia's state-owned Rosatom is building—were used "to dance around U.S. sanctions imposed on Russia's central bank."[140] Reportedly largely in response to U.S. actions (including sanctions designations on some Turkey-based entities and individuals[141]), Turkey has greatly decreased its trade with Russia in items with potential defense applications, according to some open sources.[142]

Author Information

Jim Zanotti
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

Clayton Thomas
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

[137] Gonul Tol, "Turkey's Quiet Realignment," *Foreign Affairs*, June 10, 2026.

[138] Treasury Department, "Treasury Sanctions Major Russian Oil Companies, Calls on Moscow to Immediately Agree to Ceasefire," October 22, 2025; Ray Furlong, "New Sanctions on Russian Oil Hit Indian, Turkish Refineries. Enter China?" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 18, 2026.

[139] Durrie Bouscaren, "Turkey Is in the Crosshairs over Russian's Ghost Fleet," NPR, December 25, 2025.

[140] Joe Wallace et al., "Moscow Has $2 Billion Stuck at JPMorgan," *Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2025.

[141] Treasury Department, "Treasury Takes Aim at Third-Country Sanctions Evaders and Russian Producers Supporting Russia's Military Industrial Base," October 30, 2024; "U.S. Continues to Degrade Russia's Military-Industrial Base and Target Third-Country Support with Nearly 300 New Sanctions," May 1, 2024.

[142] Adam Samson et al., "Turkey Blocks Exports of Military-Linked Goods to Russia After US Warning," *Financial Times*, October 22, 2024.

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