Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations

Updated November 9, 2020

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
R41368

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

SUMMARY

R41368

November 9, 2020

Jim Zanotti
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

Clayton Thomas
Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs

Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations

U.S.-Turkey tensions have raised questions about the future of bilateral relations and have led to congressional action against Turkey, including informal holds on major new arms sales (such as upgrades to F-16 aircraft) and efforts to impose sanctions. Nevertheless, both countries' officials emphasize the importance of continued U.S.-Turkey cooperation and Turkey's membership in NATO. Observers voice concerns about the largely authoritarian rule of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey's polarized electorate could affect Erdogan's future leadership. His biggest challenge may be structural weaknesses in Turkey's economy—including a sharp decline in Turkey's currency—that have worsened since the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic began. The following are key factors in the U.S.-Turkey relationship.

Turkey's strategic orientation and U.S./NATO basing. Traditionally, Turkey has relied closely on the United States and NATO for defense cooperation, European countries for trade and investment, and Russia and Iran for energy imports. A number of complicated situations in Turkey's surrounding region—including those involving Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh (a region disputed by Armenia and Azerbaijan), and Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration—affect its relationships with the United States and other key actors, as Turkey seeks a more independent role. President Erdogan's concerns about maintaining his parliamentary coalition with Turkish nationalists may partly explain his actions in some of the situations mentioned above. Turkey-Russia cooperation has grown in some areas. However, Turkish efforts to counter Russia in several theaters of conflict at relatively low cost—using domestically produced drone aircraft (reportedly with some U.S. components) and Syrian mercenaries—suggest that Turkey-Russia cooperation is situational rather than comprehensive in scope.

Since Turkey's 2019 agreement with Libya's Government of National Accord on Eastern Mediterranean maritime boundaries, and its increased involvement in Libya's civil war, Turkey's tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean with countries such as Cyprus and Greece have become more intertwined with its rivalry with Sunni Arab states such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia. In this context, some observers have advocated that the United States explore alternative basing arrangements for U.S. and NATO military assets in Turkey—including a possible arsenal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons at Incirlik Air Base. The August 2020 agreement between Israel and the UAE to normalize their ties could increase tensions between Turkey and these other regional U.S. allies and partners.

Russian S-400 purchase and U.S. responses. Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system led to its removal by the United States from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program. The S-400 deliveries that began in July 2019 also reportedly triggered informal congressional holds on major new arms sales. If Turkey transitions to major Russian weapons platforms with multi-decade lifespans, it is unclear how it can stay closely integrated with NATO on defense matters. The S-400 deal could trigger U.S. sanctions under Section 231 of the Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017 (CRIEEA, title II of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA; P.L. 115-44). President Trump has reportedly delayed CAATSA sanctions while seeking to persuade Turkey to refrain from operating the S-400. It is unclear how sanctions against Turkey could affect its economy, trade, and defense procurement. Future U.S. actions in response to Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 could affect U.S. arms sales and sanctions with respect to other U.S. partners who have purchased or may purchase advanced weapons from Russia—including India, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

Congressional initiatives and other U.S. actions. Congressional and executive branch action on arms sales, sanctions, or military basing regarding Turkey and its rivals could have implications for bilateral ties, U.S. political-military options in the region, and Turkey's strategic orientation and financial well-being. How closely to engage Erdogan's government could depend on U.S. perceptions of his popular legitimacy, likely staying power, and the extent to which a successor might change his policies in light of geopolitical, historical, and economic considerations.

Contents

Introduction and Issues for Congress ... 1
Country Overview and the Erdogan Era ... 2
Political Assessment ... 4
Economic Assessment ... 7
Overview and Currency Problems ... 7
Energy ... 8
The Kurdish Issue ... 11
Background ... 11
Government Approaches to the Kurds ... 12
Religious Minorities ... 12
Halki Seminary and Hagia Sophia ... 13
Alevis ... 14
Turkey's Strategic Orientation and Military Involvement ... 14
U.S./NATO Presence ... 16
Issues with Other U.S./NATO Allies ... 18
Eastern Mediterranean and Offshore Natural Gas ... 18
Middle East and Libyan Civil War ... 19
The Syrian Conflict ... 20
Countering the Syrian Kurdish YPG ... 21
Turkish-Occupied Areas and Idlib ... 23
Role in Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute: Armenia and Azerbaijan ... 24
Turkish Defense Procurement ... 25
Background ... 25
U.S. Arms Sales and Aid ... 26
Key Weapons Systems and Turkey's Relationships: S-400, F-35, Patriot ... 27
Drones: Domestic Production, U.S. and Western Components, and Exports ... 28
Congressional Scrutiny: U.S. Responses and Options ... 31
Outlook ... 34

Figures

Figure 1. Turkey at a Glance ... 2
Figure 2. Turkey: 2018 Parliamentary Election Results in Context ... 6
Figure 3. Turkish Currency Reserves ... 8
Figure 4. Turkish Natural Gas Imports by Country ... 9
Figure 5. Turkey and Southeastern European Gas Infrastructure ... 10
Figure 6. Map of U.S. and NATO Military Presence in Turkey ... 17
Figure 7. Competing Claims in the Eastern Mediterranean ... 19
Figure 8. Syria-Turkey Border ... 22
Figure 9. Arms Imports as a Share of Turkish Military Spending ... 26
Figure 10. Bayraktar TB2 Drone ... 29
Figure 11. Turkish Military Export Statistics ... 31

Appendixes

Appendix A. Turkey's Foreign Policy Relationships 35
Appendix B. Profiles of Key Figures in Turkey 43
Appendix C. Timeline of Turkey's Involvement in Syria (2011-2020) 46
Appendix D. Significant U.S.-Origin Arms Transfers or Possible Arms Transfers to Turkey 48

Contacts

Author Information 49

Introduction and Issues for Congress

While U.S.-Turkey ties have always been complicated, tensions in recent years have produced a number of crises and have led to questions about the status and future of the bilateral relationship. Although the United States and Turkey, NATO allies since 1952, share some vital interests, harmonizing priorities can be difficult. These priorities sometimes diverge irrespective of who leads the two countries, based on contrasting geography, threat perceptions, and regional roles. This report provides background information and analysis on the following topics:

- **Turkey's domestic setting.** President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, or AKP), in power since 2003, rule in a largely authoritarian manner. Erdogan has steadily consolidated control through elections and increasing dominance over the country's security apparatus and other key institutions. Erdogan's biggest challenge may be structural weaknesses in Turkey's economy—including a sharp decline in Turkey's currency—that have worsened since the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic began. Concerns about maintaining his political support and the AKP's parliamentary coalition with the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyet Halk Partisi*, or MHP) may partly explain Erdogan's policies in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, and his efforts to weaken domestic minorities (including the Kurds) and opponents.
- **Turkey's strategic orientation.** Policy differences and public acrimony between Turkey and the United States have fueled concern about their relationship and about Turkey's status as a U.S. ally and NATO member. Turkey appears to compartmentalize its relationships with United States, Russia, the European Union (EU), China, and its regional neighbors depending on various circumstances (see **Appendix A**). For example, Turkey has purchased an S-400 surface-to-air defense system from Russia and cooperates with it in some other areas, but also has blocked or opposed Russian interests in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh (a region disputed by Armenia and Azerbaijan).
- **Congressional scrutiny and U.S. responses and options.** U.S.-Turkey tensions have led to a number of congressional initiatives and other U.S. actions. These include informal congressional holds and proposed legislation aimed at restricting arms sales, possible sanctions on Turkey, and other efforts to limit strategic cooperation or empower Turkey's rivals.

According to the Turkish Coalition of America, a non-governmental organization that promotes positive Turkish-American relations, as of November 2020, there are at least 101 Members of the House of Representatives (98 of whom are voting Members), and four Senators in the Congressional Caucus on Turkey and Turkish Americans.[1] Reduced caucus membership numbers since 2018 may reflect the increased difficulties in bilateral relations and congressional concerns about Turkey's trajectory under President Erdogan.

[1] See http://www.tc-america.org/in-congress/caucus.htm.

Figure 1. Turkey at a Glance

Geography	*Area:* 783,562 sq km (302,535 sq. mile), slightly larger than Texas
People	*Population:* 82,017,514. Most populous cities: Istanbul 15.2 mil, Ankara 5.1 mil, Izmir 3 mil, Bursa 2.0 mil, Adana 1.8 mil, Gaziantep 1.7 mil. *% of Population 14 or Younger:* 23.4% *Ethnic Groups:* Turks 70%-75%; Kurds 19%; Other minorities 7%-12% (2016) *Religion:* Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), Others (mainly Christian and Jewish) 0.2% (2017) *Literacy:* 96.2% (male 98.8%, female 93.5%) (2017)
Economy	*GDP Per Capita (at purchasing power parity):* $26,768 *Real GDP Growth:* -3.9% (2020), 3.6% (2021 projection) *Inflation:* 11.9% *Unemployment:* 14.6% *Budget Deficit as % of GDP:* 5.6% *Public Debt as % of GDP:* 38.0% *Current Account Deficit as % of GDP:* 3.7% *International currency reserves:* $81.9 billion

Source: Graphic created by CRS. Map boundaries and information generated by Hannah Fischer using Department of State Boundaries (2011); Esri (2014); ArcWorld (2014); DeLorme (2014). Fact information (2020 estimates unless otherwise specified) from International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database; Economist Intelligence Unit; and Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*.

Country Overview and the Erdogan Era

Turkey's large and diversified economy, strong military, Muslim-majority population, and geographic position straddling Europe and the Middle East make it a significant regional power. For decades since its founding in the 1920s, the Turkish republic had relied upon its military, judiciary, and other bastions of its Kemalist (a term inspired by Turkey's republican founder,

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk) "secular elite" to protect it from political and ideological extremes—sacrificing at least some of its democratic vitality in the process. Major political developments in Turkey over the past two decades appear to stem partly from significant socioeconomic changes that began in the 1980s. The military-guided governments that came to power after Turkey's 1980 coup helped establish Turkey's export-driven economy. This led to the gradual political awakening of a largely Sunni Muslim middle class from Turkey's Anatolian heartland.

These changes helped fuel Turkey's dramatic transformation after 2002, led by the Islamist-leaning AKP and President (formerly Prime Minister) Erdogan. The AKP won governing majorities four times—2002, 2007, 2011, and 2015—during a period in which Turkey's economy generally enjoyed growth and stability.

During his first decade as Turkey's leader, Erdogan worked to reduce the political power of the "secular elite." He subsequently clashed with other possible rival power centers, including previous allies in the Fethullah Gulen movement.[2] Domestic polarization intensified after 2013: nationwide antigovernment protests that began in Istanbul's Gezi Park took place that year, and corruption allegations later surfaced against a number of Erdogan's colleagues in and out of government.[3]

After Erdogan became president in August 2014 via Turkey's first-ever popular presidential election, he claimed a mandate for increasing his power and pursuing a "presidential system" of governance. Analyses of Erdogan sometimes characterize him as one or more of the following: a pragmatic populist, a protector of traditionally marginalized groups, a budding authoritarian, or an Islamic ideologue.[4] While there may be some similarities between Turkey under Erdogan and countries like Russia, Iran, or China, some factors distinguish Turkey from them. For example, unlike Russia or Iran, Turkey's economy cannot rely on significant rents from natural resources if foreign sources of revenue or investment dry up. Unlike Russia and China, Turkey does not have nuclear weapons under its command and control. Additionally, unlike all three others, Turkey's economic, political, and national security institutions and traditions have been closely connected with those of the West for decades.

Erdogan's consolidation of power has continued and arguably accelerated since 2014. After Erdogan survived a July 2016 coup attempt staged by rogue military officers, Turkey's parliament approved a state of emergency. The state of emergency enabled Turkish authorities to target many of Erdogan's political opponents and civil society critics beyond those with proven connections to the coup attempt. More than 60,000 Turks were arrested and 130,000 dismissed from government posts.[5] Erdogan and his supporters also gained greater control over the country's government, security, educational, media, and business institutions.[6] After winning controversial victories in an April 2017 constitutional referendum and June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections, (see below), Erdogan's presidential powers expanded. In July 2018, parliament lifted the state of emergency, but enacted many of its features into law for another three years. However, the positive economic conditions that helped propel Erdogan's early political popularity have turned

[2] For more on Gulen and the Gulen movement, see CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

[3] Freedom House, *Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media, and Power in Turkey*, February 3, 2014.

[4] See, e.g., Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017; Burak Kadercan, "Erdogan's Last Off-Ramp: Authoritarianism, Democracy, and the Future of Turkey," *War on the Rocks*, July 28, 2016.

[5] Carlotta Gall, "Turkish Leader's Next Target in Crackdown on Dissent: The Internet," *New York Times*, March 4, 2018.

[6] Kareem Fahim, "As Erdogan prepares for new term, Turkey dismisses more than 18,000 civil servants," *Washington Post*, July 8, 2018.

into largely negative ones in the past two years, raising questions about how much popularity he can maintain over time.

Human Rights Concerns in Turkey

During the second decade of President Erdogan's leadership of Turkey, domestic and international observers have raised claims about human rights violations that they assert—amid some opposing views—are more widespread and systematic than in the country's past eras. During the 2000s, some of these observers expressed hopes that reducing the role of Turkey's military in its institutions of civilian governance could lead to a more liberal democracy—and perhaps European Union membership. Since then, however, many have voiced worries about the largely unchecked, Islamist-tinged civilian rule that Erdogan justifies on the basis of elections of questionable legitimacy.[7]

Official analyses from the United States and European Union, as well as unofficial reports from human rights monitors and other third parties, identify a number of issues,[8] including the following:

- Practices by the government or its supporters (e.g., media control, censorship, intimidation, voter fraud or manipulation) that may undermine the "free and fair" nature of Turkey's elections.
- Arbitrary arrest, indefinite detention, and improper interrogation practices (including instances of torture), and some general erosion of the justice sector's independence and evidentiary standards.
- Imprisonment, forced closures or asset transfers, and other measures targeting journalists, civil society leaders, Erdogan's political opponents, and independent institutions. The government justifies some measures on the basis of countering terrorism, even though sometimes those targeted appear to have had only minimal or superficial contacts with organizations classified by Turkey as terrorist groups—such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) or the Fethullah Gulen movement.
- Significant limits on the right to assemble and protest.
- Conditions on and legal prosecution of content posted on key Internet and social media sites (i.e., YouTube, Facebook, Twitter).
- Increased spending on Sunni Muslim religious (*imam hatip*) secondary schools, and expanded religious instruction in other schools.

As a member of the Council of Europe, Turkey agrees to accept the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), but has not done so in some cases.[9] Specific concerns regarding the treatment of Turkey's large ethnic Kurdish population and its religious minorities are discussed in various sections below.

Erdogan and various other key Turkish figures (including political party leaders) are profiled in **Appendix B**.

Political Assessment

President Erdogan retains sweeping power over Turkey. However, he presides over a polarized electorate and faces substantial domestic and international criticism for governing in an authoritarian manner. Many Turks' opposition to his continued rule, along with Turkey's ongoing economic challenges, could undermine Turkey's future stability and prosperity, even if it does not lead to Erdogan leaving office.[10]

[7] See, e.g., "Democracy Talks: Mustafa Akyol, Author and Journalist," George W. Bush Presidential Center, April 28, 2020.

[8] Department of State, "Turkey," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019*; European Commission, *Turkey 2020 Report*, October 6, 2020; Human Rights Watch, "Turkey," *World Report 2020*; Freedom House, "Turkey," *Freedom in the World 2020*.

[9] "Turkey's Erdogan says ECHR ruling on jailed politician supports terrorism," *Reuters*, November 21, 2018.

[10] See, e.g., Max Hoffman, "Turkey's President Erdoğan Is Losing Ground at Home," Center for American Progress, August 24, 2020.

Erdogan won the June 2018 presidential elections with about 53% of the vote. To obtain a parliamentary majority in the June 2018 elections, Erdogan's AKP relied on the MHP (see **Figure 2** below). The MHP is the country's traditional Turkish nationalist party, and is known for opposing political accommodation with the Kurds. The MHP also had provided key support for the constitutional amendments approved in 2017. Erdogan started courting nationalist constituencies around the time Kurdish voter support for the AKP decreased in 2015 with the end of Turkey-PKK peace negotiations and the resumption of armed conflict (see "Government Approaches to the Kurds" below). Some allegations of voter fraud and manipulation surfaced in connection with the June 2018 elections,[11] which was also the case with the April 2017 constitutional referendum.[12]

The Post-2018 Presidential System

Two years into the presidential system in Turkey, it is unclear how the formalities of government and the surrounding politics will affect checks and balances. Commentators routinely compare Turkey's system with other presidential systems, particularly those in the United States and France.[13] Under Turkey's constitutional changes, a president may serve for up to two five-year terms, and presidential and parliamentary elections occur at the same time. The president can appoint ministers, other senior officials, and a large majority of senior judges without parliamentary approval, and also is responsible for preparing the budget proposals.

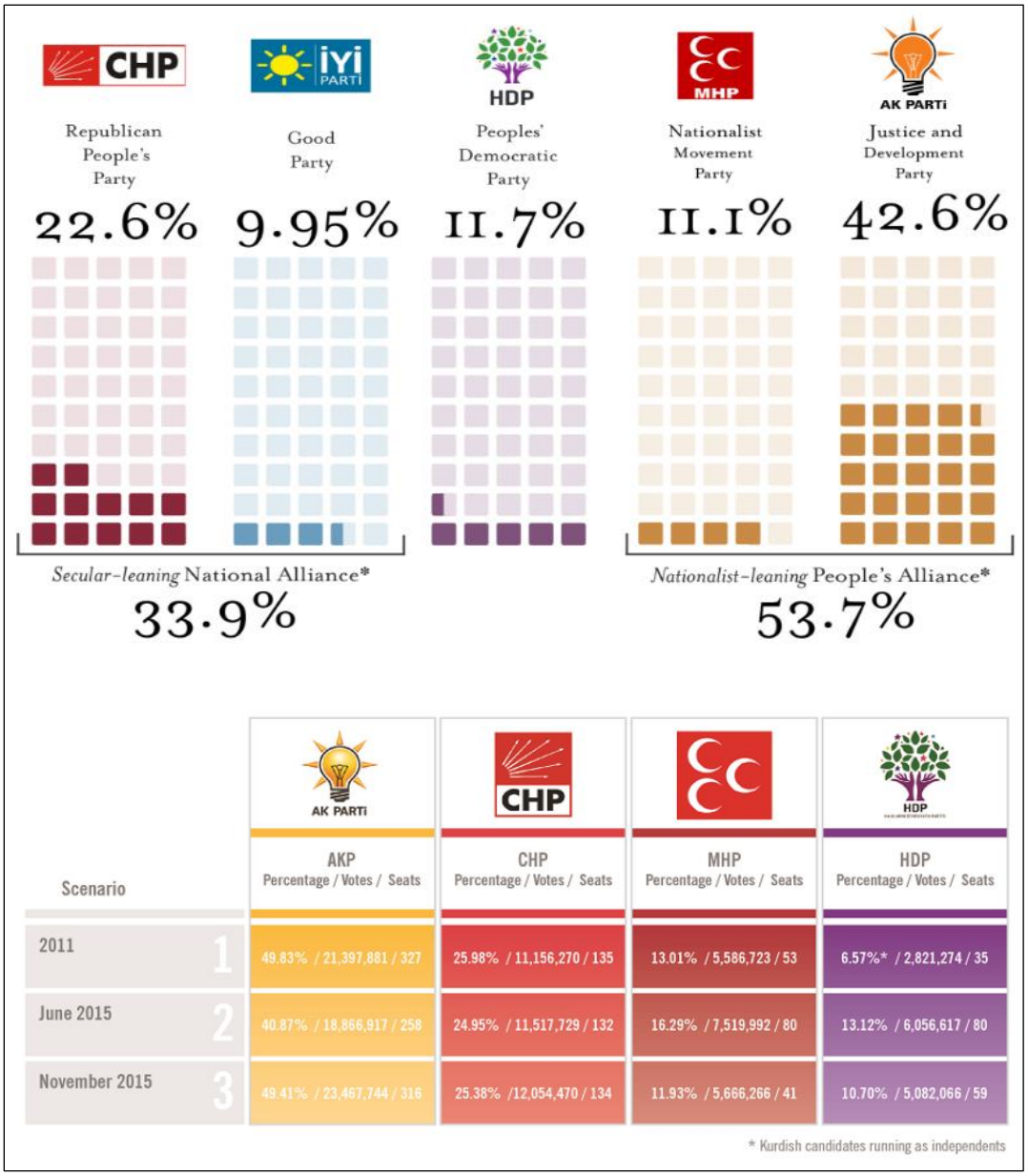
The 600-seat parliament has some ability to counter presidential actions. It retains power to legislate, appoint some judges and bureaucrats, and approve the president's budget proposals. It also may impeach the president with a two-thirds majority. The president can declare a state of emergency, but parliament can reverse this action, and decrees made during a state of emergency lapse if parliament does not approve them within three months.

[11] OSCE, International Election Observation Mission, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Turkey, Early Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, June 24, 2018 (published June 25, 2018).

[12] Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Limited Referendum Observation Mission Final Report, Turkey, April 16, 2017 (published June 22, 2017).

[13] See, e.g., Chris Morris, "Turkey elections: How powerful will the next Turkish president be?" *BBC News*, June 25, 2018.

Figure 2. Turkey: 2018 Parliamentary Election Results in Context



Sources: Institute for the Study of War; Bipartisan Policy Center.

Note: Each square represents 12 parliamentary seats.

In 2019 local elections, the AKP maintained the largest share of votes but lost some key municipalities to opposition candidates from the secular-leaning Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, or CHP). The AKP's most significant losses in those elections include the capital, Ankara, and Istanbul, Turkey's largest city and economic hub. The Istanbul municipal election was particularly controversial: though CHP candidate Ekrem Imamoglu appeared to win a narrow victory in the March 2019 election, the AKP disputed his vote total and the election was annulled by the Supreme Electoral Council. In the closely watched June 2019 re-vote, Imamoglu won a decisive victory over AKP candidate and former Prime Minister Binali Yildirim.

It is unclear to what extent, if at all, these losses were connected with Turkey's economic troubles and represent a threat to Erdogan's rule. Imamoglu and some other opposition mayors have national profiles and by some measures reportedly may rival Erdogan in popularity.[14] Using access to information that their positions afford, they have claimed that their AKP predecessors engaged in corrupt and wasteful practices.[15] Additionally, since the local elections, Ahmet Davutoglu and Ali Babacan, who are prominent former AKP figures from previous Erdogan-led governments, each have established new political parties that could weaken Erdogan's hold on his conservative political base. Erdogan is up for reelection at the end of his term in 2023. He could call early elections at any time, but may be unlikely to do so unless a comfortable AKP victory seems assured.[16]

Economic Assessment

Overview and Currency Problems

The AKP's political successes during the 2000s were aided considerably by robust Turkish economic growth. Growth rates were comparable at times to other major emerging markets, such as the BRIC economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Key Turkish businesses include diversified conglomerates (such as Koc and Sabanci) from traditional urban centers as well as "Anatolian tigers" (small- to medium-sized export-oriented companies) scattered throughout the country.

In the past decade, however, growth has at times slowed or reversed, and the Turkish economy has experienced significant volatility. The "low-hanging fruit"—numerous large infrastructure projects and the scaling up of low-technology manufacturing—that largely drove the previous decade's economic success may be unlikely to produce similar results going forward. Turkey's relatively large current account deficit increases its vulnerability to higher borrowing costs. Concerns about rule of law in Turkey and the possibility of U.S. sanctions may also drive volatility. In July 2018, Erdogan gave himself the power to appoint central bank rate-setters and appointed his son-in-law Berat Albayrak (the former energy minister) to serve as treasury and finance minister, exacerbating concerns about greater politicization of Turkey's monetary policy.[17]

The steady depreciation over several years of Turkey's currency, the lira, has put further strain on the economy. As of November 2020, the value of the lira had declined nearly 30% for the year. With net foreign currency reserves probably in negative territory (see **Figure 3**), and interest rates below the rate of inflation, analysts have predicted that Turkey will need to raise interest rates—perhaps dramatically—or seek significant external assistance to address its financial fragility.[18] In November, Erdogan replaced Turkey's central bank governor and Albayrak resigned as treasury and finance minister, fueling speculation about the likelihood of interest rate hikes despite Erdogan's long-expressed disdain of them.[19] Turkey unsuccessfully sought currency swap lines

[14] Laura Pitel and Funja Guler, "Turkish opposition mayors outshine Erdogan with 'kindness' campaigns," *Financial Times*, June 23, 2020.

[15] Laura Pitel, "Turkish mayors accuse government of coronavirus cover-up," *Financial Times*, August 30, 2020.

[16] Nick Danforth, "The Outlook for Turkish Democracy: 2023 and Beyond," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020.

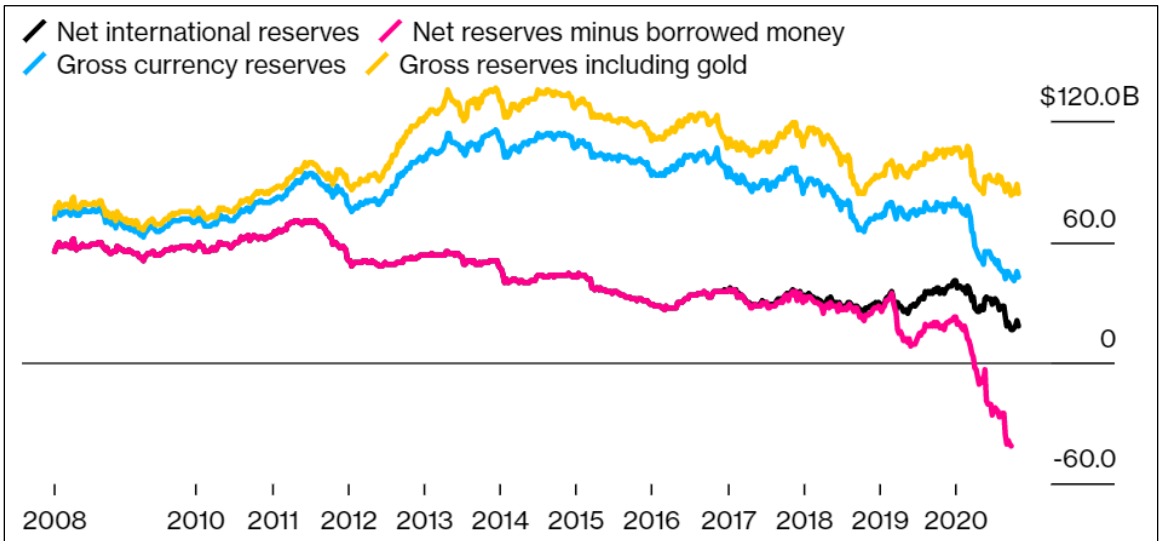
[17] Marcus Ashworth, "Erdogan's New Dynasty Makes Turkey Uninvestable," *Bloomberg*, July 10, 2018.

[18] Economist Intelligence Unit, Turkey country report (retrieved November 3, 2020).

[19] Laura Pitel, "Shock change in Turkey's economic leadership raises stakes for lira," *Financial Times*, November 8,

from the U.S. Federal Reserve earlier in 2020, having relied to date for some liquidity on swaps from Qatar and China.[20]

Figure 3. Turkish Currency Reserves



Source: Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, Bloomberg
Note: Borrowed money is defined as the central bank's monthly outstanding swap stock through September

Some observers have speculated that if investment dries up, Turkey may need to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a financial assistance package.[21] Erdogan has publicly rejected such speculation. Doing so would be a sensitive challenge for Erdogan because his political success story is closely connected with helping Turkey become independent from its most recent IMF intervention in the early 2000s.

Energy

Turkey's importance as a regional energy transport hub makes it relevant for world energy markets while also providing Turkey with opportunities to satisfy its own domestic energy needs. With few hydrocarbon resources of its own, Turkey has been traditionally dependent on other countries for energy imports—particularly Russia and Iran. However, Turkey has significantly reduced its dependence on natural gas delivered via pipeline from Russia (see **Figure 4**), in part by increasing its purchases of liquefied natural gas (LNG). From 2016 to June 2020, Russia's share of Turkish natural gas imports reportedly fell from 50% to 14%, while U.S. LNG as a share of Turkey's imports grew from 0% to 10%.[22] Turkey faces challenges in maintaining and broadening its efforts at diversification, including some pertaining to long-term supply contracts and physical infrastructure. Additionally, Russia may retain leverage with Turkey on issues such as arms sales, nuclear energy, and regional crises (i.e., Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh).

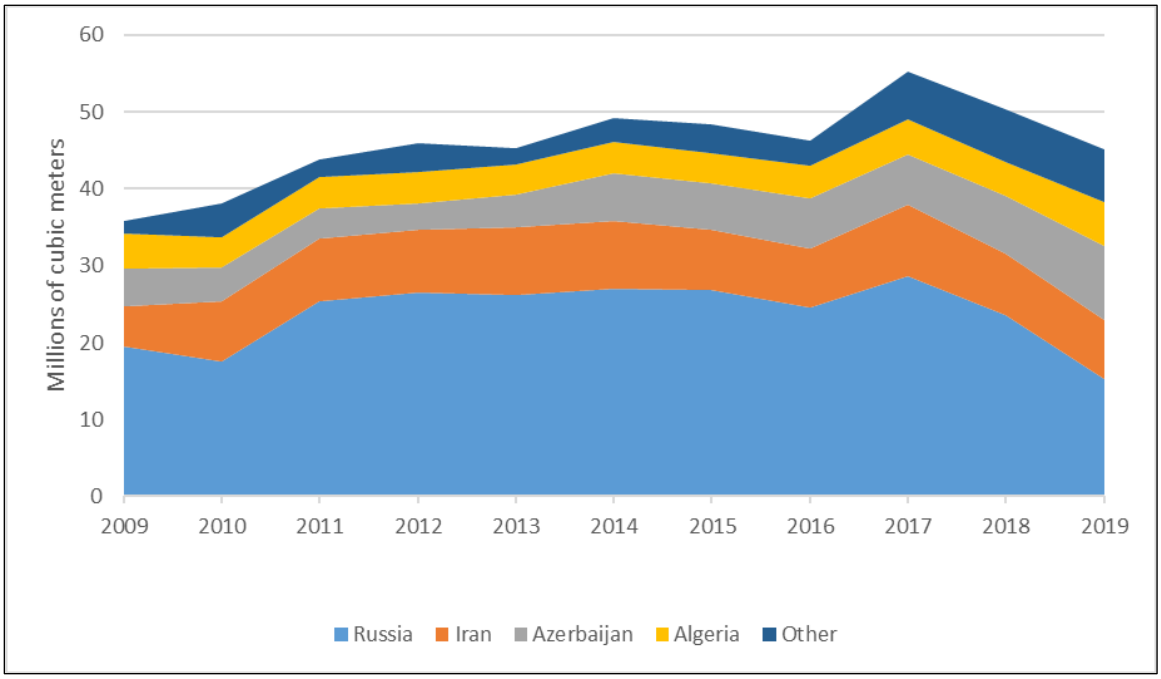
2020.

[20] Mustafa Sonmez, "Turkey's 'peg-legged' foreign currency reserves," *Al-Monitor*, July 6, 2020.

[21] Bobby Ghosh, "Erdogan should break his IMF taboo," *Bloomberg*, April 19, 2020.

[22] Rauf Mammadov, "Turkey Makes Strides in Diversifying Its Natural Gas Imports," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 17, Issue 97, July 6, 2020.

Figure 4. Turkish Natural Gas Imports by Country



Source: Turkish Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK), 2019 Annual Report

In January 2020, Presidents Erdogan and Putin inaugurated the TurkStream pipeline project (see **Figure 5**), which carries Russian natural gas across the Black Sea to southern and central Europe via Turkey.[23] A planned second line is to extend northward as far as Austria. The Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017 (CRIEEA; P.L. 115-44) authorizes sanctions on individuals or entities that invest in or engage in trade for the construction of Russian energy export pipelines. In October 2017, the Administration published guidance noting that Section 232 sanctions would not apply to projects for which contracts were signed prior to August 2, 2017, the date of CRIEEA's enactment. However, in July 2020, the Administration updated that guidance and stated that while the initial TurkStream pipeline would not be subject to Section 232 sanctions, the second line would be. The FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, P.L. 116-92) enacted in December 2019 included, as Title LXXV, the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act of 2019 (PEESA). This Act mandates sanctions—subject to a presidential waiver for national security reasons—for actors involved in laying subsea pipeline for TurkStream and possible successor projects on a going forward basis.

Turkey's location has made it a key country in the U.S. and European effort to establish a southern corridor for pipelines to Europe that bypass Russia.[24] In late 2011, Turkey and Azerbaijan reached deals for the transit of natural gas to and through Turkey via the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP);[25] the project was inaugurated in June 2018.[26] As of September 2020, work is nearing completion on the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which is to transport

[23] CRS In Focus IF11177, *TurkStream: Russia's Newest Gas Pipeline to Europe*, by Sarah E. Garding et al.

[24] Department of State press statement, "The Importance of Diversity in European Energy Security," June 29, 2018.

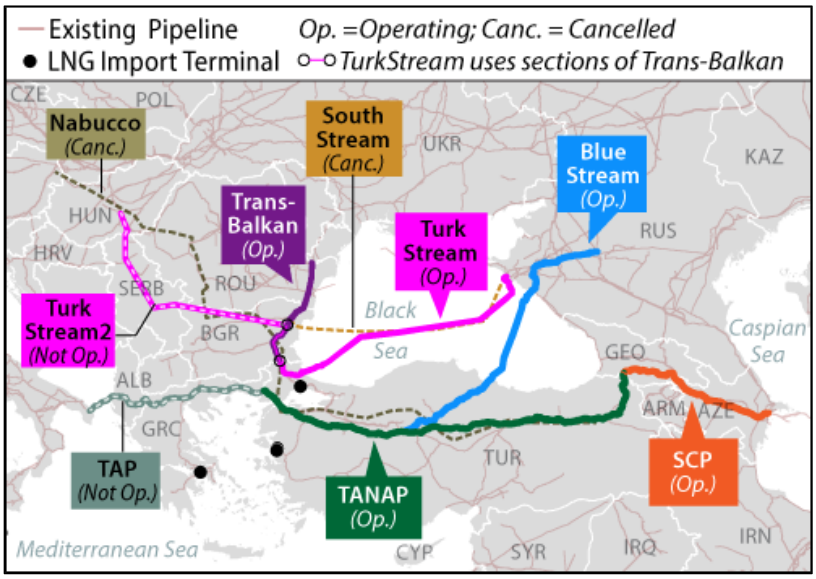
[25] The terms of the Turkey-Azerbaijan agreement specified that 565 billion-700 billion cubic feet (bcf) of natural gas would transit Turkey, of which 210 bcf would be available for Turkey's domestic use.

[26] "Leaders open TANAP pipeline carrying gas from Azerbaijan to Europe," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 12, 2018.

Azeri gas to Italy via TANAP.[27] Difficult relations with Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt are likely to complicate Turkish efforts to play a larger role in the development and transport of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean (see "Eastern Mediterranean and Offshore Natural Gas" below).[28]

In August 2020, President Erdogan announced a Turkish discovery of offshore natural gas deposits in the Black Sea. It is unclear how this news might impact the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey's overall energy policies.[29] Even if the deposits can be accessed, commercially developing them for domestic consumption or trade could take years.[30]

Figure 5. Turkey and Southeastern European Gas Infrastructure



Source: Created by CRS using data from U.S. Department of State, HIS, ESRI, European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas, Bulgartransgaz.

Another part of Turkey's strategy to become more energy independent is to increase domestic energy production. Turkey has entered into an agreement with a subsidiary of Rosatom (Russia's state-run nuclear company) to have it build and operate what would be Turkey's first nuclear power plant in Akkuyu near the Mediterranean port of Mersin. Construction, which had been delayed for several years, began in April 2018, with operations expected to begin in 2023.[31] Some observers have expressed both skepticism about the construction timeline and concerns that the plant could provide Russia with additional leverage over Turkey.[32] Plans for Japan to assist with

[27] Shabnam Hasanova, "Where does the TAP gas pipeline project stand to date? The view from Baku," Jamestown Foundation, June 30, 2020.

[28] Yigal Chazon, "Race to exploit Mediterranean gas raises regional hackles," *Financial Times*, March 9, 2018.

[29] See John V. Bowlus, "Pulling Back the Curtain on Turkey's Natural Gas Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, August 26, 2020.

[30] Selcan Hacaoglu, "Erdogan Unveils Biggest Ever Black Sea Natural Gas Discovery," *Bloomberg*, August 21, 2020.

[31] "Construction starts on 2nd unit of Turkey's 1st nuclear power plant Akkuyu," *Daily Sabah*, June 28, 2020.

[32] See, e.g., Aram Ekin Duran, "Akkuyu nuclear plant: Turkey and Russia's atomic connection," *Deutsche Welle*, April 3, 2018.

the construction of a second nuclear power plant in Sinop on the Black Sea coast were abandoned in January 2020.[33]

The Kurdish Issue

Background

Ethnic Kurds reportedly constitute approximately 19% of Turkey's population.[34] Kurds are largely concentrated in the less economically developed southeast, though populations are found in urban centers across the country. Some Kurds have been reluctant to recognize Turkish state authority in various parts of the southeast—a dynamic that also exists between Kurds and national governments in Iraq, Iran, and Syria. This reluctance and harsh Turkish government measures to quell Kurdish demands for rights have fed tensions that have occasionally escalated since the foundation of the republic in 1923. Since 1984, the Turkish military has periodically countered an on-and-off separatist insurgency and urban terrorism campaign by the PKK.[35] The initially secessionist demands of the PKK have since ostensibly evolved toward the less ambitious goal of greater cultural and political autonomy.[36] According to the U.S. government and EU, the PKK partially finances its activities through criminal activities, including its operation of a Europe-wide drug trafficking network.[37]

The struggle between Turkish authorities and the PKK was most intense during the 1990s, but has flared periodically since then. The PKK uses safe havens in areas of northern Iraq under the nominal authority of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The Turkish military's approach to neutralizing the PKK has been routinely criticized by Western governments and human rights organizations for being overly hard on ethnic Kurds. Thousands have been imprisoned and hundreds of thousands have been displaced or had their livelihoods disrupted for suspected PKK involvement or sympathies.

[33] "Turkey, Japan scrap partnership in Sinop nuclear plant in Turkey's north," *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 20, 2020.

[34] CIA World Factbook, Turkey (accessed August 2020).

[35] According to the International Crisis Group, around 14,000 Turks have been killed since fighting began in the early 1980s. This figure includes Turkish security personnel of various types and Turkish civilians (including Turkish Kurds who are judged not to have been PKK combatants). Estimates of PKK dead run from 33,000 to 43,000. International Crisis Group, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: The Rising Toll" (interactive blog updated into 2018); *Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency*, Europe Report No. 213, September 20, 2011.

[36] Kurdish nationalist leaders demand that any future changes to Turkey's constitution (in its current form following the 2017 amendments) not suppress Kurdish ethnic and linguistic identity. The first clause of Article 3 of the constitution reads, "The Turkish state, with its territory and nation, is an indivisible entity. Its language is Turkish." Because the constitution states that its first three articles are unamendable, even proposing a change could face judicial obstacles.

[37] European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018; U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Release, "Five PKK Leaders Designated Narcotics Traffickers," April 20, 2011.

Government Approaches to the Kurds

PKK Designations by U.S. Government	
Designation	**Year**
Foreign Terrorist Organization	1997
Specially Designated Global Terrorist	2001
Significant Foreign Narcotics Trafficker	2008

Until the spring of 2015, Erdogan appeared to prefer negotiating a political compromise with PKK leaders over the prospect of armed conflict.[38] However, against the backdrop of PKK-affiliated Kurdish groups' success in Syria and domestic political considerations, Erdogan then adopted a more confrontational political stance with the PKK. Within that context, a complicated set of circumstances involving terrorist attacks and mutual suspicion led to a resumption of violence between government forces and the PKK in the summer of 2015. As a result of the violence, which has been concentrated in southeastern Turkey and was most intense from 2015 to 2016, hundreds of fighters and civilians have died.[39] In addition to mass population displacement, infrastructure in the southeast has suffered significant damage. U.S. officials, while supportive of Turkey's prerogative to defend itself from attacks, have advised Turkey to show restraint and proportionality in its actions.[40]

Under the state of emergency enacted after the failed July 2016 coup attempt, Turkey's government cracked down on Turkey's Kurdish minority. Since then, dozens of elected Kurdish mayors have been removed from office and replaced with government-appointed "custodians." In November 2016, the two then-co-leaders of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halklarin Demokratik Partisi*, or HDP) were arrested along with nine other parliamentarians under various charges of crimes against the state; some remain imprisoned, along with other party leaders and members who have been detained on similar charges.[41] Turkish officials routinely accuse Kurdish politicians of support for the PKK, but these politicians generally deny close ties.

The future trajectory of Turkey-PKK dealings may depend on a number of factors, including

- which Kurdish figures and groups (imprisoned PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan [profiled in **Appendix B**], various PKK militant leaders, the professedly nonviolent HDP) are most influential in driving events;
- Erdogan's approach to the issue, which has alternated between conciliation and confrontation; and
- possible incentives to Turkey's government and the Kurds from the United States or other actors for mitigating violence and promoting political resolution.

Religious Minorities

Many Members of Congress follow the status of religious minorities in Turkey. Religious minorities are generally concentrated in Istanbul and other urban areas, as well as the southeast, and collectively represent around 0.2% of Turkey's population. Adherents of non-Muslim

[38] As prime minister, Erdogan had led past efforts to resolve the Kurdish question by using political, cultural, and economic development approaches, in addition to the traditional security-based approach, in line with the AKP's ideological starting point that common Islamic ties among Turks and Kurds could transcend ethnic differences.

[39] International Crisis Group, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: The Rising Toll."

[40] Mark Landler and Carlotta Gall, "As Turkey Attacks Kurds in Syria, U.S. Is on the Sideline," *New York Times*, January 22, 2018.

[41] See https://hdp-usa.com/political-prisoners.

religions and minority Muslim sects (most prominently, the Alevis) often attract, and to some extent rely on, legal appeals, political advocacy, and support from Western countries.

The Turkish government controls or closely oversees religious activities in the country. This arrangement was originally used to enforce secularism (often referred to as "laicism"), partly to prevent religion from influencing state actors and institutions as it did under Ottoman rule. However, since at least 2015, observers have detected some movement by state religious authorities in the direction of the AKP's Islamist-friendly worldview, and successive Department of State International Religious Freedom Reports indicate that the Turkish government limits the rights of religious minorities.[42]

U.S. concerns focus largely on the rights of Turkey's Christian and Jewish communities, which have sought greater freedom to choose leaders, train clergy, own property, and otherwise function independently of the Turkish government.[43]

Halki Seminary and Hagia Sophia

Some Members of Congress routinely express grievances through proposed congressional resolutions and letters on behalf of the Ecumenical (Greek Orthodox) Patriarchate of Constantinople, the spiritual center of Orthodox Christianity based in Istanbul.[44] The Patriarchate, along with various U.S. and European officials, continues to press for the reopening of its Halki Theological School,[45] which was closed after a 1971 ruling by Turkey's Constitutional Court prohibiting the operation of private institutions of higher education.[46] In February 2019, then-Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras made the first-ever visit by a Greek prime minister to the seminary. In the past, Erdogan has reportedly said that Halki's reopening would depend on measures by Greece to accommodate its Muslim community.[47]

Turkey has converted some historic Christian churches from museums into mosques, most notably Istanbul's landmark Hagia Sophia (*Ayasofya* in Turkish), a sixth-century Greek Orthodox cathedral that was converted to a mosque after the 1453 Ottoman conquest of Istanbul and then became a museum during the early years of the Turkish Republic. A popular movement to convert the site back into a mosque gained strength in recent years, culminating in President Erdogan's public support for such a move during the March 2019 local elections campaign.[48] In July 2020, a

[42] See also, e.g., Ceren Lord, *Religious Politics in Turkey: From the Birth of the Republic to the AKP* (Cambridge University Press), 2018.

[43] Since 2009, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has given Turkey designations ranging from "country of particular concern" (highest concern) to "monitored." As of the 2020 report, Turkey is recommended for the Department of State's Special Watch List. For additional information on Turkey's religious minorities, see the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report for 2019.

[44] On December 13, 2011, for example, the House passed H.Res. 306—"Urging the Republic of Turkey to safeguard its Christian heritage and to return confiscated church properties"—by voice vote. In June 2014, the House Foreign Affairs Committee favorably reported the Turkey Christian Churches Accountability Act (H.R. 4347). The Turkish government does not acknowledge the "ecumenical" nature of the Patriarchate, but does not object to others' reference to the Patriarchate's ecumenicity.

[45] The Patriarchate also presses for the Turkish government to lift the requirement that the Patriarch be a Turkish citizen, and for it to return previously confiscated properties.

[46] In remarks accompanying the release of the 2018 religious freedom report, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said, "We urge the immediate reopening of the Halki Seminary." Department of State, "Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo at the Release of the 2018 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom," June 21, 2019.

[47] Stelyo Berberakis, "Patriarch hopes to reopen seminary after talks with president," *Daily Sabah*, May 11, 2018; "Turkey ready to open Halki Seminary in return for a mosque in Greece: report," *Hurriyet Daily News*, May 8, 2015.

[48] "Turkey's Erdogan Says He Plans to Change Hagia Sophia's Title from Museum to Mosque," *Reuters*, March 29,

Turkish court invalidated the 1934 decree that created Hagia Sophia as a museum, and President Erdogan subsequently approved its conversion to a mosque and led the first prayers there. The move, also seen as a political overture to conservative Turkish nationalists, was criticized by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, a number of Members of Congress, and the EU Foreign Affairs Council.

Alevis

About 10 to 20 million Turkish Muslims are Alevis (of whom about 20% are ethnic Kurds). The Alevi community has some relation to Shiism and may contain strands from pre-Islamic Anatolian and Christian traditions.[49] Alevism has been traditionally influenced by Sufi mysticism that emphasizes believers' individual spiritual paths, but it defies precise description owing to its lack of centralized leadership and reliance on secret oral traditions. Despite multiple decisions by Turkey's top appeals court that the state financially support cemevis (Alevi houses of worship), the government still does not do so.[50]

Alevis have long been among the strongest supporters of secularism in Turkey, which they reportedly see as a form of protection from the Sunni majority.[51] Arab Alawites in Syria and southern Turkey are a distinct Shia-related religious community.

Turkey's Strategic Orientation and Military Involvement

Numerous points of tension and Turkey's military operations in various places have raised questions within the United States and Turkey about the two countries' alliance, as well as Turkey's commitment to NATO and its Western orientation. Nevertheless, U.S. and Turkish officials maintain that bilateral cooperation on a number of issues—including regional security and counterterrorism—remains mutually important.[52]

Concerns among Turkish leaders that U.S. policy might undermine Turkey's security date back at least to the 1991 Gulf War,[53] but the following developments have fueled them since 2010:

2019. In 2014, then-Prime Minster Erdogan responded to activists calling for Hagia Sophia to be opened as a mosque by saying that other extant mosques in the area should be fully utilized before any change would be made to Hagia Sophia. Orhan Kemal Cengiz, "What caused Erdogan's change of heart on Hagia Sophia?" *Al-Monitor*, March 29, 2019.

[49] For additional historical background, see Elise Massicard, *The Alevis in Turkey and Europe: Identity and managing territorial diversity*, New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 11-18.

[50] Patrick Kingsley, "Turkey's Alevis, a Muslim Minority, Fear a Policy of Denying Their Existence," *New York Times*, July 22, 2017; "Turkey's top appeals court rules for state to pay utilities of Alevi houses of worship," *Daily Sabah*, November 29, 2018.

[51] According to a scholar on Turkey, "Alevis suffered centuries of oppression under the Ottomans, who accused them of not being truly Muslim and suspected them of colluding with the Shi'i Persians against the empire. Alevi Kurds were victims of the early republic's Turkification policies and were massacred by the thousands in Dersim [now called Tunceli] in 1937-39. In the 1970s, Alevis became associated with socialist and other leftist movements, while the political right was dominated by Sunni Muslims. An explosive mix of sectarian cleavages, class polarization, and political violence led to communal massacres of Alevis in five major cities in 1977 and 1978, setting the stage for the 1980 coup." Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 14.

[52] Stephen J. Flanagan, et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army*, RAND Corporation, 2020.

[53] See, e.g., Keith Johnson and Robbie Gramer, "Who Lost Turkey?" foreignpolicy.com, July 19, 2019.

- Close U.S. military cooperation against the Islamic State with Syrian Kurdish forces linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that has waged an on-and-off insurgency against the Turkish government since the 1980s while using safe havens in both Syria and Iraq.
- Turkey's view that the United States supported or acquiesced to events during post-2011 turmoil in Egypt and Syria that undermined Sunni Islamist figures tied to Turkey.
- Many Western leaders' criticism of President Erdogan for ruling in a largely authoritarian manner. Erdogan's sensitivity to Western concerns was exacerbated by the 2016 coup attempt. Erdogan blames the coup attempt on Fethullah Gulen, a former Turkish imam (prayer leader) who leads a worldwide socioreligious movement and lives in the United States.

Turkey arguably seeks a more independent foreign policy course than at any time since joining NATO in 1952, driven partly by geopolitical and economic considerations. Traditionally, Turkey has relied closely on the United States and NATO for defense cooperation, European countries for trade and investment, and Russia and Iran for energy imports. Turkish leaders' interest in reducing their dependence on the West for defense and discouraging Western influence over their domestic politics may partly explain their willingness to coordinate some actions with Russia in Syria and purchase a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system. Nevertheless, Turkey retains significant differences with Russia—with which it has a long history of discord—including over political outcomes in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Also, as mentioned above, Turkey appears to be making efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian energy. While Turkey-Russia cooperation on some issues may not reflect a general Turkish realignment toward Russia, Russia may be content with helping weaken Turkey's ties with the United States, NATO, and the EU to reduce obstacles to Russian actions and ambitions.[54]

Turkish leaders appear to compartmentalize their partnerships and rivalries with other global powers as each situation dictates, partly in an attempt to reduce Turkey's dependence on and maintain its leverage with these actors.[55] This approach may to some extent reflect President Erdogan's efforts to consolidate control domestically. Because Erdogan's Islamist-friendly AKP maintains a parliamentary majority in partnership with the more traditionally nationalist MHP, efforts to maintain the support of core constituencies may imbue Turkish policy with a nationalistic tenor. A largely nationalistic foreign policy also has precedent from before Turkey's Cold War alignment with the West.[56] Turkey's history as both a regional power and an object of great power aggression translates into wide domestic popularity for nationalistic political actions and discourse, as well as sympathy for Erdogan's "neo-Ottoman" narrative of restoring Turkish regional prestige.

Turkish Hard Power: Using Drones and Proxy Forces in Regional Conflicts

During Erdogan's first decade as prime minister, Turkey's main approach in its surrounding region (with the exception of its long-running security operations against the PKK) was to project political and economic influence, or "soft power," backed by diplomacy and military deterrence. As regional unrest increased near Turkey's borders with the onset of conflict in Syria, however, Turkey's approach shifted dramatically in light of newly perceived

[54] See, e.g., Marc Pierini, "How Far Can Turkey Challenge NATO and the EU in 2020?" *Carnegie Europe*, January 29, 2020; Andrew Higgins, "Putin and Erdogan Reach Accord to Halt Fighting in Syria," *New York Times*, March 5, 2020.

[55] Flanagan, et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course*.

[56] Pierini, "How Far Can Turkey Challenge NATO and the EU?"

threats. This was especially the case after Erdogan (as president) began courting Turkish nationalist constituencies in 2015 and consolidating power following the July 2016 coup attempt.

Under this modified approach, Turkey now largely relies on hard power to affect regional outcomes. Specifically, Turkey has focused on a relatively low-cost method of using armed drones (see "Drones: Domestic Production, U.S. and Western Components, and Exports") and/or proxy forces (particularly Syrian fighters who oppose the Syrian government and otherwise have limited sources of income) in theaters of conflict including northern Syria and Iraq, western Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Partly because the drones and proxy forces limit Turkey's political and economic risk, Turkish leaders have shown less constraint in deploying them, and they have reportedly proven effective at countering other actors' more expensive but less mobile armored vehicles and air defense systems. Turkey's early 2018 "Operation Olive Branch" against PKK-linked Syrian Kurds in Syria's Afrin province was reportedly a crucial early test of this method.

During 2020, Turkey's drones and proxies appear to have blocked or made inroads against Russian-assisted forces in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh.[57] Turkish efforts to counter Russia in multiple theaters suggest that Turkey-Russia cooperation is situational rather than comprehensive in scope (see **Appendix A**), and that U.S. and Turkish interests may overlap in some of these cases.

U.S./NATO Presence

Turkey's location near several global hotspots 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. From Turkey's perspective, NATO's traditional value has been to mitigate its concerns about encroachment by neighbors. Turkey initially turned to the West largely as a reaction to aggressive post-World War II posturing by the Soviet Union. In addition to Incirlik Air Base near the southern Turkish city of Adana, other key U.S./NATO sites include an early warning missile defense radar in eastern Turkey and a NATO ground forces command in Izmir (see **Figure 6**). Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through its straits pursuant to the Montreux Convention of 1936.

Incirlik Air Base

Turkey's Incirlik (pronounced *een-jeer-leek*) air base in the southern part of the country has long been the symbolic and logistical center of the U.S. military presence in Turkey, with the U.S. Air Force's 39th Air Base Wing based there. Since 1991, the base has been critical in supplying U.S. military missions in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Anti-Islamic State coalition flights in Syria and Iraq began in 2014, but reportedly dropped off significantly by 2018 owing to U.S.-Turkey tensions.[58]

The use of Incirlik by coup plotters within Turkey's military in July 2016 caused temporary disruptions of some U.S. military operations, and intensified concerns about Turkey's stability and the safety and utility of Turkish territory for U.S. and NATO assets. Several open source media outlets have speculated about whether U.S. tactical nuclear weapons may be based at Incirlik Air Base, and if so, whether U.S. officials might consider taking them out of Turkey.[59]

Tensions between Turkey and other NATO members have fueled internal U.S./NATO discussions about the continued use of Turkish bases. As a result of the tensions and questions about the

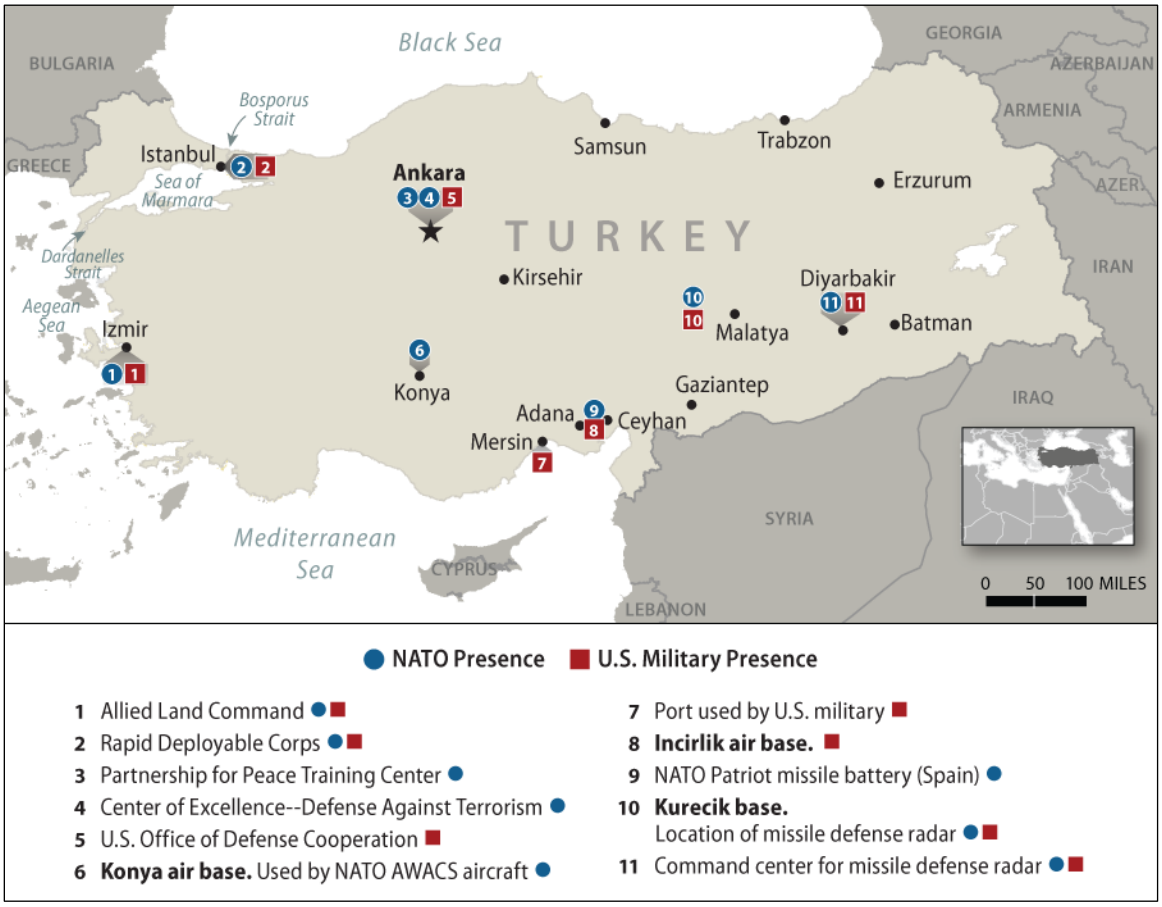
[57] Mitch Prothero, "Turkey's Erdogan has been humiliating Putin all year — here's how he did it," *Business Insider*, October 22, 2020.

[58] Gordon Lubold, et al., "U.S. Pares Operations at Base in Turkey," *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2018.

[59] Dorian Jones, "US Military Base in Turkey Has Uncertain Future," *Voice of America*, November 24, 2019; Miles A. Pomper, "Why the US has nuclear weapons in Turkey—and may try to put the bombs away," *The Conversation*, October 23, 2019. A bill introduced in the Senate in October 2019 (S. 2644) would, among other provisions, require the President to provide an interagency report to Congress "assessing viable alternative military installations or other locations to host personnel and assets of the United States Armed Forces currently stationed at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey."

safety and utility of Turkish territory for U.S. and NATO assets, some observers have advocated exploring alternative basing arrangements in the region.[60] Some reports suggest that expanded or potentially expanded U.S. military presences in places such as Greece, Cyprus, and Jordan might be connected with concerns about Turkey.[61]

Figure 6. Map of U.S. and NATO Military Presence in Turkey



Sources: Department of Defense, NATO, and various media outlets; adapted by CRS.

Notes: All locations are approximate.

There are historical precedents for the United States withdrawing military assets from Turkey and Turkey restricting U.S. use of its territory or airspace. These include the following:

- **1962 - Cuban Missile Crisis**. The United States withdrew its nuclear-tipped Jupiter missiles following this crisis.
- **1975 - Cyprus.** Turkey closed most U.S. defense and intelligence installations in Turkey during the U.S. arms embargo that Congress imposed in response to Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus.

[60] See, e.g., Xander Snyder, "Beyond Incirlik," *Geopolitical Futures*, April 19, 2019.

[61] "Pentagon pushes back on claim that US to leave Turkey's Incirlik base," *Al-Monitor*, September 16, 2020; Joseph Trevithick, "Docs Show US to Massively Expand Footprint at Jordanian Air Base amid Spats with Turkey, Iraq," *The Drive*, January 14, 2019.

- **2003 - Iraq.** A Turkish parliamentary vote did not allow the United States to open a second front from Turkey in the Iraq war.

Assessing costs and benefits to the United States of a U.S./NATO presence in Turkey, and of potential changes in U.S./NATO posture, largely revolves around three questions:

- To what extent does the United States rely on direct use of Turkish territory or airspace to secure and protect U.S. interests?
- How important is U.S./NATO support to Turkey's external defense and internal stability, and to what extent does that support serve U.S. interests?
- To what extent would other regional countries provide more or less stability and protection for U.S./NATO military assets and personnel?

Issues with Other U.S./NATO Allies

Turkey's regional ambitions have contributed to difficulties with some of its neighbors that are (like Turkey) U.S. allies or partners.

Eastern Mediterranean and Offshore Natural Gas

A dispute during the past decade between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus about Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration arguably has brought Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt closer together.[62] Turkey has objected to Greek Cypriot transactions in the offshore energy sector because they have not involved the de facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus that controls the northern one-third of the island. Turkey also has supported Turkish Cypriot claims to an exclusive economic zone around part of the island. Cyprus, Greece, and Israel have discussed possible cooperation to export gas finds to Europe via a pipeline bypassing Turkey.[63]

In late 2019, the Turkey-Cyprus dispute became intertwined with longtime Turkey-Greece disagreements over continental shelves, territorial waters, airspace, and exclusive economic zones when Turkey signed an agreement with Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) on maritime boundaries (see **Figure 7**).[64] The dispute has increased Turkey-Greece naval tensions, especially after Greece and Egypt reached a maritime agreement in August 2020 rivaling the 2019 Turkey-Libya deal.[65] Some observers assert that nationalistic and anti-Western sentiment within elite Turkish national security circles may help drive Turkey's recent naval buildup and maximalist maritime claims, citing arguments within these circles that Turkey is entitled to a "Blue Homeland" in surrounding waters.[66] Turkish decisions may partly stem from concerns about potential geostrategic encirclement and exclusion from potentially lucrative commercial energy transactions.

[62] Yaroslav Trofimov, "Turkey, Rivals Square Off Over Gas Finds," *Wall Street Journal*, August 3, 2020.

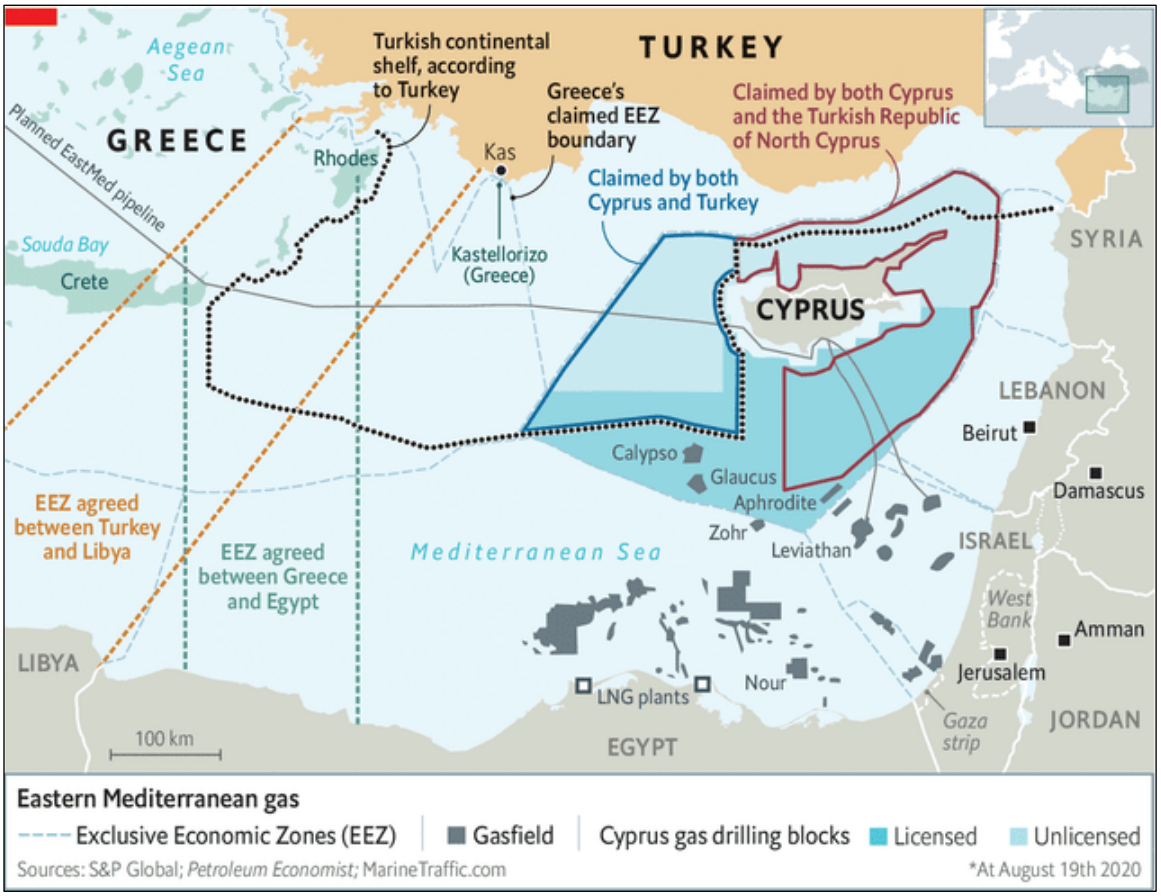
[63] "Battling over boundaries," *Economist*, August 22, 2020. The feasibility of such a pipeline is unclear. Sue Surkes, "Mistake to leave Turkey out of new East Med gas club – international expert," *Times of Israel*, September 27, 2020.

[64] For background, see "Turkish-Greek Aegean Dispute" at globalsecurity.org.

[65] Michael Tanchum, "How Did the Eastern Mediterranean Become the Eye of a Geopolitical Storm?" foreignpolicy.com, August 18, 2020.

[66] Ryan Gingeras, "Blue Homeland: The Heated Politics Behind Turkey's New Maritime Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, June 2, 2020; "The Turkish Navy in an Era of Great Power Competition," *War on the Rocks*, April 30, 2019.

Figure 7. Competing Claims in the Eastern Mediterranean



Source: Main map created by *The Economist*, with slight modifications by CRS.

The disputes involving Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece have prompted U.S. and broader Western criticism of Turkey and some EU sanctions against Turkish individuals aimed at discouraging Turkish drilling near Cyprus.[67] Diplomatic prospects to reduce the Turkey-Greece tensions, which could undermine NATO unity, remain uncertain as Turkish ships with naval escorts have engaged in exploration activities and Greece, Cyprus, France, and Italy have held military exercises aimed at deterring these Turkish actions.[68]

Middle East and Libyan Civil War

In the Middle East, Sunni Arab states that support traditional authoritarian governance models in the region—notably Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt—regard Turkey with suspicion, largely because of the Turkish government's sympathies for Islamist political groups and its close relationship with Qatar.[69] Ties with Turkey bolster Qatar amid its isolation

[67] Council of the European Union press release, "Turkey's illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: EU puts two persons on sanctions list," February 27, 2020.

[68] Steven Erlanger, "Tensions Over Drilling Between Turkey and Greece Divide E.U. Leaders," *New York Times*, August 28, 2020.

[69] Flanagan, et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course*; Andrew England, et al., "UAE vs Turkey: the regional rivalries pitting MBZ against Erdogan," *Financial Times*, October 26, 2020.

from other Arab states, and Turkey has relied on Qatari resources to strengthen its troubled financial position and support its regional military efforts.[70]

One aspect of Turkey's rivalry with some Sunni Arab states is their support for opposing sides in Libya's civil war. Turkey and Qatar have supported forces aligned with the U.S.- and U.N. Security Council-recognized GNA, while Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (along with Russia and possibly France) have supported those of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA). Turkey has sent drone aircraft, military personnel, and allied Syrian fighters to Libya, and suffered some casualties in helping GNA-allied forces drive back an LNA offensive against Tripoli in early 2020.[71] GNA-allied forces face threats of heightened intervention from Egypt if they advance east.[72] Further signs of tension between Turkey and Sunni Arab states come from a Turkish military presence at bases in Qatar and Somalia.[73]

Turkey's involvement in Libya and maritime dealings with the GNA have increased the overlap between Turkey's disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean and its rivalry with Sunni Arab states. The U.S.-brokered agreement between Israel and the UAE in August 2020 to normalize their relations could further solidify common cause among Eastern Mediterranean countries and Arab Gulf states to counter Turkish regional influence.[74] Some Saudi business leaders have called for a boycott of Turkish goods, fueling speculation about possible efforts to encourage other Arab Gulf and North African states to reduce regional trade with Turkey.[75] Turkey maintains diplomatic ties and significant levels of trade with Israel, but Turkey-Israel relations have deteriorated significantly during Erdogan's rule (see **Appendix A**).

The Syrian Conflict

Turkey's involvement in Syria's conflict since 2011 has been complicated and costly, and has severely strained U.S.-Turkey ties.[76] Turkey's priorities in Syria have evolved during the course of Syria's civil war. While Turkey still opposes Syrian President Bashar al Asad, it has engaged in a mix of coordination and competition with Russia and Iran (Asad's supporters) on some matters since intervening militarily in Syria starting in August 2016. Similar interaction takes place between Turkey and the United States given the U.S. military presence in key areas of northern Syria east of the Euphrates River.

---

[70] Ibrahim Sunnetci, "Turkey and Qatar: Foul-Weather Friends!" *Defence Turkey*, Vol. 14, Issue 98, 2020, pp. 34-47; "Qatar boosts support for Turkey's regional forays," *The Arab Weekly*, July 5, 2020.

[71] Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General, *East Africa Counterterrorism Operation, North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020-March 30, 2020*, July 16, 2020.

[72] For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11556, *Libya and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard. Instability within the GNA and how different Libyan political groups interact could also affect Turkey's position.

[73] Sunnetci, "Turkey and Qatar"; "Turkey to train 1/3 of entire Somali military, envoy says," *Daily Sabah*, August 4, 2020.

[74] Simon A. Waldman, "Erdogan's Crumbling Superpower Dreams Make Turkey Even More Dangerous," haaretz.com, August 24, 2020.

[75] "Saudi imports from Turkey rise in August despite informal boycott," *Reuters*, October 25, 2020. Turkey-Saudi relations also have been affected by the killing of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018.

[76] For background, see Burak Kadercan, "Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A 'Turkish Tragedy' in the Making," *War on the Rocks*, August 4, 2017.

Countering the Syrian Kurdish YPG

In the ongoing conflict, Turkey seeks to manage and reduce threats to itself and to influence political and security outcomes (see **Appendix C** for a timeline of Turkey's involvement). Turkish-led forces have occupied and administered parts of northern Syria since 2016 (see **Figure 8**). Turkey's chief objective has been to thwart the PKK-linked Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) from establishing an autonomous area along Syria's northern border with Turkey. Turkish-led military operations to that end included Operation Euphrates Shield (August 2016-March 2017) against an Islamic State (IS)-controlled area in northern Syria, and Operation Olive Branch in early 2018 directly against the Kurdish enclave of Afrin.

Turkey has considered the YPG and its political counterpart, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), to be a top threat to Turkish security because of Turkish concerns that YPG/PYD gains emboldened the PKK in Turkey.[77] The YPG/PYD has a leading role within the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—an umbrella group including Arabs and other non-Kurdish elements that became the main U.S. ground force partner against the Islamic State in 2015. Shortly after the YPG/PYD and SDF began achieving military and political success, Turkey-PKK peace talks broke down, tensions increased, and occasional violence resumed within Turkey.

In October 2019, Turkey's military attacked some SDF-controlled areas in northeastern Syria after President Trump ordered a pullback of U.S. Special Forces following a call with President Erdogan.[78] The declared aims of what Turkey called Operation Peace Spring (OPS) were to target "terrorists"—both the YPG and the Islamic State—and create a "safe zone" for the possible return of some of the approximately 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey.[79] The ground component of the Turkish operation—as during previous Turkish operations in Syria—was carried out to a major extent by Syrian militia forces comprised largely of Sunni Arab opponents of the Syrian government.

Turkey's capture of territory from the SDF during OPS separated the two most significant Kurdish-majority enclaves in northern Syria, complicating Syrian Kurdish aspirations for autonomy. Turkey then reached agreements with the United States and Russia that ended the fighting, created a buffer zone between Turkey and the YPG, and allowed Turkey to directly monitor some areas over the border (see **Figure 8**).[80]

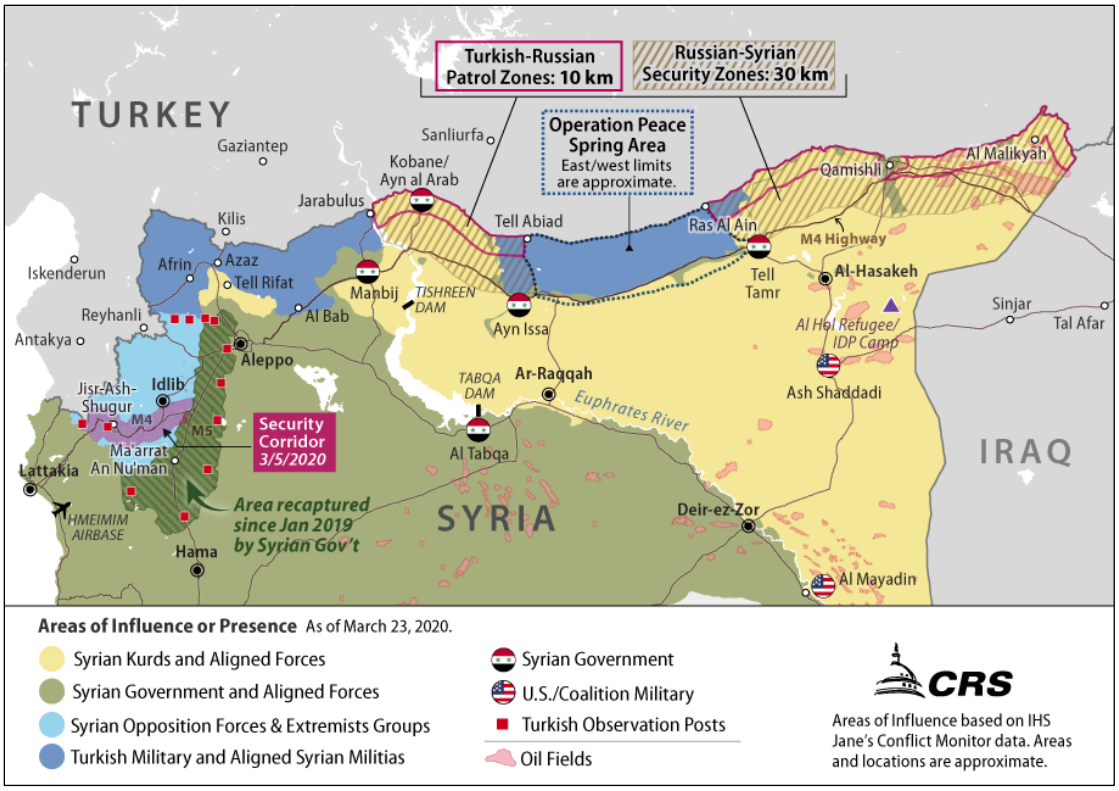
[77] See, e.g., Soner Cagaptay, "U.S. Safe Zone Deal Can Help Turkey Come to Terms with the PKK and YPG," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 7, 2019.

[78] In the previous months, joint U.S.-Turkey ground patrols had monitored the border area and some YPG fortifications were dismantled, but Turkish leaders repeatedly criticized the United States for not doing enough to secure the removal of the YPG from the border area. Ryan Browne et al., "US and Turkish troops conduct first joint ground patrol of Syrian 'safe zone,'" *CNN*, September 8, 2019.

[79] Ibrahim Kalin, Twitter post, 4:32 AM, October 7, 2019.

[80] White House, "The United States and Turkey Agree to Ceasefire in Northeast Syria," October 17, 2019; Department of State, "Special Representative for Syria Engagement James F. Jeffrey Remarks to the Traveling Press," October 17, 2019; White House, "Remarks by President Trump on the Situation in Northern Syria," October 23, 2019; President of Russia, *Memorandum of Understanding Between Turkey and the Russian Federation*, October 22, 2019.

Figure 8. Syria-Turkey Border



Source: CRS, using area of influence data from IHS Jane's Conflict Monitor. All areas of influence approximate and subject to change. Other sources include U.N. OCHA, Esri, and social media reports.

Note: This map does not depict all U.S. bases in Syria.

Ultimate Turkish and YPG objectives regarding the northern Syrian areas in question remain unclear. U.S. officials have continued partnering with SDF forces against the Islamic State in some areas of Syria south of the zones from which YPG personnel were cleared,[81] while the SDF has made some arrangements for its own protection by Syrian government forces.

[81] "US to deploy more troops to eastern Syria to secure oilfields," *Al Jazeera*, October 25, 2019.

Syrian Refugees in Turkey

In addition to its ongoing military activities in Syria, Turkey hosts about 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees—more than any other country. Turkey has largely closed its border to additional refugee influxes since 2016, though it also assists thousands of displaced Syrians in makeshift camps near the border.[82] President Erdogan claimed in 2019 that Turkey had spent $40 billion on refugee assistance,[83] though one source estimated in November 2019 that the amount could be closer to $24 billion.[84] Turkey closed several refugee camps in 2019 and encouraged Syrians in those camps to integrate into Turkish society while resolution of their long-term status is pending.

Economic competition—particularly at a time of general economic uncertainty in Turkey—may fuel some tensions between refugees and Turkish citizens.[85] Surveys suggest that a majority of Turks have concerns about refugees' impact on Turkey's society and economy.[86] While a July 2019 study indicated that 84% of refugee households had at least one member working, most Syrians' jobs are in the informal sector, where wages are below the legal minimum and workers can face exploitation and unsafe working conditions.[87] The United Nations estimates that 64% of Syrian refugees in Turkish cities (where the vast majority reside) live below the poverty line.

The return of refugees to Syria is a sensitive issue. Some reports claim that, in light of domestic pressure,[88] Turkey may have forcibly returned thousands of Syrian refugees to Syria,[89] though Turkish officials deny these claims.[90] Erdogan presented a plan to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in November 2019 for facilitating the return of one million refugees to areas of Syria that Turkey captured during OPS, but the plan does not appear to have elicited serious consideration to date.

Turkish-Occupied Areas and Idlib

In areas of northern Syria that Turkey has occupied since 2016, Turkey has set up local councils, though questions persist about future governance and Turkey's overarching role. The local councils and associated security forces reportedly provide public services in these areas with funding, oversight, and training from Turkish officials. One Turkish analyst has observed that the migration of thousands of Sunni Arabs to these areas has significantly changed their demography, while Syrian Kurds maintain self-rule in some areas, even though they are less contiguous with each other and the Turkish border.[91] The same analyst has written that Turkish officials debate how permanent their control in northern Syria should be, surmising that Erdogan foresees a long-term Turkish presence rather than a transition to Syrian government rule.[92]

---

[82] Kemal Kirisci and Basak Yavcan, "As Covid-19 worsens precarity for refugees, Turkey and the EU must work together," Brookings Institution, June 11, 2020.

[83] Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "Erdogan: Turkey is Stepping Up Where Others Fail to Act," *Wall Street Journal*, October 14, 2019.

[84] Mustafa Sonmez, "Mystery surrounds Turkey's $40 billion refugee bill," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, November 2, 2019.

[85] Alan Makovsky, "Turkey's Refugee Dilemma," Center for American Progress, March 13, 2019; Sarah Dadouch, "'They want to kill you': Anger at Syrians erupts in Istanbul," *Reuters*, July 9, 2019.

[86] Suat Kiniklioglu, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Changing Attitudes and Fortunes," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, February 2020.

[87] Dogus Simsek, "Integration for whom?" Heinrich Boll Stiftung, October 1, 2019; "Refugees in Turkey: Livelihoods Survey Findings 2019," Turkish Red Crescent and World Food Programme, July 11, 2019.

[88] Pinar Tremblay, "Are Syrians in Turkey no longer Erdogan's 'brothers'?" *Al-Monitor*, July 30, 2019.

[89] Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Syrians Being Deported to Danger," October 24, 2019; Amnesty International, *Sent to a War Zone: Turkey's Illegal Deportations of Syrian Refugees*, October 2019.

[90] Fahrettin Altun, "Turkey Is Helping, Not Deporting, Syrian Refugees," foreignpolicy.com, August 23, 2019.

[91] Asli Aydintasbas, "A new Gaza: Turkey's border policy in northern Syria," European Council on Foreign Relations, May 28, 2020.

[92] Ibid.

Turkey has increasingly focused on Syria's northern province of Idlib. The majority of the armed opposition to the Asad government—including elements aligned with Al Qaeda—is based there, along with millions of civilians (including many internally displaced persons from other areas of the country). Idlib is one of the specific "de-escalation zones" identified in a September 2017 agreement as part of the Astana Process involving Turkey, Russia, and Iran. The Syrian government has since seized the other zones. Turkey deployed troops to Idlib to protect it from government forces and prevent further refugee flows into Turkey.

The Turkish military remains in a standoff with Russia and the Syrian government over the future of Idlib. A limited outbreak of conflict in early 2020 led to several Turkish casualties (including dozens reportedly killed in Russian air operations), displaced hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians, and opened highway access for Syrian forces through the province to other parts of the country. After the fighting, the United States announced that it would provide ammunition for the Turkish military, as well as $108 million in humanitarian assistance for U.N. programs aiding Syrian civilians.[93] Russian willingness to back Syrian operations in Idlib perhaps stems in part from Turkey's unwillingness or inability to enforce a 2018 Turkey-Russia agreement by removing heavy weapons and "radical terrorist groups" from the province.[94]

Role in Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute: Armenia and Azerbaijan

Turkey plays a significant role in the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, due largely to Turkey's close ethnic and linguistic ties with Azerbaijan and its troubled history with the Armenian people. Nagorno-Karabakh is within Azerbaijan's borders but has been controlled by its ethnic Armenian majority—with Armenian assistance—since the end of an initial conflict over the area in 1994 after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

As Azerbaijan's energy-rich economy allowed it to spend more on its military over the past decade, its capabilities relative to Armenian rivals improved. Key Azeri acquisitions reportedly have included Turkish-origin drones, as well as kamikaze drones and ballistic missiles from Israel.[95] Azeri weapons purchases from Turkey surged over the first nine months of 2020, totaling around $123 million, compared with $21 million over the same time period in 2019.[96] After some Armenia-Azerbaijan border clashes in July 2020, Turkey held joint exercises with Azerbaijan on its territory. According to some reports, Turkey may have left some key equipment and personnel in Azerbaijan.[97]

The frozen conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh resumed in September 2020, with Azeri units reportedly using Israeli Harop and Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones in its attacks on ethnic Armenian positions, including armored vehicles and air defense systems. Azeri President Ilham Aliyev has stated that some Turkish F-16s are based in Azerbaijan and available for use if the conflict escalates.[98] Additionally, reports suggest that Turkey has recruited and paid Syrian

[93] Tuvan Gumrukcu, "U.S. willing to give Turkey ammunition for Syria's Idlib," *Reuters*, March 3, 2020; Jared Malsin, "U.S. Offers Aid, not Missiles, as Turkey Pushes Back Syrian Forces," wsj.com, March 3, 2020.

[94] Text of agreement available at https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/full-text-of-turkey-russia-memorandum-on-idlib-revealed-1.771953.

[95] Anton Troianovski, "Resignation and Despair Stoke Armenian Conflict," *New York Times*, October 19, 2020.

[96] Ece Toksabay, "Turkish arms sales to Azerbaijan surged before Nagorno-Karabakh fighting," *Reuters*, October 14, 2020.

[97] Paul Antonopoulos, "Hundreds of Turkish military personnel are orchestrating Azerbaijan's invasion of Artsakh: reports," *Greek City Times*, October 18, 2020.

[98] "Aliyev threatens to use Turkish F-16s against possible external aggression," *Turkish Minute*, October 26, 2020.

mercenaries to assist Azerbaijan's military, as it has previously done in Libya.[99] One Turkish journalist has observed that placing Sunni Arab Syrians in predominantly Shia Azerbaijan could fan sectarian tensions and also raise concerns in Russia about the potential for Islamist political unrest among its own Muslim population in the Caucasus.[100] In October, Secretary of State Pompeo criticized Turkey for increasing the risk in the conflict by lending its firepower to Azerbaijan, and as of November 6, 97 Representatives were co-sponsoring an introduced nonbinding resolution (H.Res. 1165) that would condemn Azerbaijan's military operations and denounce Turkey's involvement.[101]

President Erdogan has supported Azeri demands that Armenian forces withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh. In doing, he has opposed some calls from the Minsk Group (chaired by the United States, Russia, and France) for a cease-fire.[102]

The mutual involvement of Turkey and Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis could give one or both of them leverage over the other on their other issues of mutual interest, such as Syria, Libya, arms sales, and energy. Russia maintains close political and security ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia's treaty obligation to defend Armenia from attack does not appear to apply to Nagorno-Karabakh because it is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan.[103]

Turkish Defense Procurement

Background

Turkish goals to become more self-sufficient on national security matters and increase Turkey's arms exports affect the country's procurement decisions. After the 1975-1978 U.S. arms embargo over Cyprus significantly hampered Turkish arms acquisitions, Turkey sought to decrease dependence on foreign sources by building up its domestic defense industry (see **Figure 9**).[104] Over time, Turkish companies have supplied an increased percentage of Turkey's defense needs, on equipment ranging from armored personnel carriers and naval vessels to drone aircraft. For key items that Turkey cannot produce itself, its leaders generally seek deals with foreign suppliers that allow for greater co-production and technology sharing.[105]

[99] Raja Abdulrahim, "Hundreds of Syrian Rebels Join Armenia-Azerbaijan Fight," *Wall Street Journal,* October 14, 2020.

[100] Fehim Tastekin, "Syrian fighters add snarls to tangled south Caucasus," *Al-Monitor,* October 2, 2020.

[101] "Pompeo Criticizes Turkey's Involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Reuters,* October 16, 2020.

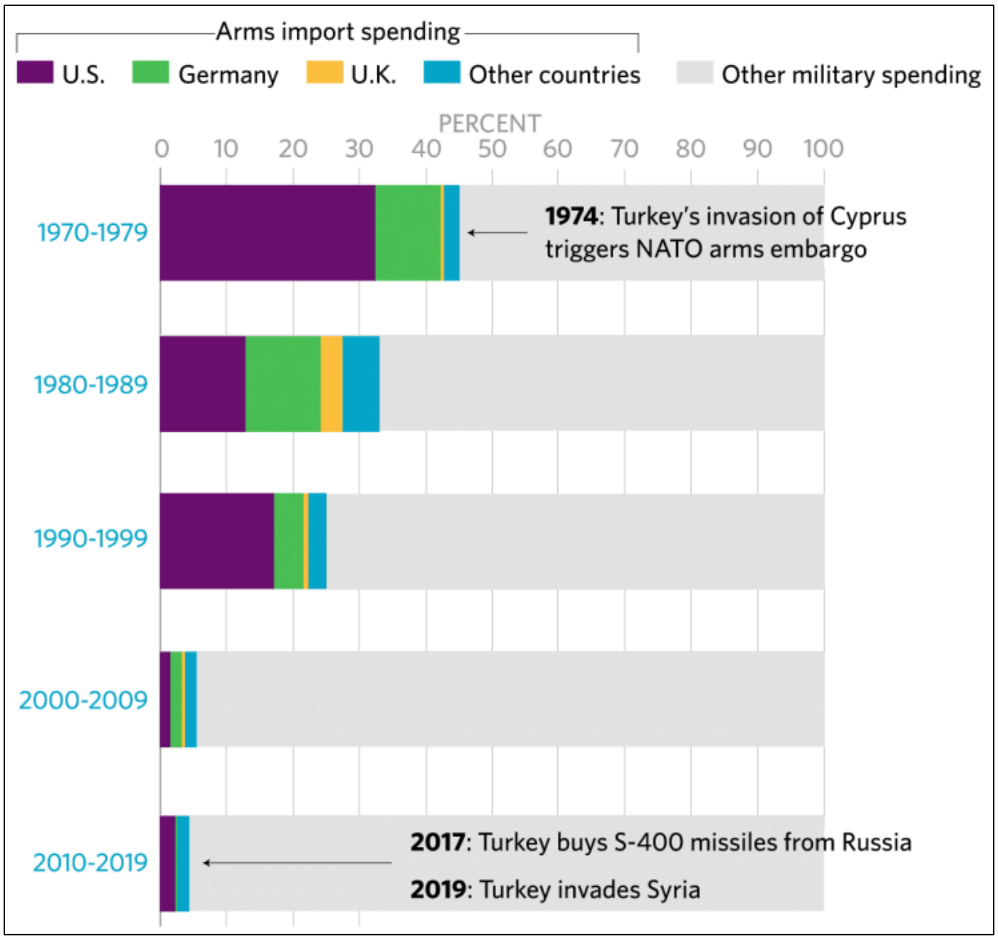
[102] The Minsk Group formed in 1992 to lead the efforts of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in mediating a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

[103] Dmitri Churciu, "Russia says defense pact does not apply to Karabakh," *Anadolu Agency,* October 7, 2020.

[104] Omar Lamrani, "Facing Sanctions, Turkey's Defense Industry Goes to Plan B," *Stratfor,* November 7, 2019.

[105] "Turkey - Market Report," *Jane's Navigating the Emerging Markets,* March 5, 2020. According to one source, since Erdogan became prime minister in 2003, Turkey went from providing around 20% of its own defense industry needs to around 65%. Interview with Bulent Aliriza of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Aaron Mehta, "4 questions on the risks facing Turkey's defense industry," *Defense News,* April 22, 2019.

Figure 9. Arms Imports as a Share of Turkish Military Spending



Sources: Stratfor, based on information from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Traders Database.

U.S. Arms Sales and Aid

Historically, Turkey was one of the largest recipients of U.S. arms, owing to its status as a NATO ally, its large military, and its strategic position. Since 1948, the United States has provided Turkey with approximately $13.8 billion in overall military assistance (nearly $8.2 billion in grants and $5.6 billion in loans).

However, U.S. arms sales to Turkey have declined over time given Turkey's efforts mentioned above to become more self-reliant, as well as recent bilateral tensions. Current annual military assistance is limited to approximately $2 million in International Military Education and Training (IMET). See **Appendix D** for information on recent arms sales or potential sales.

An August 2020 article reported that some Members of congressional committees have placed informal holds on major new U.S.-origin arms sales to Turkey over the past two years in connection with the Turkey-Russia S-400 transaction discussed below. Such a disruption has not occurred since the 1975-1978 embargo over Cyprus.[106] Major sales (valued at $25 million or

[106] Valerie Insinna, et al., "Congress has secretly blocked US arms sales to Turkey for nearly two years," *Defense News*, August 12, 2020.

more) supposedly on hold include structural upgrades for Turkey's F-16 aircraft and export licenses for engines involved in a Turkish sale of attack helicopters to Pakistan. Sales already underway or for smaller items and services—such as spare parts, ammunition, and maintenance packages for older equipment—are not subject to these holds.

Key Weapons Systems and Turkey's Relationships: S-400, F-35, Patriot

How Turkey procures key weapons systems affects its partnerships with major powers. For decades, Turkey has relied on important U.S.-origin equipment such as aircraft, helicopters, missiles, and other munitions to maintain military strength.[107] Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system and its exploration of possibly acquiring Russian Sukhoi fighter aircraft may raise the question: If Turkey transitions to major Russian weapons platforms with multi-decade lifespans, how can it stay closely integrated with NATO on defense matters?

A number of factors may have influenced Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400 instead of the U.S.-origin Patriot system. One is Turkey's apparent desire to diversify its foreign arms sources.[108] Another is Erdogan's possible interest in defending against U.S.-origin aircraft such as those used by Turkish military personnel in the 2016 coup attempt.[109]

Turkey's general interest (discussed above) in procurement deals that feature technology sharing and co-production also may have affected its S-400 decision. Lack of agreement between the United States and Turkey on technology sharing regarding the Patriot system over a number of years possibly contributed to Turkey's interest in considering other options.[110] While Turkey's S-400 purchase reportedly does not feature technology sharing,[111] Turkish officials express hope that a future deal with Russia involving technology sharing and co-production might be possible to address Turkey's longer-term air defense needs, with another potential option being Turkish co-development of a system with European partners.[112]

In response to the beginning of S-400 deliveries to Turkey, the Trump Administration announced in July 2019 that it was removing Turkey from participation in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program. In explaining the U.S. decision to remove Turkey from the F-35 program, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen Lord said, "Turkey cannot field a Russian intelligence collection platform [within the S-400 system] in proximity to where the F-35 program makes, repairs and houses the F-35. Much of the F-35's strength lies in its stealth capabilities, so the ability to detect those capabilities would jeopardize the long-term security of the F-35 program."[113] Additionally, Section 1245 of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization

[107] Turkey also has procurement and co-development relationships with other NATO allies, including Germany (submarines), Italy (helicopters and reconnaissance satellites), and the United Kingdom (a fighter aircraft prototype).

[108] "Turkey is buying Russian missiles to diversify supply," *Oxford Analytica*, January 26, 2018.

[109] Nicholas Danforth, "Frustration, Fear, and the Fate of U.S.-Turkish Relations," German Marshall Fund of the United States, July 19, 2019; Ali Demirdas, "S-400 and More: Why Does Turkey Want Russian Military Technology So Badly?" nationalinterest.org, July 14, 2019.

[110] Flanagan, et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course*.

[111] Aaron Stein, "Putin's Victory: Why Turkey and America Made Each Other Weaker," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, July 29, 2019.

[112] Burak Ege Bekdil, "West's reluctance to share tech pushes Turkey further into Russian orbit," *Defense News*, January 10, 2020.

[113] Department of Defense transcript, 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.

Act (P.L. 116-92) prohibits the use of U.S. funds to transfer F-35s to Turkey unless the Secretaries of Defense and State certify that Turkey no longer possesses the S-400.

Turkey had planned to purchase at least 100 U.S.-origin F-35s and was one of eight original consortium partners in the development and industrial production of the aircraft.[114] According to U.S. officials, most of the supply chain handled by Turkish companies was due to move elsewhere by March 2020, with a few contracts in Turkey continuing until completion.[115] The cost of shifting the supply chain, beyond some production delays,[116] was estimated in July 2019 to be between $500 million and $600 million.[117]

Into 2020, Turkey continued discussions with the Trump Administration about having the United States deploy or sell Patriot surface-to-air defense systems to Turkey if Turkey returned the S-400 to Russia or limited its use,[118] but the discussions have stalemated.[119] Since 2013, various NATO countries have stationed air defense batteries in southern Turkey as a means of assisting Turkey during Syria's civil war. The United States removed its contribution of Patriot batteries from Turkey in 2015, explaining the action in terms of its global missile defense priorities while contributing to doubts among Turkish leaders about the U.S. commitment to their security.[120] As of September 2020, Spain operates a Patriot system in the Turkish city of Adana under NATO auspices.

Drones: Domestic Production, U.S. and Western Components, and Exports

Over the past decade, Turkey has built up a formidable arsenal of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drone aircraft, to carry out armed attacks or perform target acquisition. Their primary purpose has been to counter the PKK or PKK-linked militias in southeastern Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. In 2020 Turkey and its allies also have reportedly used armed drones against Syrian government forces in Idlib, the LNA in Libya, and ethnic Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. Open source accounts report that the drones have been effective in targeting adversaries, while also raising concerns about the legality of their use in these settings and the danger they pose to civilians. Since 2018, some open sources have claimed that Turkish drones have made reconnaissance flights over Greek islands, Cyprus, and Eastern Mediterranean waters.[121]

---

[114] A 2007 memorandum of understanding among the consortium participants is available at https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/102378.pdf, and an earlier 2002 U.S.-Turkey agreement is available at https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/196467.pdf. For information on the consortium and its members, see CRS Report RL30563, *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

[115] Marcus Weisgerber, "Turkey Will Make F-35 Parts Throughout 2020, Far Longer Than Anticipated," *Defense One*, January 14, 2020.

[116] Paul McLeary, "F-35 Production Hurt If Turkey Kicked Out of Program: Vice Adm. Winter," *Breaking Defense*, April 4, 2019.

[117] Department of Defense transcript. It is unclear whether the United States or the F-35 consortium could be liable for financial penalties beyond refunding Turkey's initial investment in the program, an estimated $1.5 billion. Michael R. Gordon, et al., "U.S. to Withhold Order of F-35s from Turkey," *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 2019.

[118] Tuvan Gumrukcu and Orhan Coskun, "Turkey says U.S. offering Patriot missiles if S-400 not operated," *Reuters*, March 10, 2020.

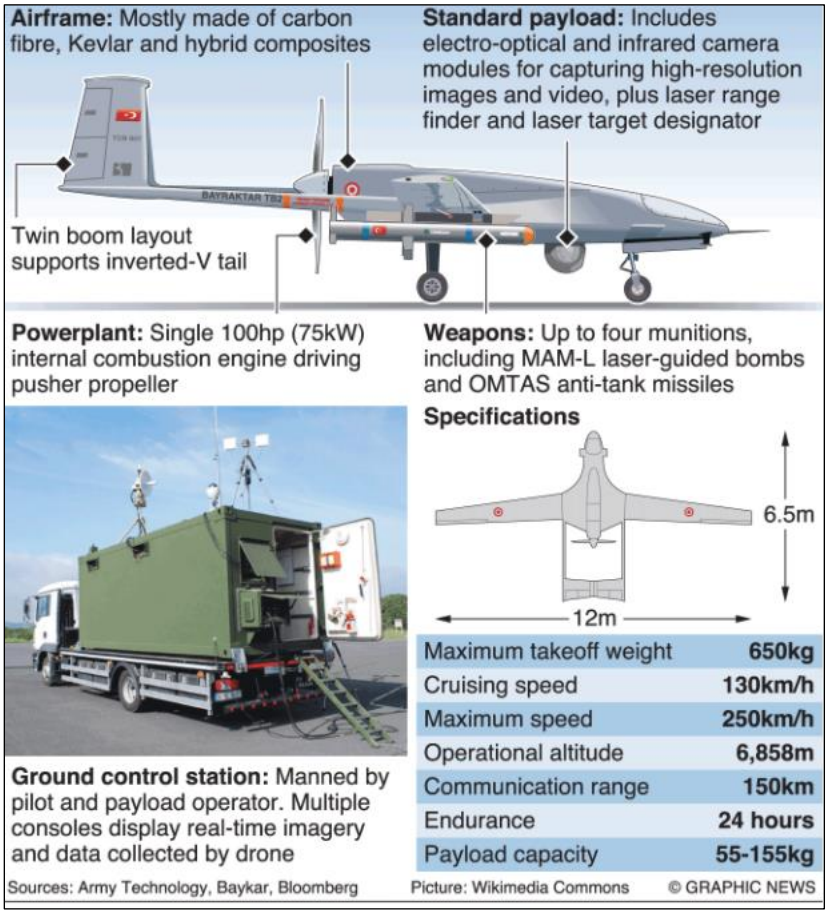
[119] Aaron Stein, "Finding Off Ramps to the Ongoing S-400 Crisis with Turkey," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, July 1, 2020.

[120] Jim Townsend and Rachel Ellehuus, "The Tale of Turkey and the Patriots," *War on the Rocks*, July 22, 2019; Ibrahim Kalin, "No, Turkey Has Not Abandoned the West," *Bloomberg*, July 22, 2019.

[121] Dan Gettinger, "Turkey's military drones: an export product that's disrupting NATO," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, December 6, 2019.

Turkey has focused on producing drones domestically. This is partly due to its failure in the early 2010s to acquire U.S.-made armed MQ-9 Reapers because of reported congressional opposition,[122] as well as to concerns that Israel may have deliberately delivered underperforming versions of its Heron reconnaissance drones to Turkey in 2010.[123] Kale Group and Baykar Technologies have produced the Bayraktar TB2 (see **Figure 10**), and Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) has produced the Anka-S. Turkey anticipates adding both larger (the Aksungar and Bayraktar Akinci) and smaller drones (the Kargu-2 and Alpagu) to its arsenal over the next decade.[124] Selcuk Bayraktar, a son-in-law of President Erdogan, has played a key role in engineering the Bayraktar drones that dominate Turkey's fleet.[125]

Figure 10. Bayraktar TB2 Drone



While Turkish companies have assembled the drones, they apparently rely on Western countries for some key components, including engines, optical sensors, and camera systems.[126] After a

[122] Ibid.

[123] Itamar Eichner, "Turkey accuses Israel of selling them defective drones," *Ynetnews*, June 24, 2018.

[124] Paul Iddon, "Turkey's Drones Are Coming in All Sizes These Days," forbes.com, October 4, 2020.

[125] Umar Farooq, "The Second Drone Age: How Turkey Defied the U.S. and Became a Killer Drone Power," *The Intercept*, May 14, 2019.

[126] "Canadian decision to halt tech exports exposes key weakness in Turkish drone industry," *Turkish Minute*, October 17, 2020.

Canadian-produced camera system was reportedly found in a Bayraktar TB2 downed in Nagorno-Karabakh in October 2020, Canada halted export permits for parts used in Turkish drones pending an investigation.[127] Also in October, a Canadian company whose Austrian subsidiary produces engines for Bayraktar TB2s announced that it would suspend engine deliveries to "countries with unclear usage."[128] Additionally, Armenian sources have raised concerns about the possible use of some U.S.-origin components in Bayraktar TB2s that could affect their future availability.[129]

It is unclear if Turkey can produce replacements for Western-origin drone components. Since 2018, TAI has reportedly been integrating domestically produced engines into its drones, including the Anka-S.[130] Following the Canadian decision on export permits, the head of Turkey's government defense procurement agency said that Turkey is beginning mass production of a domestic camera system for its drones.[131]

Turkey's drones' apparent effectiveness—such as in destroying Russian-origin air defense systems[132]—may have boosted global demand for Turkish defense exports (see **Figure 11**). In addition to Azerbaijan, Qatar and Ukraine have reportedly purchased Bayraktar TB2s. Ukraine apparently seeks to make additional purchases, which could lead to some form of co-production.[133] Serbia, Indonesia, and Tunisia also have supposedly expressed interest in Turkish drones. It is unclear whether a more combative Turkish foreign policy approach that helps market drones to other countries is a net plus or minus for Turkey's fragile economy, in light of the potential for Turkey's actions to isolate it from major powers that represent key sources of trade and investment.[134]

[127] Levon Sevunts, "Armenia claims it found Canadian tech on downed Turkish drone," *Radio Canada International*, October 20, 2020.

[128] Levon Sevunts, "Bombardier Recreational Products suspends delivery of aircraft engines used on military drones," *Radio Canada International*, October 25, 2020.

[129] "How much does the production of Turkish 'local' Bayraktar TB2 ATS depend on foreign supplies?" *Ermeni Haber Ajansi* (translated from Armenian), October 26, 2020.

[130] Beth Davidson, "IDEF'19: Anka Aksungur to Fly with Turkish Engine by Year-end," *AIN Online*, May 1, 2019.

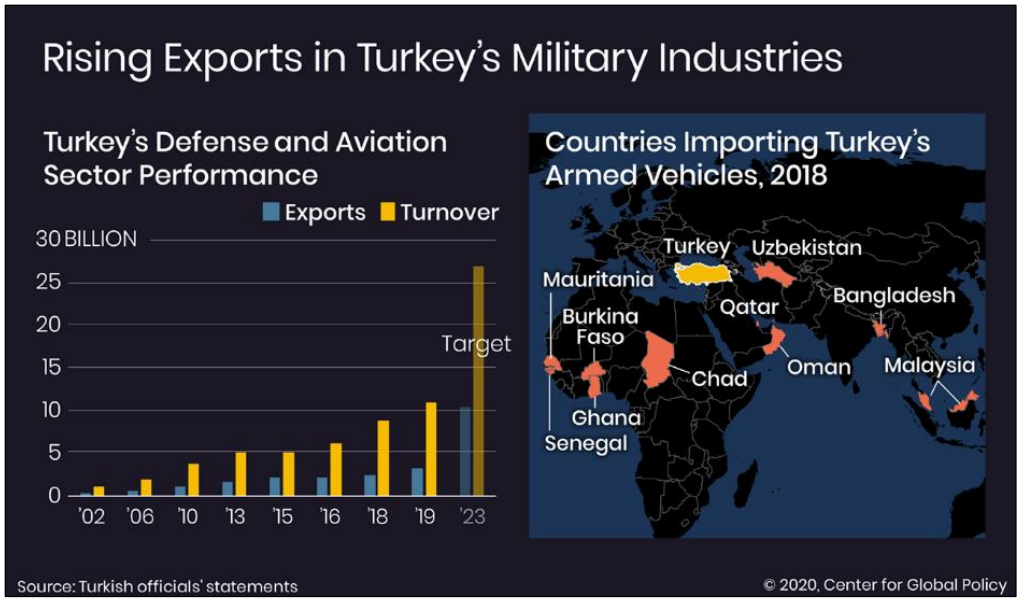
[131] Gokhan Ergocun, "'Turkish defense industry moving on despite embargoes,'" *Anadolu Agency*, October 6, 2020.

[132] Seth Frantzman, "Russian air defense systems outmatched by Turkish drones in Syria and Libya," *Long War Journal* (Foundation for Defense of Democracies), June 10, 2020.

[133] "Ukraine considers buying 48 Bayraktar TB2 drones from Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, October 6, 2020.

[134] See, e.g., Metin Gurcan, "Turkey's foreign policy becoming alarmingly militarized," *Al-Monitor*, September 22, 2020; Sinan Ulgen, "A Weak Economy Won't Stop Turkey's Activist Foreign Policy," foreignpolicy.com, October 6, 2020.

Figure 11. Turkish Military Export Statistics



Congressional Scrutiny: U.S. Responses and Options

In a context where many Members of Congress are increasingly critical of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy actions, as reflected in legislative proposals and oversight, some U.S. concerns have led to sanctions and other measures against Turkey, and to efforts to empower Turkey's rivals. These measures or others in the future could, in turn, affect U.S.-Turkey relations more broadly.

Selected Events Affecting U.S.-Turkey Tensions

July 2016	Failed coup attempt in Turkey. President Erdogan and many Turks blame the Fethullah Gulen movement for the coup and call for Gulen's extradition from the United States (which has not happened to date). Several domestic and international observers, including in the United States, criticize Turkey's post-coup arrests and purge of the public sector.
May 2017	During President Erdogan's visit to Washington, DC, several of his security guards reportedly assault ethnic Kurdish protestors gathered near the Turkish ambassador's residence in Sheridan Circle, drawing sharp criticism from some Members of Congress.
August 2018	The United States and Turkey levy reciprocal sanctions against one another over disagreements relating to Turkey's imprisonment of American pastor Andrew Brunson. Brunson is released in October 2018, but three Turkish nationals employed by U.S. consulates remain under various forms of legal confinement or restraint.
July 2019	Turkey begins receiving S-400 system components from Russia; Department of Defense announces Turkey's removal from F-35 program.
October 2019	Turkey and allied Syrian militias seize territory in northeastern Syria and attack PKK-linked Syrian Kurdish forces that partner with the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition, drawing intense criticism from many Members of Congress.

	Department of Justice charges Turkey's largely state-owned Halkbank for various offenses related to a supposed multi-billion dollar scheme to evade U.S. sanctions on Iran. Criminal penalties could affect Turkey's economy; the case also could implicate Erdogan directly, and it has some connection to his domestic struggles against the Gulen movement.[135]
Summer 2020	Turkey-Greece tensions intensify in the Eastern Mediterranean over energy, maritime, and airspace disputes, fueling U.S. and European criticism of Turkey.
Fall 2020	Turkey provides political and material support for Azerbaijan in its resumption of conflict with ethnic Armenians over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, further increasing U.S. criticism of Turkey.

Sanctions' effect on Turkish behavior may be difficult to gauge. One financial strategist said in October 2019 that measures constraining Turkish banks from transacting in dollars could particularly affect Turkey's financial system.[136] While negative effects on Turkey's economy could lead to domestic pressure to change Turkish policies,[137] they also could increase popular support for the government. While Turkey has long-standing, deeply rooted ties with the West, some sanctions could potentially create incentives for Turkey to increase trade, investment, and arms dealings with non-Western actors.[138] President Erdogan has stated that U.S. actions against Turkey could lead to the ejection of U.S. military personnel and assets from Turkey.[139]

Relevant U.S. measures affecting or potentially affecting Turkey include:

- **Congressional action on arms sales.** Beyond the informal holds mentioned above (see "U.S. Arms Sales and Aid"), Congress could respond to Turkish policies of concern—in Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean, Nagorno-Karabakh, or elsewhere—by taking action on specific arms sales or on sales generally, including U.S.-origin components used in domestically produced systems. In October 2020, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Bob Menendez introduced S.Res. 755, a resolution entitled to expedited consideration in the Senate (under Section 502B(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961; 22 USC 2304(c)) that could require a Department of State report within 30 days on possible Turkish human rights abuses both domestically and in the South Caucasus, Syria, Libya, and Iraq; and lead to expedited action on U.S. arms sales and assistance to Turkey.
- **CAATSA sanctions.** The S-400 acquisition also could trigger the imposition of U.S. sanctions under CRIEEA (Title II of the Countering America's Adversaries

[135] According to one media source, the charges against Halkbank might have come sooner and also been brought against some prominent individuals involved with the transactions in question were it not for direct efforts by President Erdogan to seek Trump Administration intervention with the prosecutor's office, given considerations that might range from foreign policy sensitivities to personal affinities between Presidents Trump and Erdogan. Eric Lipton and Benjamin Weiser, "Trump Ties to Erdogan Snarled U.S. Inquiry into Turkish Bank," *New York Times*, October 30, 2020.

[136] Sebastian Galy, cited in Jack Ewing, "Tariffs Won't Stop Turkey's Invasion of Syria, Analysts Warn," *New York Times*, October 15, 2019.

[137] Ewing, "Tariffs Won't Stop Turkey's Invasion of Syria, Analysts Warn."

[138] Remarks by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, *Congressional Record* vol. 165, no. 173, Senate - October 31, 2019, p. S6310 (Turkey and Syria); Paul McLeary, "Tough Sanctions May Drive Turkey into Russia's Arms," *Breaking Defense*, October 10, 2019; Burak Ege Bekdil and Matthew Bodner, "No obliteration: Western arms embargo has little impact on Turkey as it looks east," *Defense News*, October 24, 2019.

[139] Selcan Hacaoglu, "Pentagon chief questions Turkey's NATO loyalty after base threat," *Bloomberg*, December 17, 2019.

Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA; P.L. 115-44; 22 U.S.C. 9525). Under Section 231 of CAATSA, the President is required to impose sanctions on any party that he determines has knowingly engaged in "a significant transaction with a person that is part of, or operates for or on behalf of, the defense or intelligence sectors of the Government of the Russian Federation." Section 1292 of the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act passed by the House in July 2020 (H.R. 6395) has a provision that would require the Administration to impose CAATSA sanctions on Turkey. The Administration imposed CAATSA sanctions against China in September 2018, roughly eight months after it took possession of Russian S-400-related components and fighter aircraft.[140] President Trump has appeared to favor an "interim solution" allowing Turkey to avoid sanctions if it does not operate the S-400. Reportedly, Turkey has delayed plans to put the system into use, but has tested it multiple times since 2019.[141]

- **Sanctions related to Syria.** In October 2019, the Trump Administration imposed sanctions on some Turkish cabinet ministries and ministers in response to Turkey's armed incursion against Kurdish-led forces in Syria, but lifted them later that same month.[142] The sanctions came pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13984, which President Trump signed on October 14, 2019, and which remains in effect.[143] That same month, Congress considered a number of sanctions bills in response to Turkey's incursion into Syria, with the House passing the Protect Against Conflict by Turkey Act (H.R. 4695).
- **End of arms embargo against Cyprus.** Section 1250A of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92), enacted in December 2019, lifted a 32-year-old embargo on U.S. arms sales to the Republic of Cyprus, amid the Turkey-Greece-Cyprus tensions over Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration and maritime boundary issues described above. In July 2020, the U.S. embassy in Cyprus announced that the United States would begin providing some International Military Education and Training to Cyprus in FY2021.[144] In September, Secretary of State Pompeo waived restrictions on the U.S. sale of non-lethal defense articles and services to Cyprus for FY2021, attracting criticism from Turkish officials.
- **Reduced U.S.-Turkey cooperation against the PKK.** One media report citing U.S. and Turkish officials stated that in response to Turkey's October 2019 military operations against the YPG, the U.S. military stopped drone flights that

[140] Department of State, "CAATSA Section 231: Addition of 33 Entities and Individuals to the List of Specified Persons and Imposition of Sanctions on the Equipment Development Department," September 20, 2018.

[141] Stein, "Finding Off Ramps"; Joyce Karam, "Turkey tests S-400 Russian missile system with US jets, defying Washington," *The National*, November 25, 2019; "US Condemns Turkey for Testing Russian-Made S-400 Missile," *Voice of America*, October 17, 2020.

[142] Department of the Treasury, *Executive Order on Syria-related Sanctions; Syria-related Designations; Issuance of Syria-related General Licenses*, October 14, 2019; Department of the Treasury, *Syria-related Designations Removals*, October 23, 2019.

[143] White House, "Executive Order on Blocking Property and Suspending Entry of Certain Persons Contributing to the Situation in Syria," 84 *Federal Register* 55851-55855, October 14, 2019.

[144] U.S. Embassy in Cyprus, "U.S. International Military Education and Training for the Republic of Cyprus," July 8, 2020.

had been sharing intelligence to help Turkey target PKK locations in northern Iraq for more than a decade.[145]

Outlook

The future of U.S.-Turkey relations could depend on a number of factors, including:

- whether Turkey makes its Russian S-400 system fully operational and considers additional Russian arms purchases;
- how various regional crises (Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Eastern Mediterranean disputes with Greece and Cyprus) unfold and influence Turkey's relationships with key actors (including the United States, Russia, China, the European Union, Israel, Iran, and Sunni Arab states);
- whether Turkey can project power and create its own sphere of influence using military and economic cooperation (including defense exports); and
- whether President Erdogan is able to maintain broad control over the country given its economic problems and human rights concerns.

Administration and congressional actions regarding Turkey can have implications for bilateral ties, U.S. political-military options in the region, and Turkey's strategic orientation and financial well-being. For example, U.S. actions in response to Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 could affect U.S. relations with respect to other key partners who have purchased or may purchase advanced weapons from Russia—including India, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. These actions could include placing conditions on arms sales, whether and how to impose CAATSA sanctions, assessing U.S./NATO basing options, and balancing relations with Turkey and its regional rivals.

How closely to engage Erdogan's government could depend on U.S. perceptions of his popular legitimacy, likely staying power, and the extent to which a successor might change his policies in light of geopolitical, historical, and economic considerations. Key constituencies to consider include pious Sunni Muslims, secular Turks, nationalists, Kurds, Alevis, various elites, and the middle and working classes.

[145] Humeyra Pamuk and Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: U.S. halts secretive drone program with Turkey over Syria incursion," *Reuters*, February 5, 2020.

Appendix A. Turkey's Foreign Policy Relationships

A number of considerations drive the complicated dynamics behind Turkey's international relationships. Turkey's maintenance of cooperative relationships with countries whose respective interests may conflict involves a balancing act. Turkey's vulnerability to threats from Syria and Iraq on its southern border increases the pressure on it to manage this balance, a balance further complicated by the active involvement of other regional and global powers in these countries.

Russia

After reaching a low point in Turkey-Russia relations in 2015-2016 (brought about by the Turkish downing of a Russian plane near the Turkey-Syria border and Russia's temporary imposition of sanctions), President Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin cultivated closer ties. Putin showed support for Erdogan during the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, and subsequently allowed Turkey to carry out military operations in northern Syria over the next two years that helped roll back Kurdish territorial control and reduce refugee flows near Turkey's border. The S-400 transaction and cooperation on natural gas pipelines and nuclear energy are other positive aspects of Turkey-Russia relations, even though the two countries have a centuries-long history of geopolitical conflict.

While some Western observers express concern that Turkey-Russia cooperation could undermine Turkey's relationships with the United States, the European Union, and NATO, Turkish and Russian interests diverge significantly in several places throughout the region. Several observers have remarked that Turkey's use of relatively inexpensive drones and proxy forces in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh have frustrated Russia's aspirations in these places—ironically by borrowing some of the tactics Putin has used to frustrate Western designs in its near abroad.[146] Additionally, Turkey is strengthening its defense cooperation with Ukraine in a way that seems calculated to check Russian regional dominance, and Turkey continues to oppose Russia's annexation of Crimea.[147]

These differences between Turkey and Russia may not lead to a major rupture between them. They suggest that any Turkish drift away from the West might lead Turkey toward more compartmentalization of its relations—in which cooperation or competition with different actors will depend on the specific circumstances of each issue—rather than toward close alignment with Russia or any other great power. Reinforcing this is Turkey's ongoing diversification of energy imports and the uncertainty surrounding its use of the S-400 and future defense cooperation with Russia.

China

Turkey and China cooperate on various matters in a way that generally does not affect the tense regional crises that enmesh Turkey and other international actors. For Turkey, China is a growing source of imports, lending, investment, and tourism at a time of economic difficulty and uncertainty in its relations with its traditional strategic partners in the West. For China, Turkey's strategic location at the crossroads of Eurasian transportation corridors makes it an important country for China's Belt and Road Initiative.[148] Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE have

[146] Prothero, "Turkey's Erdogan has been humiliating Putin all year."

[147] "Turkey, Ukraine Sign Military Cooperation Agreements," *Associated Press*, October 30, 2020.

[148] For more information on the Belt and Road Initiative, see CRS Report R45898, *U.S.-China Relations*, coordinated

increased their involvement in Turkey's telecommunications sector, and other Chinese firms have made significant investments in Turkish energy and transportation infrastructure.[149] Turkey and China also maintain some bilateral defense ties. Nevertheless, Turkey-China economic, military, and political ties remain relatively limited in contrast to Turkey's linkages with the United States and Europe.[150]

China's negative treatment of its Uyghur minority may be an obstacle to closer Turkey-China relations because the Uyghurs—a Turkic Muslim people—share ethnic, linguistic, and religious ties with most Turks. An estimated 50,000 Uyghurs have fled China in the past decade and found refuge in Turkey.[151] Once publicly critical of China's repression of the Uyghurs, Erdogan has become less outspoken in recent years despite China's detention of roughly 1.5 million Uyghurs in political re-education centers. His reticence may be due at least partly to Turkey's hopes that expanded Chinese lending and investment can help its struggling economy.[152] Reports in 2020 that suggest some Uyghur dissidents living in Turkey have been repatriated to China via third countries prompted a Department of State spokesperson to issue the following statement in July: "The United States will continue to call on the People's Republic of China to immediately end its campaign of repression in [China's] Xinjiang [province, where most Uyghurs live], release all those arbitrarily detained, and cease efforts to coerce members of Muslim minority groups residing abroad to return to China to face an uncertain fate."[153]

European Union[154]

Turkey has a long history of partnership with the EU (and its predecessor organizations) and began negotiations to join the EU in 2005. Talks stalled shortly thereafter and Turkey's membership is now seen as unlikely, at least in the near future. Many analysts argue that resistance to Turkish EU accession has been rooted in a fear that Turkey's large Muslim population would fundamentally change the cultural character of the EU and dilute the power of the EU's founding Western European states in particular. Turkey's unwillingness to normalize diplomatic and trade relations with EU member Cyprus presents a major obstacle to its accession prospects. Other EU concerns over Turkey's qualifications for membership center on the treatment of Kurds and religious minorities, media freedoms, women's rights, and the proper and transparent functioning of Turkey's democratic and legal systems.[155]

by Susan V. Lawrence.

[149] Ayca Alemdaroglu and Sultan Tepe, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State," foreignpolicy.com, September 16, 2020.

[150] Gonul Tol, "The Middle Kingdom and the Middle Corridor: Prospects for China-Turkey ties," Middle East Institute, May 29, 2020.

[151] Aykan Erdemir and Philip Kowalski, "China Buys Turkey's Silence on Uyghur Oppression," *The Diplomat*, August 21, 2020.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Emily Judd, "US calls on China to stop coercing Uighurs to return after Turkey extradition report," *Al Arabiya*, July 26, 2020.

[154] For more information on this subject, see archived CRS Report RS22517, *European Union Enlargement: A Status Report on Turkey's Accession Negotiations*, by Vincent L. Morelli; and CRS Report RS21344, *European Union Enlargement*, by Kristin Archick and Vincent L. Morelli.

[155] European Commission, *Turkey 2020 Report*.

Debate regarding the extent to which Turkey meets EU standards has intensified in recent years in light of domestic controversies since 2013 and President Erdogan's consolidation of power. Erdogan has used anti-European rhetoric to gain support both at home and among the substantial Turkish diaspora communities in Europe. Turkish domestic expectations of full accession to the EU have apparently been in decline for several years. Despite the lack of significant progress in accession negotiations, the EU has provided Turkey with more than €9 billion in pre-accession financial and technical assistance since 2002 (which is separate from the support for refugees addressed below). Based on concerns about Turkish backsliding on reforms, the EU reduced pre-accession assistance levels in 2018. Annual assistance levels that ranged from between €493-626 million for 2014-2017 dropped to slightly less than €400 million for 2018-2020.[156]

Turkey-EU Relations in Brief

1959: Turkey applies for associate membership in the then-European Economic Community (EEC)

1963: Turkey is made an associate member of the EEC (Ankara Agreement)

1970: Protocol signed outlining eventual establishment of Customs Union

1982: European Community (EC, successor to the EEC and forerunner of the EU) freezes relations with Turkey in response to 1980 coup; relations resume 4 years later

1987: Turkey applies to join the EC as a full member

1996: Customs Union between Turkey and the EU takes effect

1999: EU recognizes Turkey as a candidate for membership

2005: Accession negotiations begin

2016: The European Parliament passes a nonbinding resolution urging that accession talks with Turkey be halted

Since 2011, nearly four million refugees or migrants from Syria and other countries have come to Turkey, posing significant humanitarian, socioeconomic, and security challenges. Many have sought to cross from Turkey into Europe. Turkey and the EU reached an arrangement in March 2016 providing for the return from Greece to Turkey of "irregular migrants or asylum seekers whose applications have been declared inadmissible."[157] In exchange, the EU agreed to resettle one Syrian refugee for every Syrian readmitted to Turkey and provide Turkey with €6 billion to be used to support refugees, among other incentives.[158] The deterrent effect of the arrangement on migrants appears to have helped dramatically reduce the number of people crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands.[159]

In February 2020, as conflict in Syria's Idlib province threatened to bring a new wave of refugees into Turkey, President Erdogan—apparently partly owing to a desire for bolstered and expedited EU funding—announced that Turkey would no longer abide by the agreement. Turkish officials reportedly facilitated efforts by thousands of migrants—mostly Afghans, not Syrians—to cross Turkey's land border with Greece.[160] While such threats may highlight the potential for Turkey to use refugees as leverage with the EU,[161] in this case Turkish leverage appears to have been

[156] See https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180817-revised-indicative-strategy-paper-2014-2020-for-turkey.pdf.

[157] European Commission Fact Sheet, "Implementing the EU-Turkey Statement—Questions and Answers," June 15, 2016, available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-1664_en.htm. The arrangement is controversial because of questions surrounding its compatibility with international legal and human rights standards.

[158] For more, see https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/fourth_annual_report_on_the_facility_for_refugees_in_turkey.pdf.

[159] "UN agency praises 'huge impact' of EU-Turkey refugee deal," *Hurriyet Daily News,* April 18, 2018.

[160] Berkay Mandiraci, "Sharing the Burden: Revisiting the EU-Turkey Migration Deal," International Crisis Group, March 13, 2020.

[161] Kemal Kirisci and Basak Yavcan, "As COVID-19 worsens precarity for refugees, Turkey and the EU must work together," Brookings Institution, June 11, 2020.

relatively light given robust Greek border controls and reportedly little interest in leaving Turkey among Syrian refugees who live there.[162]

Armenia

Turkey's relations with Armenia are fraught for historical reasons. From 1915 to 1923, hundreds of thousands of Armenians died as a result of actions of the Ottoman Empire (Turkey's predecessor state). U.S. and international characterizations of these events influence Turkey's domestic and foreign policy, and are in turn influenced by developments in Turkey-Armenia relations. Turkey and Armenia initially agreed in 2009 on a set of joint protocols to normalize relations, but the ratification process in both countries stalled shortly thereafter. Armenia cancelled the protocols in 2018 in light of Turkish inaction. Turkey's support for Azerbaijan in the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh crisis also has implications for its relations with Armenia.

All U.S. Presidents since Jimmy Carter have made public statements memorializing the events, with President Ronald Reagan referring to a "genocide of the Armenians" during a Holocaust Remembrance Day speech in 1981.[163] In annual statements issued on every April 24 of his presidency, President Trump (echoing statements made by President Obama) has said that the events were "one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century" and that "one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths."[164] In addition to past statements or actions by U.S. policymakers, the website of the Armenian National Institute, a U.S.-based organization, asserts that at least 29 other countries (not counting the United States or Armenia) have characterized the events as genocide in some way, including 16 of the 27 EU member states.[165]

Congress has considered how to characterize the events of 1915-1923 on a number of occasions. In 1975 (H.J.Res. 148) and 1984 (H.J.Res. 247), the House passed proposed joint resolutions that referred to "victims of genocide" of Armenian ancestry from 1915 and 1915-1923, respectively.[166] Neither proposed joint resolution came to a vote in the Senate. Fifteen other proposed resolutions characterizing these World War I-era events as genocide were reported by various congressional

[162] Kadri Gursel, "Why Ankara's Syrian refugee threat has lost its impact," *Al-Monitor*, March 19, 2020.

[163] Additionally, in a May 1951 written statement to the International Court of Justice, the Truman Administration cited "Turkish massacres of Armenians" as one of three "outstanding examples of the crime of genocide" (along with Roman persecution of Christians and Nazi extermination of Jews and Poles). International Court of Justice, *Reservations on the Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: Advisory Opinion of May 28, 1951: Pleadings, Arguments, Documents*, p. 25.

[164] See, e.g., White House, "Statement by the President on Armenian Remembrance Day," April 24, 2020. Beginning with President Obama in 2009, annual White House statements (including those from President Trump) have continuously referenced the "Meds Yeghern," an Armenian phrase that translates roughly to "great crime." Vartan Matiossian, "The 'Exact Translation': How 'Medz Yeghern' Means Genocide," *Armenian Weekly*, May 15, 2013.

[165] The EU states listed as having recognized a genocide are Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Sweden. The European Parliament has also referred to the deaths as genocide. The non-EU states are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Lebanon, Paraguay, Russia, Switzerland, Vatican City, Venezuela, and Uruguay. In April 2015, the Republic of Cyprus's ethnic Greek parliament passed a resolution making it a crime to deny that the events constituted genocide. In 2007, Switzerland criminally fined an ethnic Turkish politician for denying that the events constituted genocide, and in 2012 France passed a law making it a crime to deny that the events constituted genocide—though the law was subsequently invalidated by the French Constitutional Council. Long-standing Turkish law criminalizes characterization of the events as genocide.

[166] Neither H.J.Res. 148 nor H.J.Res. 247 explicitly identified the Ottoman Empire or its authorities as perpetrators of the purported genocide. H.J.Res. 247 stated that "one and one-half million people of Armenian ancestry" were "the victims of the genocide perpetrated in Turkey."

committees from 1984 to 2014, but neither chamber passed measures related to the issue until the 116th Congress.

In late 2019, the House and Senate passed nonbinding resolutions (H.Res. 296 in October 2019 and S.Res. 150 in December 2019) characterizing the "killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923" as genocide. The resolutions came shortly after Turkish military operations against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in northeastern Syria drew significant congressional denunciation. Turkish officials roundly criticized both resolutions, but did not announce any changes to defense cooperation or any other aspect of U.S.-Turkey relations, despite having threatened to do so in years past in connection with similar proposed resolutions. In response to the Senate's December 2019 vote, the Department of State released a statement reading, "The position of the Administration has not changed. Our views are reflected in the president's definitive statement on this issue from last April."[167]

Cyprus and Greece

Since Cyprus became independent of the United Kingdom in 1960, Turkey has viewed itself as the protector of the island's ethnic Turkish-Cypriot minority from potential mistreatment by the ethnic Greek-Cypriot majority.[168] Responding to Greek and Greek-Cypriot political developments that raised concerns about a possible Greek annexation of Cyprus, Turkey's military intervened in 1974 and established control over the northern third of the island. This prompted an almost total ethnic and de facto political division along geographical lines that persists today.[169] The ethnic Greek-Cypriot-ruled Republic of Cyprus is internationally recognized as having jurisdiction over the entire island, while the de facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) (in the northern third) has only Turkish recognition.

The Republic of Cyprus's accession to the EU in 2004 and Turkey's refusal to normalize political and commercial relations with it are seen as major obstacles to Turkey's EU membership aspirations. Moreover, EU accession may have reduced incentives for Cyprus's Greek population to make concessions toward a reunification deal.[170] Incoming TRNC leader Ersin Tatar, who was elected in October 2020, favors a separate Turkish Cypriot state.

Turkey's relations with Greece are also fraught. The two countries joined NATO in 1952, but intercommunal tensions, the Cyprus question, and airspace and maritime border disputes "ensured that war between the two allies remained a real risk well into the 1990s."[171] Despite more regular diplomatic relations in the following two decades, Turkish relations with Greece have again deteriorated in recent years, including a resumption of Turkey-Greece border incidents (see "Eastern Mediterranean and Offshore Natural Gas"). In August 2020, in the context of

[167] Senate Resolution 150, Department of State, December 17, 2019.

[168] Turkey views its protective role as justified given its status as one of the three guaranteeing powers of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee that was signed at the time Cyprus gained its independence. The United Kingdom and Greece are the other two guarantors.

[169] Turkey retains between 30,000 and 40,000 troops on the island (supplemented by several thousand Turkish Cypriot soldiers). This is countered by a Greek Cypriot force of approximately 12,000 with reported access to 50,000 reserves. "Cyprus - Army," *Jane's Group UK*, October 2019. The United Nations maintains a peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP) of approximately 900 personnel within a buffer zone headquartered in Cyprus's divided capital of Nicosia (known as Lefkosa in Turkish). Since the mission's inception in 1964, UNFICYP has suffered 186 fatalities. The United Kingdom maintains approximately 3,000 personnel at two sovereign military bases on the southern portion of the island at Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

[170] The Greek Cypriots rejected by referendum a United Nations reunification plan (called the Annan plan after then Secretary-General Kofi Annan) in 2004 that the Turkish Cypriot population accepted.

[171] "Why Turkey and Greece cannot reconcile," *Economist*, December 14, 2017.

disputes over maritime borders and offshore natural gas exploration, Greek and Turkish frigates had a minor collision in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Middle East and North Africa

Turkey's Middle Eastern profile expanded in the 2000s as Erdogan (while serving as prime minister) sought to build economic and political linkages—often emphasizing shared Muslim identity—with Turkey's neighbors. However, efforts to increase Turkey's influence and offer it as a "model" for other regional states appear to have been set back by a number of developments since 2011: (1) conflict and instability that engulfed the region and Turkey's own southern border, (2) Turkey's failed effort to help Muslim Brotherhood-aligned groups gain lasting power in Syria and North Africa, and (3) domestic polarization accompanied by government repression. Turkey's troubled relations with some Sunni Arab states are described in "Middle East and Libyan Civil War," while its relations with other key regional states are outlined below.

Iran

While Turkey and Iran are sometimes rivals for regional influence, the two neighbors also work together on certain regional issues. Along with Russia, they coordinate efforts in Syria as part of the Astana Process. They also have some common concerns regarding Kurdish militant groups that maintain presences in Iraq.[172] However, Turkey is wary of Tehran's ambitions near its borders in those two countries, as well as its close relations with their governments. Turkish officials have periodically criticized Iran in stark terms, accusing it of destabilizing the region in pursuit of sectarian interests or "Persian expansionist policies."[173]

Turkey and Iran maintain significant economic ties, though Turkey's traditional reliance on Iranian oil and gas has declined in recent years. Turkey cut oil imports in 2019 in light of the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions on Iran. Turkey is still one of the largest importers of Iranian gas (under a contract that expires in 2026), but Iran's share of Turkish gas imports has decreased over the past decade as Turkey has increased its imports of LNG.[174] Iran has opposed the proposed Trans-Caspian Pipeline, which would bypass Iran by connecting Turkmenistan's considerable gas reserves with Azerbaijan, and from there to Turkey.

Iraq

Turkey's first priority in Iraq is to counter threats to Turkey from the PKK, which maintains safe havens there. Another concern—despite the generally positive relations described below between Turkey and Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)—is the possibility that Iraqi Kurdish moves toward independence could spread separatist sentiment among Kurds in Turkey. Turkey has conducted airstrikes against PKK targets in Iraq since 2007. The KRG—given its own rivalry with the PKK—has not generally objected to these strikes, though it is sensitive to pan-Kurdish

[172] Iran faces a separatist Kurdish insurgency by an affiliate of the PKK known as PJAK (Kurdish acronym for Kurdistan Free Life Party). Like the PKK, the PJAK has a presence in Iraq. Turkey and Iran have conducted separate operations against the two groups in northern Iraq, periodically coordinating but generally not to a significant extent.

[173] "Iran and Turkey trade barbs over Syria and Iraq," *Al Jazeera*, February 21, 2017; Ilnur Cevik, "Turkey is caught between the US and Iran," *Daily Sabah*, July 23, 2018.

[174] Tamer Badawi, "The economic turn in Turkish-Iranian relations," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 12, 2020; Omid Shokri Kalehsar, "The future of Iranian natural gas exports to Turkey," *National Interest*, June 24, 2020.

sympathies among its population.[175] Large Turkish air and ground offensives targeting PKK safe havens in 2020 have been condemned both by the KRG and Iraq's central government.[176]

Around 2008, Turkey started developing a political and economic partnership with the KRG. As part of this cooperation, in 2013 the KRG began transporting oil through pipelines to Turkish ports for international export. Turkey halted these exports after the KRG's symbolic 2017 referendum on independence, which it strongly opposed, but has since resumed them. Periodic attacks attributed to the PKK have shut down these pipelines at times.[177]

Turkey maintains an uneasy relationship with Iraq's central government over concerns that its Shia leaders are unduly influenced by Iran and that Iraq's security forces and Shia militias often mistreat Iraq's Sunni Arabs and ethnic Turkmen. Relations with Baghdad are also strained by Iraqi concerns about the potential impact that Turkish dam construction and water management decisions could have on downstream Iraqi communities.[178] Turkey's military maintains various posts inside northern Iraq and a presence at a base in Bashiqa near Mosul.

Israel

Ties between Turkey and Israel, which were close during the 1990s and early 2000s, have deteriorated considerably during Erdogan's rule. This slide has reflected the military's declining role in Turkish society relative to Erdogan and other leaders whose criticisms of Israel resound with domestic public opinion. Despite the countries' differences, trade between the two countries has grown.

After years of downgraded diplomatic ties following the 2010 *Mavi Marmara* (or Gaza flotilla) incident,[179] Turkey and Israel announced the full restoration of diplomatic relations in 2016, in a deal reportedly facilitated by the United States.[180] Nevertheless, the bilateral relationship remains tense.

Israelis routinely decry Turkey's ties with Palestinian Sunni Islamist militant group Hamas (a U.S.-designated terrorist organization). Erdogan's Islamist sympathies have contributed to these ties.[181] Some reports claim that some Hamas operatives are located in Turkey and involved in planning attacks on Israeli targets.[182] In September 2019, the Department of the Treasury designated an individual and an entity based in Turkey—under existing U.S. counterterrorism sanctions authorities—for providing material support to Hamas.[183]

---

[175] CRS In Focus IF10350, *The Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

[176] Amberin Zaman, "KRG seeks US help to rein in Turkish attacks," *Al-Monitor*, August 5, 2020.

[177] Mohammed Hussein et al., "PKK suspected of Iraq-Turkey Pipeline attack," *Iraq Oil Report*, October 30, 2020.

[178] "Iraq complains Turkey causing water shortages," *Arab Weekly*, July 17, 2020.

[179] The incident took place in international waters under disputed circumstances and resulted in the death of nine Turks and an American of Turkish descent.

[180] According to media reports, the rapprochement included Israeli compensation to the families of those killed in the flotilla incident in exchange for an end to legal claims, as well as opportunities for Turkey to assist with humanitarian and infrastructure projects for Palestinian residents in the Gaza Strip.

[181] Department of State spokesperson, President Erdogan's Meeting with Hamas Leadership, August 25, 2020.

[182] See, e.g., Raf Sanchez, "Exclusive: Hamas plots attacks on Israel from Turkey as Erdogan turns blind eye," telegraph.co.uk, December 14, 2019.

[183] Department of the Treasury press release, Treasury Targets Wide Range of Terrorists and Their Supporters Using Enhanced Counterterrorism Sanctions Authorities, September 10, 2019.

For their part, Turkish leaders often condemn Israel's treatment of Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip. Additionally, Erdogan has sought to lead regional opposition to various U.S. policies that go against Palestinian stances, including the 2017 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the encouragement of Israeli normalization of relations with Arab states such as the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan. After the U.S. embassy moved to Jerusalem in May 2018, Turkey expelled Israel's ambassador to Turkey, leading Israel to respond in kind with Turkey's ambassador to Israel. The ambassadors have not returned to date. Israeli officials are reportedly interested in countering Turkish aid, tourism, and civil society initiatives in Jerusalem seen as bolstering the city's Islamic identity and Arab residents.[184]

Some observers have characterized negative statements by Erdogan and other prominent Turkish voices about Israel, Zionism, and various regional and global trends as anti-Semitic.[185] Erdogan insists that his criticisms of the Israeli government and its policies are not directed to the Jewish people or to Jews in Turkey.

Other International Relationships

Turkey seeks to use political and economic influence to strengthen relationships with non-Western countries. Through political involvement, increased trade and investment, and humanitarian and development projects, Turkey has curried favor with foreign countries not only in the greater Middle East, but also in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Gulen movement-affiliated organizations had spearheaded some of these ties with other countries before Turkey's government classified the movement as a terrorist organization. Questions persist about how these ties will develop in response to changes in Turkey.

[184] Ahmad Melham, "Israel goes after Turkish projects in Jerusalem," *Al-Monitor*, July 2, 2020.

[185] Hannah Lucinda Smith, et al., "Turkey blames 'Jewish lobby' for economic crisis," *Times* (UK), May 30, 2018.

Appendix B. Profiles of Key Figures in Turkey

Recep Tayyip Erdogan—President
(pronounced *air-doe-wan*)

Born in 1954, Erdogan was raised in Istanbul and in his familial hometown of Rize on the Black Sea coast. He attended a religious *imam hatip* secondary school in Istanbul. In the 1970s, Erdogan studied business at what is today Marmara University, became a business consultant and executive, and became politically active with the different Turkish Islamist parties led by eventual prime minister Necmettin Erbakan.

Erdogan was elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994 but was removed from office, imprisoned for six months, and banned from parliamentary politics for religious incitement after publicly reciting a poem drawing from Islamic imagery. After Erbakan's government resigned under military pressure in 1997 and his Welfare Party was disbanded, Erdogan became the founding chairman of the AKP in 2001. The AKP won a decisive electoral victory in 2002, and has led the government ever since. After the election, a legal change allowed Erdogan to run for parliament in a 2003 special election, and after he won, Erdogan replaced Abdullah Gul as prime minister.

Erdogan and his personal popularity and charisma have been at the center of much of the domestic and foreign policy change that has occurred in Turkey since he came to power. Erdogan became Turkey's first popularly elected president in August 2014 and won reelection to a newly empowered presidency in June 2018. Many observers believe that he primarily seeks to consolidate power and to avoid the reopening of corruption cases that could implicate him and close family members or associates.

Erdogan is married and has two sons and two daughters. He is widely believed to be positioning his son-in-law Berat Albayrak (currently treasury and finance minister) as a possible successor. Erdogan does not speak English fluently.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu—Leader of Republican People's Party (CHP)
(*kill-itch-dar-oh-loo)*

Born in 1948 in Tunceli province in eastern Turkey to an Alevi background, Kilicdaroglu is the leader of the CHP, which is the main opposition party and traditional political outlet of the Turkish nationalist secular elite. In recent years, the party has also attracted various liberal and social democratic constituencies.

After receiving an economics degree from what is now Gazi University in Ankara, Kilicdaroglu had a civil service career—first with the Finance Ministry, then as the director-general of the Social Security Organization. After retiring from the civil service, Kilicdaroglu became politically active with the CHP and was elected to parliament from Istanbul in 2002. He gained national prominence for his efforts to root out corruption among AKP officials and the AKP-affiliated mayor of Ankara. Kilicdaroglu was elected as party leader in 2010 but has since faced criticism for the CHP's failure to make electoral gains.

Kilicdaroglu is married with a son and two daughters.

Devlet Bahceli—Leader of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)
(*bah-cheh-lee*)

Born in 1948 in Osmaniye province in southern Turkey, Bahceli is the leader of the MHP, which is the traditional Turkish nationalist party of Turkey that is known for opposing political accommodation with the Kurds.

Bahceli moved to Istanbul for his secondary education, and received his higher education, including a doctorate, from what is now Gazi University in Ankara. After a career as an economics lecturer at Gazi University, he entered a political career as a leader in what would become the MHP. He became the chairman of the MHP in 1997 and served as a deputy prime minister during a 1999-2002 coalition government. He was initially elected to parliament in 2007.

Bahceli and the MHP have allied with Erdogan, providing support for the 2017 constitutional referendum and joining a parliamentary coalition with the AKP in 2018.

Bahceli speaks fluent English.

Meral Aksener—Founder and Leader of the Good (*Iyi*) Party
(*awk-sheh-nar*)

Born in 1956 in Izmit in western Turkey to Muslims who had resettled in Turkey from Greece, Aksener is the founder and leader of the Good Party. She founded the party in 2017 as an alternative for nationalists and other Turks who oppose the MHP's alliance with Erdogan.

Aksener studied at Istanbul University and received a doctorate in history from Marmara University, becoming a university lecturer before entering politics. She was first elected to parliament in 1995 with the True Path Party, and served as interior minister in the coalition government that was ultimately forced from office in 1997 by a memorandum from Turkey's military. She served in parliament with the MHP from 2007 to 2015 and served for most of that time as deputy speaker.

Aksener became a forceful opponent of Erdogan after the MHP agreed in 2016 to provide him the necessary parliamentary support for a constitutional referendum establishing a presidential system of government. She left the party and campaigned vigorously against the proposed changes, which won adoption in 2017 despite the controversy that attended the vote. After founding the Good Party, she ran as its presidential candidate in the 2018 elections.

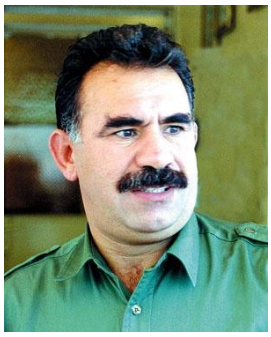
Selahattin Demirtas—Former Co-Leader and Presidential Candidate of Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)
(*day-meer-tosh*)

Born in 1973 to an ethnic Kurdish family, Demirtas is the most prominent member of the HDP, which has a Kurdish nationalist base but has also reached out to a number of non-Kurdish constituencies, particularly liberals and minorities. The constituency of the party and its various predecessors overlaps with that of the PKK, but the party professes a nonviolent stance and claims an independent identity.

Demirtas was raised in Elazig in eastern Turkey. He attended universities in both Izmir and Ankara and received his law degree from Ankara University. He became a human rights activist leader in Diyarbakir and was elected to parliament for the first time in 2007, becoming co-leader of the HDP's immediate predecessor party in 2010. His national visibility increased after he ran as one of two candidates opposing Erdogan for the presidency in 2014. His personal popularity and charisma are generally seen as major reasons for the HDP becoming the first pro-Kurdish party to pass the electoral threshold of 10% in June and November 2015 parliamentary elections.

Demirtas was arrested in November 2016 on terrorism-related charges, and received a 4-year, 8-month sentence for incitement in September 2018 and is imprisoned in Edirne. He stepped down from party leadership in January 2018 but ran for president in 2018 from prison, garnering about 8.5% of the vote.

Demirtas is married with two daughters.



Abdullah Ocalan—Founder of the PKK
(*oh-juh-lawn)*

Born in or around 1949 in southeastern Turkey (near Sanliurfa), Ocalan is the founding leader of the PKK.

After attending vocational high school in Ankara, Ocalan served in civil service posts in Diyarbakir and Istanbul until enrolling at Ankara University in 1971. As his interest developed in socialism and Kurdish nationalism, Ocalan was jailed for seven months in 1972 for participating in an illegal student demonstration. His time in prison with other activists helped inspire his political ambitions, and he became increasingly politically active upon his release.

Ocalan founded the Marxist-Leninist-influenced PKK in 1978 and launched a separatist militant campaign against Turkish security forces—while also attacking the traditional Kurdish chieftain class—in 1984. He used Syrian territory as his safe haven, with the group also using Lebanese territory for training and Iraqi territory for operations. Syria forced Ocalan to leave in 1998 after Turkey threatened war for harboring him.

After traveling to several different countries, Ocalan was captured in February 1999 in Kenya—possibly with U.S. help—and was turned over to Turkish authorities. The

PKK declared a cease-fire shortly thereafter. Ocalan was sentenced to death, in a trial later ruled unfair by the European Court of Human Rights, but when Turkey abolished the death penalty in 2002, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He resides in a maximum-security prison on the island of Imrali in the Sea of Marmara, and was in solitary confinement until 2009.

Although other PKK leaders such as Cemil Bayik and Murat Karayilan have exercised direct control over PKK operations during Ocalan's imprisonment, some observers believe that Ocalan still ultimately controls the PKK through proxies.

Appendix C. Timeline of Turkey's Involvement in Syria (2011-2020)

2011	Though the two leaders once closely corresponded, then-Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan calls for Syrian President Bashar al Asad to step down as protests and violence escalate; Turkey begins support for Sunni Arab-led opposition groups in cooperation with the United States and some Arab Gulf states
2012-2014	As conflict escalates in Syria and involves more external actors, Turkey begins facing cross-border fire and jihadist terrorist attacks in border areas and urban centers; as well as allegations of Turkish government permissiveness with jihadist groups that oppose the Asad government Turkey unsuccessfully calls for U.S. and NATO assistance to establish safe zones in northern Syria as places to train opposition forces and gather refugees and IDPs At Turkey's request, a few NATO countries (including the United States) station air defense batteries in Turkey near Syrian border
2014	The Islamic State obtains control of large swath of northern Syria IS attack on Kurdish-majority Syrian border town of Kobane unchallenged by Turkish military but repulsed by YPG-led Syrian Kurds (and some non-YPG Kurds from Iraq permitted to transit Turkish territory) with air support from U.S.-led coalition, marking the beginning of joint anti-IS efforts between the United States and YPG-led forces (including non-Kurdish elements) that (in 2015) become the SDF through U.S. train-and-equip initiatives Turkey, with Erdogan now president, begins allowing anti-IS coalition aircraft to use its territory for reconnaissance purposes
2015	Turkey begins permitting anti-IS coalition aircraft to conduct airstrikes from its territory As YPG-led forces find success in taking over IS-controlled areas with U.S.-led coalition support, a Turkey-PKK peace process (ongoing since 2013) breaks down and violence resumes in Turkey; Turkish officials' protests intensify in opposition to U.S. partnership with SDF in Syria U.S. military withdraws Patriot air defense battery from Turkey; some other NATO countries continue operating air defense batteries on Turkey's behalf In September, Russia expands its military involvement in Syria and begins helping Asad regain control over much of the country In November, a Turkish aircraft shoots down a Russian aircraft based in Syria under disputed circumstances; Russia responds with punitive economic measures against Turkey
2016	After failed coup attempt in Turkey in July, Turkey partners in August with Syrian opposition forces on its first military operation in Syria (Operation Euphrates Shield), an effort to eject IS fighters from and occupy an area between SDF-controlled enclaves
2017	Turkey begins Astana peace process on Syria with Russia and Iran In preparation for the campaign against the final major IS-held urban center in Raqqah, U.S. officials decide in May to arm YPG personnel directly, insisting to protesting Turkish officials that the arms will be taken back after the defeat of the Islamic State
2018	Turkey and its Syrian opposition partners militarily occupy the Kurdish enclave of Afrin (Operation Olive Branch); significant Kurdish displacements prompt humanitarian and human rights concerns In September, Turkey and Russia agree on parameters for Idlib province, including a demilitarized zone
2019	Erdogan insists on a safe zone in Syria to prevent opportunities for YPG attacks in Turkey or collaboration with Turkey-based PKK forces, and to resettle Syrian refugees; U.S. officials try to prevent conflict and to get coalition assistance to patrol border areas in northeastern Syria

	In October, President Trump announces highly controversial pullback of U.S. Special Forces from SDF-controlled border areas; to date, the United States had not recovered U.S.-origin arms from YPG personnel
	Turkey launches Operation Peace Spring (OPS), with Turkish-led forces obtaining control of various border areas and key transport corridors in northeastern Syria; reports of civilian casualties and displacement take place amid general humanitarian and human rights concerns
	Turkey reaches agreements with United States and Russia that end OPS and create a buffer zone between Turkey and the YPG
2020	A Russian-aided Syrian offensive in Idlib province leads to several Turkish and Syrian casualties, displaces hundreds of thousands of Sunni Arabs, and opens access for Syrian forces through the province to other parts of the country

Sources: Various open sources.

Appendix D. Significant U.S.-Origin Arms Transfers or Possible Arms Transfers to Turkey

(Congressional notifications since 2009)

Amount/Description	FMS or DCS	Year: Cong. Notice	Year: Contract	Year: Delivery	Primary Contractor(s)	Estimated Cost
400 RIM-162 Ship-air missiles (ESSM)	DCS	2009	Signed	2011-2019	Raytheon	$300 million
72 Patriot Advanced Capability Missiles (PAC-3), 197 Patriot Guidance Enhanced Missiles, and associated equipment	FMS	2009			Raytheon and Lockheed Martin	$4 billion
14 CH-47F CHINOOK Helicopters	FMS	2009	2011 and 2015	2016, 2018-2019 (10)	Boeing	$1.2 billion ($531 million for 10)
3 AH-1W SUPER COBRA Attack Helicopters	FMS	2011	Signed	2012	N/A (from U.S. Marine Corps inventory)	$111 million
117 AIM-9X-2 SIDEWINDER Block II Air-air missiles (SRAAM) and associated equipment	FMS	2012	2014	2015-2016	Raytheon	$140 million
48 MK-48 Mod 6 Advanced Technology All-Up-Round (AUR) Warshot torpedoes and associated equipment	FMS	2014			Raytheon and Lockheed Martin	$170 million
145 AIM-120C-7 Air-air missiles (AMRAAM)	FMS	2014	Signed	2016-2019	Raytheon	$320 million
21 MK-15 Phalanx Block 1B Baseline 2 Close-in weapons systems (CIWS) (sale/upgrade)	FMS	2015	2015 and 2016 (for 10)	2017-2018 (4 estimated)	Raytheon	$310 million
Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) and associated equipment	FMS	2015	2015 and 2017	2017-2018 (1,400 estimated)	Boeing	$70 million
80 Patriot MIM-104E Guidance Enhanced Missiles, 60 PAC-3 Missile Segment Enhancement missiles and related equipment	FMS	2018			Raytheon and Lockheed Martin	$3.5 billion

Sources: Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfer Database, *Defense News*, *Hurriyet Daily News*, Global Security.

Notes: All figures and dates are approximate; blank entries indicate that data is unknown or not applicable. FMS refers to "Foreign Military Sales" contemplated between the U.S. government and Turkey, while DCS refers to "Direct Commercial Sales" contemplated between private U.S. companies and Turkey.

Author Information

Jim Zanotti
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

Clayton Thomas
Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.