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Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations

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SUMMARY

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Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations

U.S. relations with Turkey take place within a complicated geopolitical environment and with Turkey in economic distress. U.S.-Turkey tensions that worsened after a failed 2016 coup in Turkey—including ongoing disagreements over Syrian Kurds and Turkey's 2019 procurement of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system—have raised questions about the future of bilateral relations. Congressional actions have included sanctions legislation and informal holds on U.S. arms sales. Nevertheless, U.S. and Turkish officials emphasize the importance of continued cooperation and Turkey's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Observers voice concerns about the largely authoritarian rule of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Major inflation and a sharp decline in Turkey's currency—perhaps partly due to Erdogan's unorthodox policy of keeping interest rates relatively low—have led to speculation that Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (Turkish acronym AKP) might be vulnerable to a coalition of opposition parties in presidential and parliamentary elections planned for June 2023 if competitive elections occur. If a different Turkish president were to win 2023 elections and take power, some domestic and foreign policy changes could be possible.

Under President Joe Biden, some existing U.S.-Turkey tensions have continued alongside cooperation on other foreign policy matters. While deepening ties with Russia in certain areas remain a cause for U.S. concern, Turkey's emergence as an important mediator between Russia and Ukraine after Russia's 2022 invasion has arguably increased Turkey's importance for U.S. policy. U.S.-Turkey relations have improved somewhat due to Turkey's cautious support for Ukraine's defense; growing relationships with other countries that seek to counter Russian regional power (including via the export of drone aircraft); and openness to rapprochement with Israel, some Arab states, and Armenia. President Biden has voiced support for sales that would upgrade Turkey's aging F-16 fleet, but some Members of Congress have expressed opposition. Congressional and executive branch action 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. Congressional oversight and legislation could affect arms sales, sanctions, military basing, and U.S. political and financial engagement with Turkey's government (including in connection with elections). The following are key factors in the U.S.-Turkey relationship.

Turkey's foreign policy orientation. For decades, 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' have indicated an interest in reducing their dependence on the West, and that may partly explain their willingness to coordinate some actions with Russia. Nevertheless, Turkey retains significant differences with Russia in Syria, Ukraine, Libya, and Armenia-Azerbaijan.

Major issues: Russia, Sweden-Finland-NATO, Greece and Cyprus, and the Middle East. In the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Turkey faces challenges in balancing its relations with the two countries and managing Black Sea access, with implications for U.S.-Turkey ties. To some extent, Erdogan has sought to reinforce Turkey's embattled economy by deepening economic and energy ties with Russia. Erdogan might assess that Western sanctions against Russia give Turkey increased leverage in these dealings. At the same time, Turkey has expanded defense cooperation with Ukraine. Turkey has become an important mediator between Russia and Ukraine on brokering a grain export corridor and other issues. In June, Turkey agreed on a framework deal for Sweden and Finland to join NATO, but Turkey has delayed ratifying their accession while demanding that the two countries help Turkey act against people it considers to be terrorists. Longstanding disputes between Greece and Turkey over territorial rights in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean seas have spiked in 2022 amid greater U.S. strategic cooperation with Greece and Cyprus, as well as renewed disagreements regarding Greek islands close to Turkey's coast. Turkey's improved relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—perhaps partly stemming from common concerns about Iran—appear to be further supports for Turkey's struggling economy.

Syria and Iraq: ongoing conflict near borders. Turkish concerns regarding its southern borders with Syria and Iraq have deepened further during Syria's civil war, due largely to (1) the flow of nearly four million refugees into Turkey, (2) U.S. efforts to counter the Islamic State by working with Syrian Kurds linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Kurdish acronym PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization), and (3) the presence of Russian, American, and Iranian forces in Syria that complicate and somewhat constrain Turkish action. Turkey and allied Syrian armed opposition groups have occupied various areas of northern Syria since 2016, and Turkey's military continues to target Kurdish fighters in Syria and Iraq. Turkey's military could undertake another ground operation against PKK-linked Syrian Kurds, despite reported U.S. and Russian expressions of concern.

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Introduction and Issues for Congress

While U.S.-Turkey[1] ties have been consistently complicated since Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, tensions in at least the past six years have produced a number of crises and have led to questions about the status and future of the bilateral relationship (see "U.S. Relations" and "Congressional Action and Options" below). Although the United States and Turkey, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (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 differences in geography, threat perceptions, and regional roles. This report provides background information and analysis on the following topics:

- **Turkey's domestic setting and 2023 elections.** 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. Structural weaknesses in Turkey's economy (including major inflation and a sharp decline in Turkey's currency) have led to speculation that Erdogan and the AKP might be vulnerable in presidential and parliamentary elections planned for June 2023. Concerns about winning reelection in partnership with the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyet Halk Partisi*, or MHP) may partly explain Erdogan's domestic and foreign policies. Polls suggest that an opposition coalition led by the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, or CHP) and Good Party (*Iyi Parti*) may have a chance to defeat Erdogan and the AKP in the elections. Some observers argue that an election may not be fully free or fair because of Erdogan's control or influence over the judiciary and media in Turkey.[2] If a different president were to win 2023 elections and take power, some policy changes could be possible, but might be limited in areas of core or longstanding national security concern.
- **Turkey's foreign policy.** Turkey appears to compartmentalize its relationships with United States, Russia, the European Union (EU), and its regional neighbors depending on various circumstances. For example, Turkey received an S-400 surface-to-air defense system from Russia in 2019 and continues to cooperate with it in other areas even after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, Turkey has provided Ukraine with military, political, and economic support in response to the conflict, and has worked with other countries in its region, perhaps partly as a means of countering Russian regional power.
- **U.S. relations.** Policy differences and public acrimony between Turkey and the United States—including over the S-400 and Kurds in northern Syria—have highlighted bilateral tensions. Yet, bilateral ties have somewhat improved due to

[1] In late 2021, President Erdogan directed the use of "Türkiye" (the country's name in Turkish) in place of "Turkey" or other equivalents (e.g. the German "Turkei," the French "Turquie," etc.) in Turkish government documents and communications. In June 2022, the United Nations accepted the Turkish request to change the country's name at the body to "Türkiye." Some U.S. government statements use "Türkiye," while others continue to use "Turkey." Vivian Salama and Jared Malsin, "Turkey's push to change how the world pronounces its name causes a flap," *Wall Street Journal*, November 27, 2022.

[2] Kemal Kirisci and Berk Esen, "Might the Turkish Electorate Be Ready to Say Goodbye to Erdoğan After Two Decades in Power?" *Just Security*, November 22, 2021.

Turkey's emergence as a potential regional counterweight to Russia and a mediator between Russia and Ukraine, among other things. President Biden has voiced support for arms sales to bolster Turkey's aging F-16 fleet (see "Possible F-16 Sales" below).

- **Congressional actions and options.** U.S.-Turkey tensions have led to a number of congressional initiatives and other U.S. actions. These include sanctions for Turkey's S-400 purchase from Russia, informal congressional holds and proposed legislation aimed at restricting arms sales, and other efforts to limit strategic cooperation or empower Turkey's rivals like Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. Options for further legislative action or oversight could address topics including possible F-16 sales; existing or new sanctions relating to the S-400, Syria, and Russia; Turkey's upcoming election, and U.S. political and economic engagement with Turkey's government.

Figure 1. Turkey at a Glance

Geography	*Area:* 783,562 sq km (302,535 sq. mile), slightly larger than Texas
People	*Population:* 83,047,706. Most populous cities: Istanbul 15.6 mil, Ankara 5.3 mil, Izmir 3.1 mil, Bursa 2.1 mil, Adana 1.8 mil, Gaziantep 1.8 mil. *% of Population 14 or Younger:* 23.4% (2020) *Ethnic Groups:* Turks 70%-75%; Kurds 19%; Other minorities 6%-11% (2016) *Religion:* Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), Others (mainly Christian and Jewish) 0.2% (2017) *Literacy:* 96.7% (male 99.1%, female 94.4%) (2019)

Economy	*GDP Per Capita (at purchasing power parity):* $38,759
	Real GDP Growth: 5.0%
	Inflation: 73%
	Unemployment: 10.8%
	Budget Deficit as % of GDP: 4.5%
	Public Debt as % of GDP: 37.5%
	Current Account Deficit as % of GDP: 5.7%
	International currency reserves: $67.1 billion

Sources: 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 (2022 end-of-year estimates or projections unless otherwise specified) from International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database; Economist Intelligence Unit; and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook*.

Country Overview and the Erdogan Era

Turkey's large and diversified economy, strong military, Muslim-majority population of over 83 million, and geographic position straddling Europe and the Middle East make it a significant power in both regions. For decades since its founding in the 1920s, the Turkish republic 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—including those described below—appear to stem partly from significant socioeconomic changes that began in the 1980s. The military-guided governments that came to power after a coup that occurred in 1980 helped establish Turkey's export-driven economy. This contributed to the gradual political awakening of a largely Sunni Muslim middle class from Turkey's Anatolian heartland.

The continued trajectory of these 1980s-initiated socioeconomic 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, with broad support among several Turkish constituencies that supported reforms to bring Turkey closer to EU standards. He subsequently clashed with rivals for power, including previous allies in the Fethullah Gulen movement.[3] 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.[4] 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.

[3] Gulen is a former Turkish state-employed imam who founded an international socioreligious movement that exercised considerable influence in Turkish media, politics, and society until Erdogan and Turkish authorities acted against thousands of its alleged members and sympathizers, starting in late 2013 and intensifying after a failed July 2016 coup involving renegade elements within the military. For more information 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.

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

Erdogan's consolidation of power has continued and arguably accelerated since 2014. In response to the 2016 coup attempt staged by rogue military officers, the government detained tens of thousands of its citizens, enacted sweeping changes to military and civilian agencies, and took over or closed various businesses, schools, and media outlets.[5] Erdogan has argued, with considerable popular support, that the Fethullah Gulen movement orchestrated the coup attempt, in which more than 250 people were killed and thousands were injured.[6] Forces and citizen groups loyal to the government ultimately thwarted the apparent efforts of some renegade military personnel (including airstrikes targeting Turkey's presidential palace and parliament building) to seize state control. Some leading opposition figures in Turkey have accused Erdogan of planning, controlling, and/or using the failed coup to suppress dissent and consolidate power.[7]

Additional developments expanded Erdogan's presidential powers further, most notably controversial victories in an April 2017 constitutional referendum and June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections (see below). In July 2018, parliament lifted the state of emergency that it had instituted after the coup attempt, but enacted many of its features into law for three years (extended for another three years in July 2021). However, the positive economic conditions that helped propel Erdogan's early political popularity have turned into largely negative ones in the past four years, leading to uncertainty about his popularity.

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.[8]

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,[9] 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

[5] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021*, Turkey; European Commission, *Turkey 2021 Report*, October 19, 2021.

[6] Gareth Jenkins, "Five Years After July 15: Erdogan's New Turkey and the Myth of Its Immaculate Conception," *Turkey Analyst*, July 15, 2021; Dorian Jones, "Turkey Looks Back at Failed Coup," *Voice of America*, July 15, 2019. Partly because of Gulen's residence in the United States, many Turks reportedly subscribe to conspiracy theories about possible U.S. involvement. Jenkins, "Five Years After July 15." CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

[7] Jenkins, "Five Years After July 15"; "Turkey coup: Top officers given life terms in mass trial," *BBC News*, April 7, 2021.

[8] See, for example, Gorkem Altinors and Umit Akcay, "The authoritarian consolidation attempt in Turkey," European Consortium for Political Research, February 22, 2022; Dimitar Bechev, *Turkey Under Erdogan: How a Country Turned from Democracy and the West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022.

[9] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021*, Turkey; European Commission, *Turkiye 2022 Report*, October 6, 2022; Human Rights Watch, "Turkey," *World Report 2022*; Freedom House, "Turkey," *Freedom in the World 2022*.

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), including an October 2022 law criminalizing "disinformation."
- Weakened protections for women. In 2021, Erdogan withdrew Turkey from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (abbreviated as the Istanbul Convention because it was signed in Istanbul in 2011), triggering statements of concern among some domestic and international observers that perpetrators may be encouraged, not discouraged. In the months leading up to Turkey's withdrawal, some domestic religious and conservative groups lobbied against the convention on the grounds that it degraded family values and advocated for LGBTQ.
- 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 has agreed to accept the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), but in some cases has refused to implement rulings, leading to speculation that Turkey may be removed from the Council.[10] Specific concerns regarding the treatment of Turkey's large ethnic Kurdish population and its religious minorities are discussed in various sections below.

Analyses of Erdogan sometimes characterize him as one or more of the following: a pragmatic populist, a protector of some historically marginalized groups, a budding authoritarian, or an Islamic ideologue.[11] 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 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 and various other key Turkish figures (including political party leaders and potential presidential candidates for 2023) are profiled in **Appendix A**.

Political Assessment

Overview

President Erdogan retains sweeping power over Turkey. At the same time, 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, whether or not it leads to Erdogan leaving office.

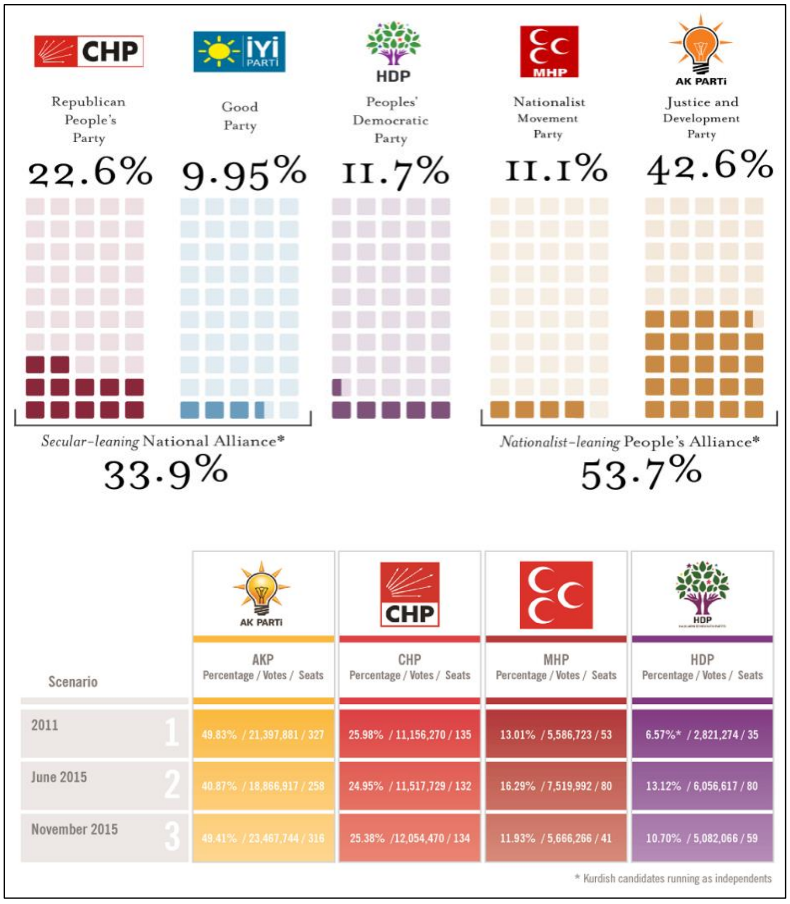
Erdogan won the June 2018 presidential elections with about 53% of the vote, but the AKP won just under 43% of votes in the concurrent parliamentary elections. To maintain a parliamentary majority, Erdogan's AKP has relied on the MHP (see **Figure 2** below). The MHP is the country's traditional Turkish nationalist party, and is known for opposing political accommodation with the

[10] Ali Kucukgocmen, "Turks risk losing Europe's human rights protections after court spurned," *Reuters*, November 10, 2022.

[11] See, for example, Bechev, *Turkey Under Erdogan*; Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2020; Bilge Yabanci, "Religion, Nationalism, and Populism in Turkey under the AKP," Middle East Institute, October 6, 2022.

Kurds. The MHP also 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,[12] which was also the case with the April 2017 constitutional referendum.[13]

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 included 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

[12] Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), International Election Observation Mission, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Turkey, Early Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, June 24, 2018 (published June 25, 2018).

[13] OSCE, Limited Referendum Observation Mission Final Report, Turkey, April 16, 2017 (published June 22, 2017).

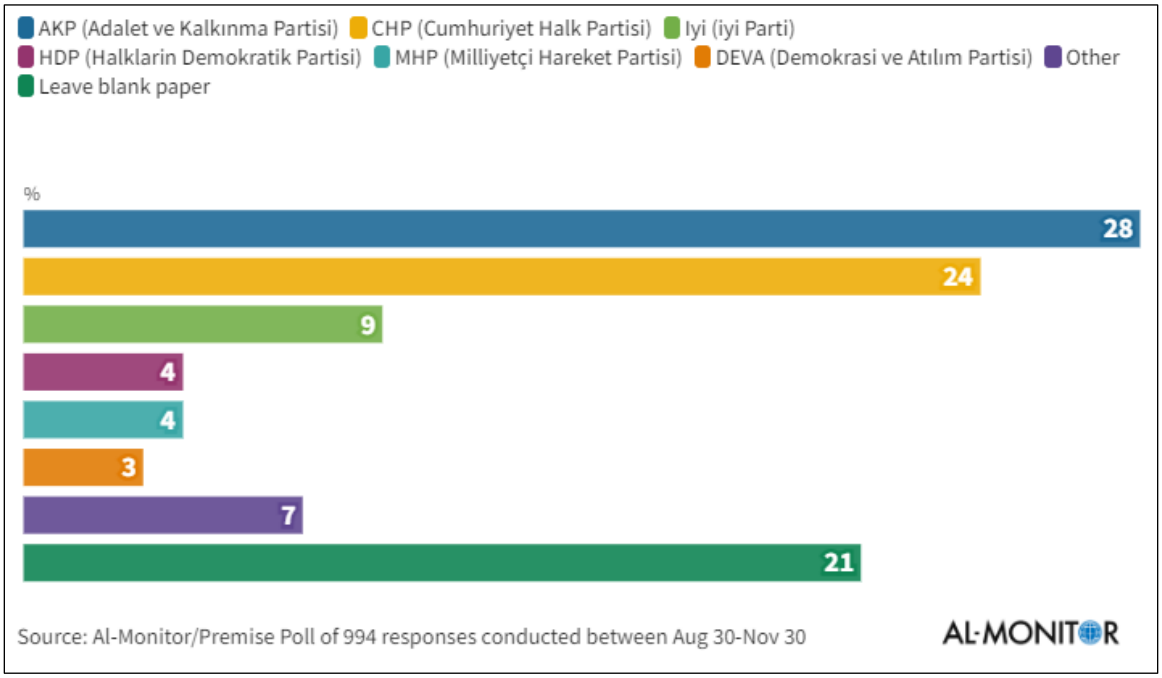
annulled by the Supreme Electoral Council. In the closely watched June 2019 re-vote, Imamoglu won a decisive victory over AKP candidate and former Prime Minister Binali Yildirim.

2023 Elections

Turkey's next presidential and parliamentary elections are planned for June 2023. Largely in the context of Turkey's economic problems discussed above, public opinion polls have fueled speculation that Erdogan and the AKP-MHP parliamentary coalition might be vulnerable.[14] In one late-2022 poll (see **Figure 3**), three parties from an opposition coalition (CHP-Iyi-DEVA) outperformed AKP-MHP by a 36%-32% margin. In the same poll, Erdogan's approval rating was 38%, the percentage who said things in Turkey were headed in the wrong direction was 59%, and the percentage who said the economy was the most important issue was 67%.[15]

Figure 3. Turkish Political Party Preferences

(as of late 2022)



How Kurdish citizens of Turkey (numbering nearly 20% of the population) vote could impact the outcome (see "Government Approaches to the Kurds" below).[16] Additionally, some observers debate whether (1) free and fair elections could take place under Erdogan,[17] (2) opposition parties

[14] Ben Hubbard, "Skyrocketing Prices in Turkey Hurt Families and Tarnish Erdogan," *New York Times*, December 5, 2022; "Polls indicate close race between rival blocs, yet people increasingly think Erdoğan will win," *BIA News*, October 12, 2022; Berk Esen, "The opposition alliance in Turkey: A viable alternative to Erdogan?" *SWP Comment* (German Institute for International and Security Affairs [SWP]), August 2022.

[15] "Al-Monitor/Premise poll finds tight race for Erdogan in Turkey's elections," *Al-Monitor*, December 7, 2022.

[16] Mesut Yegen, "Erdogan and the Turkish Opposition Revisit the Kurdish Question," *SWP Comment*, April 2022.

[17] Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, "It Is Not Too Early to Think About Political Change in Turkey," German Marshall Fund of the United States, January 10, 2022; Kirisci and Esen, "Might the Turkish Electorate Be Ready to Say Goodbye to Erdoğan After Two Decades in Power?"

can convince potential swing voters to side with them despite their personal or ideological affinity for Erdogan,[18] or (3) Erdogan would cede power after an electoral defeat.[19]

In February 2022, the CHP and the Good (or Iyi) Party, along with four smaller parties (including two established in 2019 and 2020 by Ahmet Davutoglu and Ali Babacan, prominent former AKP figures), signed a joint electoral manifesto, forming "the most comprehensive opposition platform" since 1950, according to one observer.[20] The primary pledge of this electoral coalition is to return Turkey to the parliamentary system that existed before the 2018 election, largely as a means of limiting executive power. Opposition figures have also criticized the Erdogan government's approach to a range of foreign and domestic policy issues and promised to make changes (see "Foreign Policy Changes Under a Different President?" below).[21]

The coalition seeks to select a joint presidential candidate to run against Erdogan, probably from the CHP. Party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu (who has an Alevi background—see "Alevis" below) generally polls lower than Istanbul mayor Imamoglu and Ankara mayor Mansur Yavas (see **Appendix A**).[22] Though Imamoglu's candidacy may be jeopardized by a criminal conviction (see text box), public visibility from his mayorship may have helped widen his and the CHP's appeal.[23] Despite Erdogan's potential vulnerability, some observers have expressed doubt about the opposition coalition's prospects, citing ideological differences between its constituent parties.[24]

Imamoglu's Criminal Case and Potential Political Ban

Istanbul mayor and CHP member Ekrem Imamoglu could face a ban from political activity because of a December 2022 criminal conviction. The charge of insulting members of Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council stemmed from a remark that Imamoglu said he made about the annulled March 2019 election (discussed above) in response to an insult against him from Turkey's interior minister.[25] The court sentenced Imamoglu to jail and banned him from political activity for two years and seven months, but both penalties are subject to appeal, and the timing of the appellate process is unclear.[26] In the meantime, Imamoglu continues to serve as mayor and engage politically. Imamoglu and other opposition figures denounced the verdict and judicial process as politicized and a sign of government attempts to sideline Erdogan's potential electoral opponents.[27]

[18] Ozer Sencar of Metropoll, in Laura Pitel, "Will the ailing Turkish economy bring Erdogan down?" *Financial Times*, November 1, 2021.

[19] Unnamed Western diplomat quoted in Laura Pitel, "Defeating Erdogan: Turkey's opposition searches for a champion," *Financial Times*, May 5, 2022.

[20] Esen, "The opposition alliance in Turkey"; Seren Selvin Korkmaz, "The strategies and struggles of the Turkish opposition under autocratization," Middle East Institute, October 4, 2022.

[21] "Türkiye's CHP forms technocratic committee to advise the govt," *Yetkin Report*, December 4, 2022; Berk Esen, "Post-2023 election scenarios in Turkey," *SWP Comment*, September 2022; Alper Coskun and Sinan Ulgen, "Political Change and Turkey's Foreign Policy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2022.

[22] Andrew Wilks, "Turkish opposition forms plan to oust Erdogan, restore parliament's power," *Al-Monitor*, February 15, 2022; Pitel, "Defeating Erdogan."

[23] Gonca Tokyol, "Wielding Istanbul's clout, Kaftancioglu and the CHP take aim at 2023 elections," *Turkey recap* (Substack), November 16, 2022.

[24] See, for example, James Ryan, "The path ahead in Turkey's upcoming electoral campaign," *War on the Rocks*, November 10, 2022.

[25] "Turkish court orders jail, political ban for Erdogan rival," *Reuters*, December 14, 2022; Andrew Wilks, "Cases against opposition politicians mount ahead of Turkish elections," *Al-Monitor*, June 2, 2022.

[26] Ben Hubbard and Safak Timur, "Conviction May Sideline Rival of Turkish Leader," *New York Times*, December 15, 2022.

[27] Ibid.; Yusuf Selman Inanc, "Turkey: Istanbul mayor given two-year jail sentence and 'political ban,'" *Middle East Eye*, December 14, 2022.

In response to the December court ruling, a State Department statement included the following passage:

> His [Imamoglu's] conviction is inconsistent with respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. We remain gravely concerned by the continued judicial harassment of civil society, media, political and business leaders in Turkey, including through prolonged pretrial detention, overly broad claims of support for terrorism, and criminal insult cases.
>
> The people of Turkey deserve the ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms without fear of retribution. The right to exercise the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association is enshrined in Turkey's constitution, its international law obligations, and its OSCE commitments. We urge the government to cease prosecutions under criminal "insult" laws, and to respect the rights and freedoms of all Turkish citizens, including by ensuring an open environment for public debate.[28]

Erdogan controls whether to initiate elections before June 2023 and has thus far stated his unwillingness to do so. Rather than compel elections in Turkey, domestic instability could lead Erdogan's cabinet to initiate a state of emergency with the potential to delay elections.[29]

Economic Assessment

Overview and Ongoing 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.

Since 2012, however, growth has at times slowed or reversed, and the Turkish economy has experienced significant volatility. The "low-hanging fruit"—numerous major infrastructure projects and the scaling up of low-technology manufacturing—that largely drove Turkey's economic success in the 2000s and early 2010s may be unlikely to produce similar results going forward. Turkey's relatively big current account deficit increases its vulnerability to higher borrowing costs.

Concerns among domestic and foreign market actors about rule of law in Turkey 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 to serve as treasury and finance minister, leading some observers to discern greater politicization of Turkey's monetary policy.[30] Albayrak resigned in November 2020, and Erdogan replaced his successor around a year later, mirroring the frequent personnel churn at Turkey's central bank, where Erdogan fired three bank chiefs (and numerous other officials) from 2019 to 2021.[31] That turmoil contributed to the steady depreciation over several years of Turkey's currency, the lira, putting further strain on the economy. As of

[28] State Department, "Turkey's Conviction and Sentencing of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu," December 15, 2022.

[29] "Professor says Turkey may declare state of emergency following economic crisis," *Duvar English*, December 14, 2021.

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

[31] Jared Malsin and Anna Hirtenstein, "Turkey's Erdogan fires central bank officials, fueling economic uncertainty," *Wall Street Journal*, October 14, 2021.

December 2022, the value of the lira had declined around 28% for the year, and nearly 80% since 2018.

At least some of these economic challenges appear to stem from Erdogan's longstanding and ideologically-motivated opposition to high interest rates. Erdogan, contrary to mainstream economic thinking, has expressed the view that lowering interest rates is a means to combat inflation.[32] Turkey's central bank hiked interest rates several times in 2020 and 2021, but in late 2021 returned to the interest rate cuts called for by Erdogan, despite a rising annual inflation rate that reached 85% in October 2022, the highest since 1998.[33] Some unofficial estimates have suggested that actual inflation may be well over 100%.[34]

A persistent current account deficit has put further stress on Turkey's central bank reserves, which have declined as part of government efforts to bolster the lira, reportedly leading Turkey to seek capital infusions from elsewhere. Turkey has sought currency swaps from some Arab Gulf states, and also has benefitted from Russian-origin inflows (both from tourism and from Russia's nuclear agency, which is building a nuclear power plant in southern Turkey) that contribute to U.S. warnings about potential sanctions evasion (see "Turkey-Russia Economic and Energy Cooperation" below).[35] According to one media account, Turkey's central bank received $24.4 billion in unaccounted-for funds in the first seven months of 2022.[36] In 2021, the inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force had placed Turkey on an increased monitoring or "grey" list for deficiencies in preventing money laundering and terrorist financing.[37]

The currency and inflation crisis in Turkey has dramatically affected consumers' cost of living and the cost of international borrowing (mostly conducted in U.S. dollars) for banks and private sector companies. The government has sought to stop or reverse inflation by providing tax cuts, minimum wage increases, and subsidies for basic expenses, along with borrowing incentives for banks that hold liras.[38] Erdogan has publicly rejected calls to turn to the International Monetary Fund for a financial assistance package. In December 2021, the government announced a plan to insure lira-denominated bank accounts against currency depreciation, in apparent coordination with a significant state-backed market intervention.[39]

Energy

Turkey's strategic location makes it relevant for world energy markets as a transit country while also providing Turkey with opportunities to satisfy its own domestic energy needs, which are

[32] "Is Recep Tayyip Erdogan's monetary policy as mad as it seems?" *Economist*, January 27, 2022.

[33] Beril Akman, "Turkey slashes interest rate in line with Erdogan's demand," *Bloomberg*, November 24, 2022; "Yearly inflation in Turkey rises to new 24-year high of 85%," *Associated Press*, November 3, 2022.

[34] Mustafa Sonmez, "Turkish inflation hits 85.5% as doubts linger over official data," *Al-Monitor*, November 3, 2022.

[35] Laura Pitel "Turkey finance minister defends economic links with Russia," *Financial Times*, October 25, 2022; Murat Kubilay, "As liquidity problems worsen, Turkey turns to capital controls and informal FX flows," Middle East Institute, November 7, 2022.

[36] Louis Ashworth, "Who's stuffing Turkey?" *Financial Times*, September 13, 2022.

[37] Financial Action Task Force, "Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring - October 2021," available at https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/high-risk-and-other-monitored-jurisdictions/documents/increased-monitoring-october-2021.html.

[38] Hubbard, "Skyrocketing Prices in Turkey Hurt Families and Tarnish Erdogan"; Baris Balci and Inci Ozbek, "Turkey Rewrites All Inflation Forecasts," *Bloomberg*, April 28, 2022.

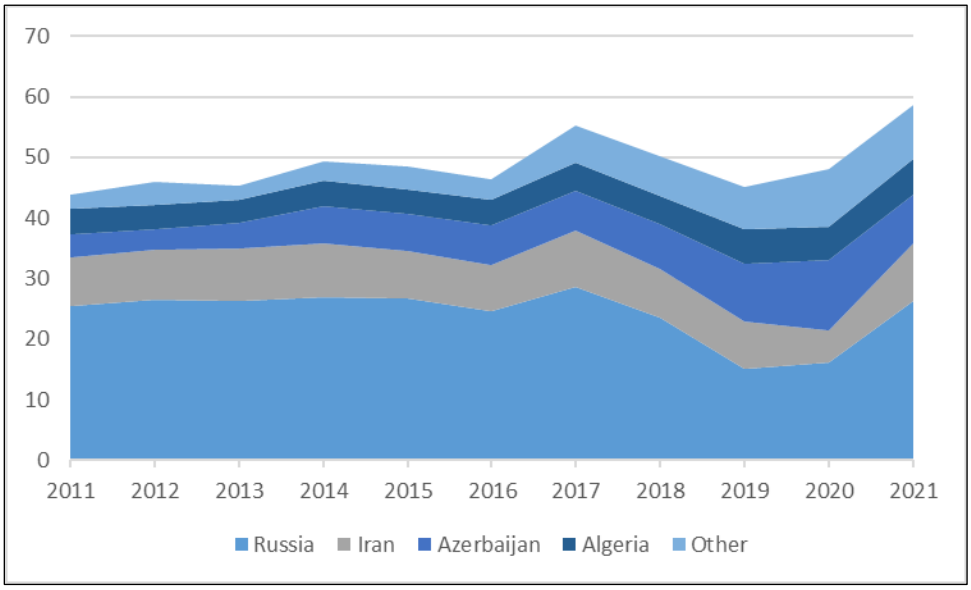
[39] "Turkish lira erodes last week's gains," *Reuters*, December 28, 2021.

considerable: Turkey imports around $45 billion of oil and gas annually.[40] With few hydrocarbon resources of its own (pending recent Black Sea discoveries mentioned below), Turkey is generally dependent on imports from other countries. Turkey seeks to diversify its energy suppliers, while positioning itself as a regional and global energy transport hub and developing its own domestic energy production capabilities.

Turkey's most important energy provider by volume has traditionally been Russia, which provides Turkey with significant amounts of natural gas and oil. Russia's share of Turkey's natural gas imports fell from around 58% in 2013 to 34% in 2020, but rebounded to 44% in 2021 (see **Figure 4)**.[41] Turkey's largest oil suppliers are Iraq (30% in 2021) and Russia (24%).[42] Turkey faces challenges in maintaining and broadening its efforts at diversification, including some pertaining to long-term supply contracts and physical infrastructure.

Figure 4. Turkish Natural Gas Imports by Country

(in millions of cubic meters)



Source: Turkish Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK), 2021 Annual Report.

Turkey has also sought to leverage its geography to position itself as a crucial transit country for global energy trade routes, mostly though natural gas pipelines. 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.[43] A planned second line is to extend northward as far as Austria.

Russian energy infrastructure projects involving Turkey could trigger U.S. sanctions under existing legislation. 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 Trump Administration published guidance noting that sanctions would not apply to projects for which

[40] "Turkey – Country Commercial Guide," U.S. Department of Commerce, July 26, 2022.

[41] Turkey Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK), Annual Natural Gas Market Report 2021.

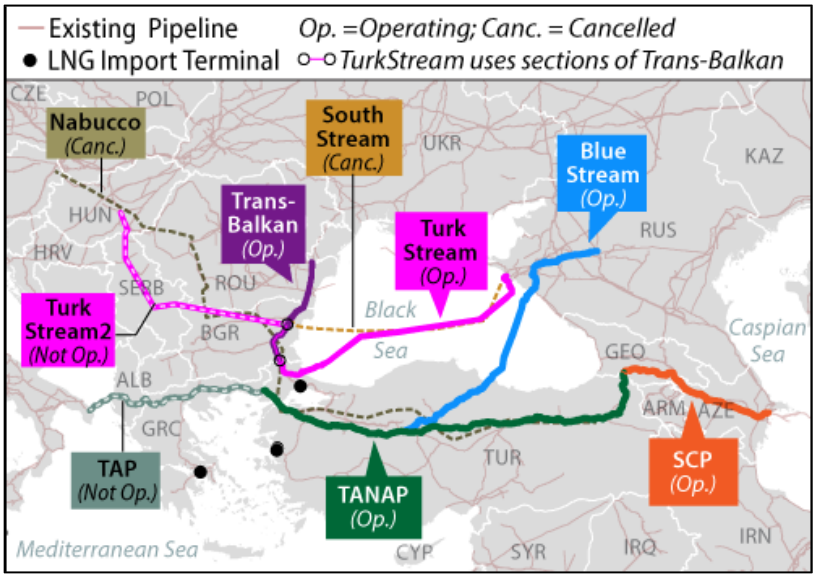
[42] EPDK, Annual Oil Market Report 2021.

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

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 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. In the Protecting Europe's Energy Security Clarification Act (PEESCA, Section 1242 of the FY2021 NDAA, P.L. 116-283), Congress expanded the scope of targeted and potentially sanctionable activities related to TurkStream and other projects.

Turkey has also been important for the U.S. and European effort to establish a southern corridor for pipelines to Europe that bypass Russia. In late 2011, Turkey and Azerbaijan reached deals for the transit of natural gas to and through Turkey via the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP);[44] the project was inaugurated in June 2018.[45] In November 2020, the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) commenced operations, bringing Azeri gas to Italy via TANAP.[46]

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.

Geopolitical dynamics may pose challenges. For example, reports suggest that Turkey would like to bolster its position as a hub for natural gas from Russia, but any such plans may run counter to European countries' aims to phase out Russian natural gas.[47] Difficulties in relations with Greece,

[44] 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.

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

[46] Dimitar Bechev, "The Trans-Adriatic Pipeline: Why it matters and what comes next?" Middle East Institute, December 2, 2020.

[47] Ragip Soylu, "Could Turkey become a gas hub for Europe?" *Middle East Eye*, November 13, 2022; Vladimir Soldatkin and Oleysa Astakhova, "Analysis: Europe wary of Turkish hub to hide gas 'made in Moscow,'" *Reuters*, December 1, 2022.

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 "Greece and the Republic of Cyprus" and "Israel and Sunni Arab Governments" below).

Turkey has opportunities to increase domestically-produced sources of energy.[48] In August 2020, President Erdogan announced a Turkish discovery of offshore natural gas deposits in the Black Sea.[49] Turkey expects production to begin in 2023 and reach its maximum by 2028, potentially satisfying a large portion of Turkey's natural gas needs, though Turkey requires additional capital to fully develop its natural gas infrastructure.[50]

Beyond natural gas production, Turkey seeks to generate nuclear power, entering 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 began in April 2018, with operations on the first of four reactors expected to begin in 2023; Turkey's energy minister has said the site, which is scheduled to be completed in 2026, will meet 10% of Turkey's electricity demand.[51] Despite speculation among observers that U.S. and European sanctions could affect Rosatom's ability to continue financing and constructing the project, Rosatom has publicly asserted sanctions on Russia will not impact Akkuyu.[52] Turkey abandoned plans for Japan to assist with the construction of a second nuclear power plant in Sinop on the Black Sea coast in January 2020; in October 2022, Turkey and Russia reportedly began talks over Rosatom taking on construction of another four reactors at Sinop.[53]

Turkey's Kurdish Issue

Background

Ethnic Kurds constitute approximately 19% of Turkey's population.[54] Kurds are largely concentrated in the less economically developed southeast, though populations are found in urban centers across the country. Some Kurds have resisted various aspects of Turkish state authority in parts of the southeast—a dynamic that also exists between Kurds and national governments in Iraq, Iran, and Syria. This resistance 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. The initially secessionist demands of the PKK have since ostensibly evolved toward the less ambitious goal of greater cultural and political autonomy.[55] According to the U.S. government and EU, the PKK partially

[48] Turkey supplies about half of its own coal, which accounts for 28% of Turkey's total primary energy supply (TPES), and all types of renewable energy, which account for 17% of TPES. Oil and natural gas account for 32% and 25% of TPES, respectively. *Turkey 2021: Energy Policy Review*, International Energy Agency, March 2021.

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

[50] See Wayne C. Ackerman, "Turkey: a new emerging gas player with resources and infrastructure," Middle East Institute, June 15, 2022.

[51] "Construction begins on fourth Turkish reactor," *World Nuclear News*, July 21, 2022.

[52] "Turkish nuclear plant threatened by Russian sanctions," *Al Jazeera*, May 16, 2022; "EU sanctions will not impede Akkuyu nuclear plant financing: Rosatom," *Anadolu Agency*, November 28, 2022.

[53] "Turkey, Japan scrap partnership in Sinop nuclear plant in Turkey's north," *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 20, 2020; Selcan Hacaoglu, "Turkey asks Russia to build another nuclear plant, defying US," *Bloomberg*, October 20, 2022.

[54] CIA World Factbook, Turkey (accessed November 2022).

[55] 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

finances its activities through criminal activities, including its alleged operation of a Europe-wide drug trafficking network.[56]

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), while also reportedly maintaining links to Kurdish groups in Syria (as discussed below). The Turkish military's approach to neutralizing the PKK has routinely been criticized by Western governments and human rights organizations for being overly hard on ethnic Kurds. Turkish authorities have imprisoned thousands and displaced or disrupted the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of others for suspected PKK involvement or sympathies.[57]

PKK Designations by U.S. Government

Designation	Year
Foreign Terrorist Organization	1997
Specially Designated Global Terrorist	2001
Significant Foreign Narcotics Trafficker	2008

Government Approaches to the Kurds

Until the spring of 2015, Erdogan appeared to prefer negotiating a political compromise with PKK leaders over the prospect of armed conflict.[58] 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 was concentrated in southeastern Turkey and was most intense from 2015 to 2016, thousands of fighters and hundreds civilians died.[59] 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 that it alleges come from the PKK or PKK allies, have advised Turkey to show restraint and proportionality in its actions.[60]

Under the state of emergency enacted after the failed July 2016 coup attempt, Turkey's government cracked down on Turkey's Kurdish minority. Dozens of elected Kurdish mayors were 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 other parliamentarians under various charges of crimes against the state; some remain imprisoned, along with other party leaders and

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.

[56] European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2022; U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Five PKK Leaders Designated Narcotics Traffickers," April 20, 2011.

[57] See, for example, Cengiz Candar, *Turkey's Mission Impossible: War and Peace with the Kurds*, Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Lexington Books, 2020.

[58] 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.

[59] International Crisis Group, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Visual Explainer," last updated November 10, 2022.

[60] White House, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby," November 28, 2022; Mark Landler and Carlotta Gall, "As Turkey Attacks Kurds in Syria, U.S. Is on the Sideline," *New York Times*, January 22, 2018.

members who have been detained on similar charges since 2016. Turkish officials routinely accuse Kurdish politicians of support for the PKK, but these politicians generally deny close ties.

In June 2021, Turkey's Constitutional Court accepted an indictment from a state prosecutor seeking to close the HDP and ban many of its members from politics. The HDP is the successor to a number of pro-Kurdish parties that the state has shut down throughout Turkey's history going back to the early 1990s.[61] As of December 2022, the court has yet to rule on the closure case.

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 A**], 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

The status of religious minorities in Turkey has attracted some congressional attention. 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 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.[62]

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.[63]

Halki Seminary and Hagia Sophia

Some Members of Congress have expressed grievances through proposed congressional resolutions and letters on behalf of the Ecumenical (Greek Orthodox) Patriarchate of

[61] Alex McDonald, "Threat to close pro-Kurdish party echoes long tradition in Turkey's politics," *Middle East Eye*, March 20, 2021.

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

[63] 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 2022 report, Turkey is among 12 countries recommended for the State Department's Special Watch List. For additional information on Turkey's religious minorities, see the State Department's Report on International Religious Freedom for 2021.

Constantinople, the spiritual center of Orthodox Christianity based in Istanbul.[64] The Patriarchate, along with various U.S. and European officials, continues to press for the reopening of its Halki Theological School, which was closed after a 1971 ruling by Turkey's Constitutional Court prohibiting the operation of private institutions of higher education.[65] The State Department issued a statement in July 2021 marking the 50th anniversary of Halki's closure and urged Turkey to allow its reopening.[66] In the past, Erdogan reportedly has said that Halki's reopening would depend on measures by Greece to accommodate its Muslim community.[67]

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 had been 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.[68] In July 2020, a 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, seen as a political overture to conservative Turkish nationalists, was criticized by the Trump Administration, a number of Members of Congress, and the EU Foreign Affairs Council.[69]

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.[70] Alevism has been influenced by Sufi mysticism that emphasizes believers' individual spiritual paths, but it defies precise description owing to its lack of centralized leadership and its reliance on secret oral traditions. 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.[71] In October 2022, President Erdogan announced plans to

[64] See, for example, H.R. 3056 in the 117th Congress. During the 112th Congress in 2011, 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. During the 113th Congress in 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.

[65] 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.

[66] State Department, "50th anniversary of the closing of Halki Seminary," July 29, 2021.

[67] 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.

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

[69] State Department, "Secretary Michael R. Pompeo at a Press Availability," July 15, 2020; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Menendez, Risch Statement on Turkey's Hagia Sophia," July 10, 2020; Council of the European Union, Foreign Affairs Council, July 13, 2020.

[70] 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.

[71] 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

create a new government directorate to oversee financial support to *cemevler* (Alevi houses of worship), with some Alevis welcoming the initiative and others rejecting it.[72] Arab Alawites in Syria and southern Turkey are a distinct Shia-related religious community.

Turkish Foreign Policy

General Assessment

Turkey's strategic orientation, or how it relates to and balances between the West and other global and regional powers, is a major consideration for the United States. Trends in Turkey's relations with the United States and other countries reflect changes to this orientation, as Turkey has sought greater independence of action as a regional power within a more multipolar global system. 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, such as in Syria and with Turkey's purchase of 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 in political-military situations involving Syria, Ukraine, Libya, and Armenia-Azerbaijan. A Turkish analyst has argued that Turkish foreign and security policy is shaped by three key objectives:

> attaining long-term strategic autonomy in key geopolitical affairs and self-sufficiency in defense technologies, building new partnerships to minimize Turkey's over-dependence on its traditional Western allies and avoiding direct confrontation with Russia.[73]

Turkish leaders appear to compartmentalize their partnerships and rivalries with other influential countries as each situation dictates, partly in an attempt to reduce Turkey's dependence on these actors and maintain its leverage with them.[74] For decades, Turkey has relied closely on the United States and NATO for defense cooperation, European countries for trade and investment (including a customs union with the European Union since the late 1990s), and Russia and Iran for energy imports. Without a means of global power projection or major natural resource wealth, Turkey's military strength and economic well-being appear to remain somewhat dependent on these traditional relationships. Turkey's ongoing economic struggles (discussed above) highlight the risks it faces if it jeopardizes these ties.[75]

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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.

[72] Sibel Hurtas, "Erdogan's pre-election gesture to Alevis met with suspicion," *Al-Monitor*, October 14, 2022; Yusuf Selman Inanc, "Turkey: Erdogan's Alevi reform initiative met with praise and scepticisim," *Middle East Eye*, October 18, 2022.

[73] Can Kasapoglu, "Turkish Drone Strategy in the Black Sea Region and Beyond," Jamestown Foundation, October 12, 2022.

[74] Nur Ozcan Erbay, "Ankara to use compartmentalization in managing relations," *Daily Sabah*, June 24, 2021; 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.

[75] Rich Outzen and Soner Cagaptay, "The Third Age of Erdoğan's Foreign Policy," Center for European Policy Analysis, February 17, 2022.

Turkey and the European Union (EU)

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 now appears unlikely, at least in the near future. Some scholars have interpreted resistance to Turkish EU accession as rooted in a fear among some EU states 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.[76] Turkey's unwillingness to normalize diplomatic and trade relations with the Republic of Cyprus (an EU member since 2004) 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.[77]

Debate within the EU regarding the extent to which Turkey meets EU standards has intensified since President Erdogan's consolidation of power starting around 2013. Erdogan has engaged in anti-European rhetoric with audiences both at home and among the substantial Turkish diaspora communities in Europe. 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. Citing 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.[78] Turkey has received additional funding since then under an overall EU budget of €14.2 billion for 2021-2027 for Turkey and six Balkan countries.

Turkey's compartmentalized approach to foreign policy may to some extent reflect domestic political concerns. Because Erdogan's control over parliament depends on the AKP's coalition with the more traditionally nationalist MHP, efforts to preserve support from 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.[79] Turkey's history as both a regional power and an object of great power aggression seems to contribute to domestic popularity for nationalistic political actions and discourse, as well as support for Erdogan's "neo-Ottoman" narrative of restoring Turkish regional prestige.

Geopolitics: A Key Driver of Turkish Foreign Policy

Turkey's geography has deep implications for its relations with neighbors and outside powers. Turkey is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. It controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits (the Straits), which are critical maritime chokepoints connecting the Black and Mediterranean Seas. Historically, Turkey's political, economic, and military strength has helped it shape developments in areas of close proximity. Its traditional rival for regional primacy has been Iran, but since the middle of the 20th century countries such as Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have developed aspects of military or economic power that approach or outstrip Turkey's in some ways.

For centuries, the influence of the Turkish state, and the Ottoman Empire that preceded it, has been checked and countered by outside powers intent on some measure of control in the regions surrounding Turkey for strategic and economic purposes. After the Ottoman Empire reached its zenith in the 16th century, its strength waned. Gradually, it lost influence and territory to Russia, other European powers, and nationalist movements in the Balkans, Middle East, and North Africa. Before the Empire disintegrated after its defeat in World War I, its rulers spent the Empire's last decades resorting to balance-of-power politics and military action to prolong its survival.

The Turkish Republic succeeded the Ottoman Empire and sought to create a stable nation-state for Turkish Muslims within a smaller territorial area. To retain control throughout Anatolia (or Asia Minor) and in the Eastern Thrace peninsula on the European side of the Straits, Turkey fought a 1919-1922 war of independence against Greek, Armenian, and French forces.

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[76] "Does 'Muslim' Turkey belong in 'Christian' Europe?" Pew Research Center, January 13, 2005; *Religion, Politics, and Turkey's EU Accession*, Dietrich Jung and Catharina Raudvere, eds., New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

[77] European Commission, *Türkiye 2022 Report*.

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

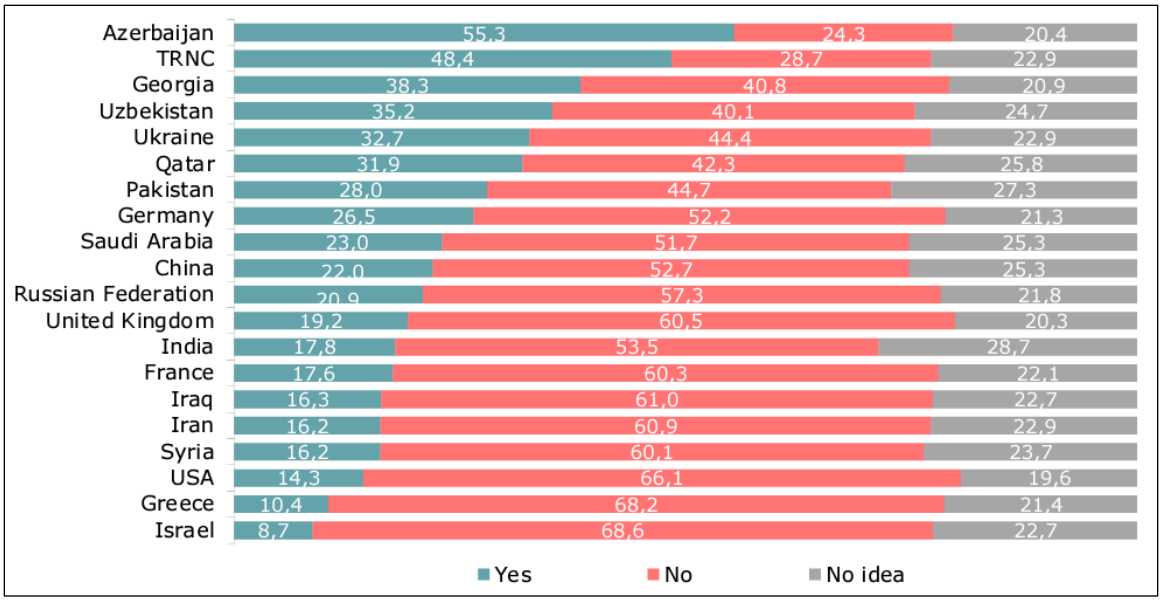
[79] William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*, New York: Routledge, 2013 (3rd edition).

These historical experiences and continued interactions between Turkey, its many neighbors, and several larger powers with regional interests, have influenced a Turkish approach to foreign policy that balances cautious accommodation with assertive claims when national priorities (which have fluctuated over time) are at stake. Turkey's sizable and restive Kurdish minority—approximately 19% of its population—makes it vulnerable to Kurdish demands for autonomy, and to outside actors that aid Kurdish groups around Turkey's borders in Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

Turkey's future foreign policy course could depend partly on the degree to which Turkish leaders feel constrained by their traditional security and economic relationships with Western powers, and how willing they are to risk tensions or breaks in those relationships while building other global relationships. One reason Turkey may seek to increase economic ties with Russia, Arab Gulf states, and other regional countries is to reduce its vulnerability to economic sanctions or other coercive tactics by the United States or European Union countries. The Turkish public appears to regard very few countries—Western or non-Western—as friendly to Turkey (see **Figure 6**).

Figure 6. Turkish Public Opinion: Are These Countries Turkey's Friends?

(percentage basis)



Source: M. Aydin, M. Çelikpala, S. Akgul-Açıkmeşe, E. Canan-Sokullu, S. Guvenç, O. Şenyuva, S. Kaya-Sonmez, *Quantitative Research Report: Public Perception on Turkish Foreign Policy 2022*, Kadir Has University Turkish Studies Group, Global Academy, Akademetre, September 8, 2022.

Notes: Decimal points are conveyed in the European style (with commas instead of periods). TRNC refers to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which (as described below) is recognized only by Turkey.

See **Appendix B** for some other drivers of Turkish foreign policy, including arms procurement and exports of drone aircraft, economics and energy, and leadership approaches.

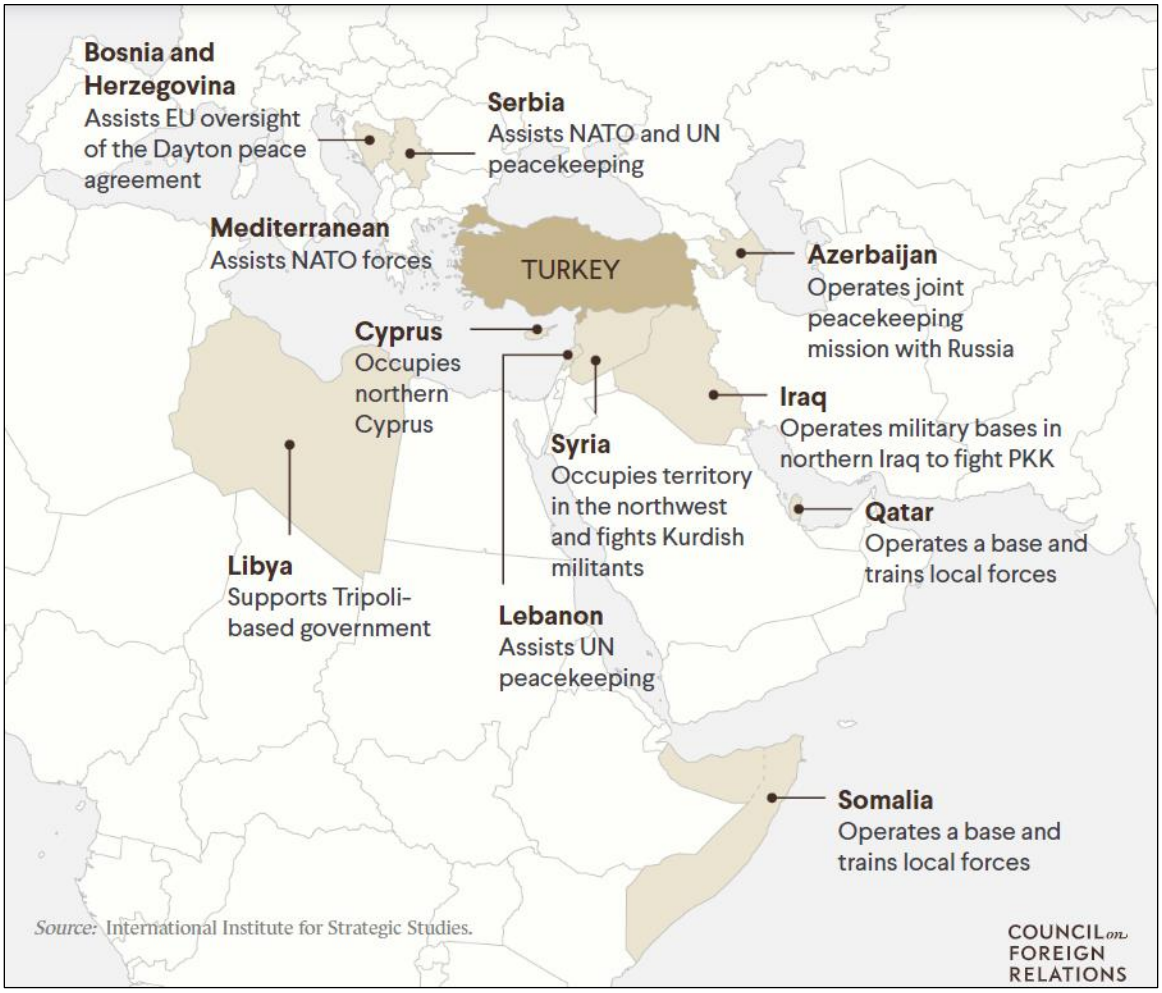
Regional Security Concerns

Security considerations are critical in Turkish foreign policy calculations and overseas deployments (see **Figure 7**). Turkish leaders often base their stances on perceived threats or opportunities, with their general priority being to safeguard Turkey's maritime approaches and border areas. A number of more peripheral areas within the region remain important, but as

secondary concerns. NATO membership is important for Turkey in part because its collective defense promise may deter threats from regional actors outside of the alliance.

Figure 7. Turkey's Military Presence Abroad

(as of August 2022)



Examples of priority concerns in Turkey's immediate vicinity include the following:

- **Border concerns in Syria and Iraq.** Turkey's leaders have expressed concerns about vulnerabilities to Kurdish militancy, refugee flows, and foreign influence near Turkey's southern borders with Iraq and Syria. Border threats have heavily influenced Turkish policies since the advent of the PKK in the 1980s. These policies—oriented toward containing cross-border Kurdish influence–evolved further after the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War. Turkey's efforts to control developments near its southern borders have continued and expanded during Syria's civil war, due largely to (1) the flow of nearly four million refugees into Turkey, (2) U.S. support for PKK-aligned Syrian Kurds against the Islamic State, and (3) the presence of Russian, American, and Iranian forces that complicate and somewhat constrain Turkish action in northern Syria (see "The Syrian Conflict" below).

- **Cyprus and Greece.** Turkey has engaged in decades-long disputes—with elements of military conflict—regarding political outcomes in Cyprus and with Greece over islands and maritime/airspace boundaries (see "Greece and the Republic of Cyprus" below).
- **Turkey's control over the Straits.** Soviet designs on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits arguably played a major role in Turkey's decision to invite U.S. support and ultimately join NATO in the early years of the Cold War. Turkish control over the Straits remains a priority amid Russia-Ukraine conflict (see "Black Sea Access" below).

Issues that are significant, but relatively peripheral, include the following:

- **General stability and governance in the Middle East and North Africa.** Beyond Syria and Iraq, Turkey under Erdogan has played direct or indirect roles in some regional countries' internal armed or political struggles (especially Libya and Egypt). Turkey also sided politically with Qatar in its 2017-2020 standoff with Arab Gulf countries and Egypt, though it has improved relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over the past two years (see "Israel and Sunni Arab Governments" below). Additionally, Turkey has provided political support for the Palestinian Sunni Islamist movement Hamas, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that engages in violent conflict against Israel (and receives some aid from Iran). In some cases, Erdogan has combined a pro-Islamist tilt with the pragmatic pursuit of gain, such as by using ties with Libya's Government of National Accord/Unity to safeguard Turkey's commercial interests and enter into favorable maritime boundary demarcation agreements.[80] Some observers have expressed concern that the preferences Erdogan and the AKP have shown for Islamist figures and movements have provoked instability in at least some cases.[81]
- **Armenia and Azerbaijan.** Turkish leaders have consistently supported Azerbaijan in territorial conflicts with Armenia, including in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Turkey and Azerbaijan share strong economic, military, cultural, and linguistic ties, while Turkey has historical animosities with Armenia and its Russian protector.[82] Armenia poses little military threat to Turkey's eastern border. In 2022, a new Turkey-Armenia dialogue launched, offering a potential path to normalization, including via the opening of their land border. President Erdogan has maintained that normalization is "interdependent" with further progress in resolving Armenia's differences with Azerbaijan, stating in August 2022 that Turkey would "open our doors after problems with Azerbaijan are solved."[83]

[80] Emadeddin Badi, "To Advance Its Own Interests, Turkey Should Now Help Stabilize Libya," *War on the Rocks*, May 24, 2021.

[81] Anchal Vohra, "Erdogan's War with Arab Monarchies Is Over," *Foreign Policy*, March 22, 2022; M. Hasim Tekines, "What Would a Post-Erdogan Turkish Foreign Policy Look Like?" *War on the Rocks*, December 8, 2021; Marwa Maziad and Jake Sotiriadis, "Turkey's Dangerous New Exports: Pan-Islamist, Neo-Ottoman Visions and Regional Instability," Middle East Institute, April 21, 2020.

[82] Patrick Keddie, "What's Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?" *Al Jazeera*, October 30, 2020.

[83] "President Erdogan Sees 'Opportunity' to Mend Armenia Ties," *Hurriyet Daily News*, October 21, 2022; Amberin Zaman, "Armenia Clings to Turkish Peace Talks to Avert War with Azerbaijan," *Al-Monitor*, August 2, 2022.

- **Iran's role in the region.** Turkey is Iran's historical rival, and the government remains leery of Iranian actions and intentions in the region. Yet, Turkey is less outwardly hostile to Iran than are Israel and some Arab states. Turkey and Iran have a centuries-long history of coexistence, Iran's current regime has avoided directly threatening Turkey, and their leaders maintain important diplomatic and trade ties—including on energy (see "Iran" below for a discussion of sanctions or possible penalties against some Turkish entities for energy-related dealings with Iranian parties). However, Turkey has supported Sunni political parties and militias in Syria and Iraq partly to counter Iran-allied groups.[84]

Foreign Policy Changes Under a Different President?

In anticipation of 2023 elections, observers have speculated about how a new president's foreign policy (including domestic policy with clear foreign policy ramifications) might differ from Erdogan's if an opposition candidate wins.[85] Because of widespread nationalistic sentiment among Turkey's population and most of its political parties, a different president may have difficulty changing Turkish policies on some of the following matters of core security concern: (1) addressing Kurdish militancy, refugee issues, and other countries' influence in Syria and Iraq; (2) exercising Turkish influence in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean (including by countering Greece and ethnic Greek Cypriots, and supporting ethnic Turkish Cypriots); and (3) balancing relations with Ukraine, Russia, and the West to address conflict and its consequences while seeking to avoid dependence on any of them.

However, a different president may be more likely to alter certain ongoing policies that may be more reflective of Erdogan's or the AKP's preferences than of broad national consensus. Such changes may include

- **Economic policy.** Providing more flexibility to central bank and other officials on monetary policy decisions and other measures to address Turkey's economic problems.
- **ECHR rulings.** Giving greater consideration to ECHR rulings calling for the release of imprisoned civil society figure Osman Kavala[86] and Kurdish political leader Selahattin Demirtas (see **Appendix A** for a profile of Demirtas).
- **Less Islamist influence.** Reducing (1) references to Islamic identity and symbols as rallying points for regional policies, and (2) Turkish support for or willingness to host certain Sunni Islamist groups like Hamas, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and Syrian armed opposition factions.

[84] Galip Dalay, "Turkey's Middle East Reset: A Precursor for Re-Escalation?" Middle East Council on Global Affairs, August 2022.

[85] Alan Makovsky, "Turkey's Hinge Election," *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*, November 2022; Coskun and Ulgen, "Political Change and Turkey's Foreign Policy."

[86] In April 2022, a Turkish court sentenced Kavala to life imprisonment after convicting him of conspiring against the government. The ECHR had demanded Kavala's release in 2019. The State Department spokesperson said that Kavala's "unjust conviction is inconsistent with respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law." State Department, "Turkey's Conviction of Osman Kavala," April 25, 2022. In July, the ECHR ordered Turkey to release Kavala and pay him damages. If Turkey does not comply, it could have its voting rights and membership in the Council of Europe suspended. Nazlan Ertan, "Europe's top court reprimands Turkey for jailing philanthropist," *Al-Monitor*, July 11, 2022.

Some Turkish opposition parties' foreign policy statements suggest that a different president might be less willing than Erdogan to say and do things that risk harming relationships with the United States and European countries.[87] Thus, despite the difficulties that may surround changing some policies (as mentioned above), a different Turkish president could conceivably be less inclined toward implementing those policies in a way that might worsen relations with Western states, such as by pursuing arms purchases from Russia, closer ties with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO—see "Russia" below), or new military operations in northern Syria or the Aegean/Eastern Mediterranean area. However, if a new, untested Turkish government feels pressure to signal its strength to various international actors or to placate multiple domestic constituencies within a coalition, that president may strive to match Erdogan's reputation for assertiveness. Conversely, a president facing lack of consensus within a coalition might become more passive on foreign policy, even in some situations when U.S. officials request a more active Turkish role.

U.S. steps to help a potential new Turkish government—whether on arms sales, sanctions, the economy, or other matters—could encourage an improvement in bilateral relations. For information on U.S.-Turkey trade and investment, see CRS In Focus IF10961, *U.S.-Turkey Trade Relations*, by Shayerah I. Akhtar. If, however, Turkish leaders or domestic audiences assess that any such steps are likely to bind future Turkish actions to U.S. interests, those concerns could limit a new Turkish government's willingness to embrace them.

Russia

Turkey's relations with Russia feature elements of cooperation and competition. Turkey has made a number of foreign policy moves since 2016 toward closer ties with Russia. These moves could be motivated by a combination of factors, including

- **Alternative to the West.** Turkey's effort to reduce dependence on the West via hedging behavior, as discussed above.
- **Economic opportunism.** Erdogan's assessment of an opportunity to reinforce Turkey's embattled economy by deepening economic and energy ties with Russia. Western sanctions have reduced the pool of Russia's economic partners and thus have arguably increased Turkish leverage with Russia.
- **Chances to increase regional influence at Russia's expense.** Turkish calculations that potentially declining Russian influence in its near abroad could present opportunities for Turkey's relative rise in influence if it involves itself more in issues and organizations spanning Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia.

At the same time, Turkey has moved closer to a number of countries that were part of the Soviet Union or otherwise in Russia's historical sphere of influence, likely in part as a counterweight to Russian regional power. These include Ukraine, Poland, and states in the Baltic, South Caucasus, and Central Asia regions.[88]

Background

Turkey and Russia have a centuries-long history of geopolitical conflict and reluctant mutual accommodation. Relations reached a relative low point in 2015-2016, when Turkey downed a

[87] Coskun and Ulgen, "Political Change and Turkey's Foreign Policy."

[88] Kasapoglu, "Turkish Drone Strategy in the Black Sea Region and Beyond"; Jeffrey Mankoff, "As Russia Reels, Eurasia Roils," *War on the Rocks*, October 11, 2022.

Russian plane near the Turkey-Syria border and Russia temporarily imposed sanctions. After that, 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 collaborative aspects of Turkey-Russia relations.

While Turkey-Russia cooperation could undermine Turkey's relationships with the United States, the European Union, and NATO to some degree, Turkish and Russian interests diverge significantly in several places throughout the region. Some observers have remarked that Turkey's use of relatively inexpensive drone aircraft 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.[89] Other observers suggest that Turkish military measures in these places may be less about setting limits to Russian action or influence, and more about encouraging greater Turkey-Russia diplomatic engagement to coordinate political outcomes.[90] In 2022, Turkey's involvement in Ukraine (discussed below) has become the most prominent case under discussion regarding the implications for Turkey-Russia relations.

Differences between Turkish and Russian leaders may not lead to a major rupture between the two countries. Turkey's cooperation or competition with different actors may depend on the specific circumstances of each issue, rather than total alignment with or opposition to any great power—be it the United States, Russia, or another country. As one example, more than three years after taking delivery of the S-400 surface-to-air defense system from Russia, Turkey does not appear to have activated the system for general use and seems to remain open to negotiating with the United States about whether to do so.

Erdogan has stated that Turkey may join the SCO, raising questions about his actual intentions to do so, and whether doing so would be a signal of greater alignment with Russia (and perhaps China), or of increased Turkish strategic autonomy and regional prominence.[91] In addition to Russia and China, the SCO—a multilateral organization covering political, economic, and security matters—includes most Central Asian countries, as well as India and Pakistan. The SCO is not a formal alliance like NATO.

Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has heightened challenges Turkey faces in balancing its relations with the two countries and managing Black Sea access, with implications for U.S.-Turkey ties. One former U.S. official has said

> Turkey will avoid picking a side in the sense of a binary, zero-sum outcome to the war. Ukrainian defeat and dismemberment would be an unmitigated disaster for Turkey, but a

[89] See, for example, Mitch Prothero, "Turkey's Erdogan has been humiliating Putin all year," *Business Insider*, October 22, 2020.

[90] Asli Aydintasbas, "Hedge politics: Turkey's search for balance in the Middle East," European Council on Foreign Relations, July 27, 2022; Guney Yildiz, "Turkish-Russian Adversarial Collaboration in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh," *SWP Comment*, March 24, 2021.

[91] Nazlan Ertan, "Why Erdogan's Shanghai ambitions are risky business," *Al-Monitor*, September 20, 2022; Mankoff, "As Russia Reels, Eurasia Roils."

> defeated and potentially unstable Russia would negatively impact Turkish interests in Syria and the Caucasus, as well as its economy.[92]

Turkey's links with Russia—especially its S-400 acquisition—have fueled significant U.S.-Turkey tensions. However, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, U.S. and Turkish interests in countering Russian revisionist aims—including along the Black Sea coast—may have converged in some ways as Turkey has helped strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities in parallel with other NATO countries.[93] In addition to denouncing Russia's invasion and opposing Russian claims to Ukrainian territory (including Crimea),[94] Turkey has supplied Ukraine with armed drone aircraft and mine-resistant ambush-resistant (MRAP) vehicles, as well as humanitarian assistance.[95] Nevertheless, Turkey's leaders likely hope to minimize spillover effects to Turkey's national security and economy, and this might partly explain Turkey's continued engagement with Russia and desires to help mediate the conflict (discussed below). One Turkish analyst has written

> Russian geopolitical revisionism is set to drive Turkey closer to the geopolitical West, but it is doubtful that this process will make the geopolitical West as indispensable for Turkey as it was during the Cold War, or function as a geo-political anchor in the way it did then.[96]

Another Turkish analyst has observed that some experts argue Turkey is successfully building "a new geo-strategic axis" through drone diplomacy and other security and energy partnerships with Ukraine (see text box below) and other "Western-leaning post-Soviet and former Warsaw Pact nations" that surround Russia. (see also **Appendix B**)[97]

Turkey-Ukraine Defense Cooperation

Turkey and Ukraine have strengthened their relations since Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014.[98] In 2017, a Turkish security analyst attributed these closer ties to growing mutual interests in countering Russian influence in the Black Sea region and in sharing military technology to expand and increase the self-sufficiency of their respective defense industries.[99] Since 2020, the two countries have signed multiple agreements signifying closer cooperation, and also signed a broader free trade agreement (pending ratification) in February 2022.[100]

In line with these agreements, Turkish and Ukrainian companies have engaged in or planned a significant expansion of defense transactions, including a number of joint development or co-production initiatives. Turkish expertise with drone and other aircraft and naval platforms complements Ukrainian skills in designing and constructing

[92] Rich Outzen, quoted in "How long can Turkey play both sides in the Ukraine war?" Atlantic Council, August 18, 2022.

[93] Saban Kardas, "The War in Ukraine and Turkey's Cautious Counter-Balancing Against Russia," German Marshall Fund of the United States, March 3, 2022.

[94] "Turkey President Erdoğan on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the future of NATO," *PBS Newshour*, September 19, 2022. For information on Crimean Tatars and their relations with Turkey, see Joseph Massad, "Crimean Tatars caught between Russia and Ukraine," *Middle East Eye*, October 3, 2022; "Türkiye grants Crimean Tatars indefinite leave to remain," *Daily Sabah*, August 11, 2022; Emad Ahmed, "Who are the Crimean Tatars? The Turkic Muslim minority loyal to Ukraine," *Middle East Eye*, March 3, 2022.

[95] For information on the MRAPs, see Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey sends 50 mine-resistant vehicles to Ukraine, with more expected," *Defense News*, August 22, 2022.

[96] Galip Dalay, "Deciphering Turkey's Geopolitical Balancing and Anti-Westernism in Its Relations with Russia," *SWP Comment*, May 20, 2022

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

[98] For information on the Crimea invasion, see CRS Report R45008, *Ukraine: Background, Conflict with Russia, and U.S. Policy*, by Cory Welt.

[99] Metin Gurcan, "Turkey-Ukraine defense industry ties are booming," *Al-Monitor*, May 1, 2017.

[100] "Turkey, Ukraine Sign Military Cooperation Agreements," *Associated Press*, October 16, 2020; Christopher Isajiw, "Free trade and drones: Turkey and Ukraine strengthen strategic ties," Atlantic Council, February 11, 2022.

aerospace engines and missiles.[101] Additionally, Turkey is helping establish Ukraine's naval capabilities by producing corvettes (small warships) for export.[102]

As part of the deepening bilateral defense cooperation, Turkey has sold several Turkish-origin Bayraktar TB2 drones to Ukraine since 2019,[103] and some reports have suggested that the manufacturer has delivered additional TB2s to Ukraine at various times since Russia's 2022 invasion.[104] Multiple accounts have surfaced of Ukraine's successful use of TB2s to target Russian armored vehicle convoys, air defense batteries, helicopters, and ships—often in coordination with other Ukrainian weapons platforms. A May 2022 report stated that Russia may have destroyed Ukrainian TB2s in sufficient number to significantly reduce their likely future impact on the war.[105] The TB2's main producer, Baykar Technology, is planning to build a $100 million factory in Ukraine that could be in position within about three years to manufacture the full range of the company's drones—doubling Baykar's overall production capacity.[106] Baykar also has planned for a testing, training, and maintenance center near the factory.[107]

Because the Turkish defense industry has made deals with Ukrainian contractors to provide engines for newer combat drone platforms, as well as various manned aircraft projects, threats posed to Ukraine's manufacturing capacity from Russia's invasion could delay some of Turkey's plans.[108] Ukraine's importance as an alternative source for Turkey in procuring engines may have increased after a 2019-2020 decrease in Western supply due to concerns about Turkish actions against Syrian Kurds and Armenians.[109]

Turkey-Russia Economic and Energy Cooperation

Turkish officials have sought to minimize any negative economic impact Turkey might face from the Russia-Ukraine war, partly through boosting various forms of economic and energy cooperation with Russia (see "Energy" above). These efforts may stem from Turkish leaders' concerns about improving the country's economic profile in advance of 2023 elections.[110] For the first nine months of 2022, Turkey-Russia trade volume was up sharply year-on-year from 2021.[111] The Turkish government has not joined economic sanctions against Russia or closed its airspace to Russian civilian flights. Decreases in Russian and Ukrainian tourism have affected Turkey's economy, and Turkey's government is wary of potential Russian actions that could harm Turkey's economy even more, such as cutoffs of natural gas and wheat exports or military operations that might increase refugee flows to Turkey.[112] A European Union price cap arrangement on Russian oil shipments has cast doubt on insurance coverage for oil tankers transiting the Straits as of

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

[102] Kate Tringham, "Update: Turkey launches first Ada-class corvette for Ukraine and cuts steel for second," *Janes Navy International*, October 3, 2022.

[103] Dorian Jones, "Turkey Strengthens Defense Industry with Its Ukraine Partnership," *Voice of America*, February 4, 2022. For more information on TB2s, see **Appendix B** and **Figure B-4**.

[104] David Hambling, "New Bayraktar Drones Still Seem to Be Reaching Ukraine," forbes.com, May 10, 2022.

[105] Stephen Witt, "Weapon of Influence," *New Yorker*, May 16, 2022.

[106] Jared Malsin, "Erdogan Seizes Chance to Give Turkey a Global Role," *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2022.

[107] Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey's defense industry eyes export expansion as government navigates geopolitical stage," *Defense News*, August 8, 2022.

[108] Fehim Tastekin, "Will Ukraine crisis help Turkey dodge Western arms embargoes?" *Al-Monitor*, March 28, 2022.

[109] Aykan Erdemir and Ryan Brobst, "Engines of Influence: Turkey's Defense Industry Under Erdogan," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, March 24, 2022.

[110] Patricia Cohen, "Turkey Tightens Energy Ties with Russia as Other Nations Step Back," *New York Times*, December 10, 2022.

[111] Yoruk Isik, "In Turkish-Russian relations, the Ukraine grain deal is not the point," Middle East Institute, November 9, 2022.

[112] Sinem Adar, "Perceptions in Turkey about the War in Ukraine," *SWP Comment*, April 6, 2022.

December. Turkey has been requiring tankers to document coverage to mitigate concerns of financial risk from a spill or other costly incident.[113]

In August 2022, Presidents Erdogan and Putin publicly agreed to boost Turkey-Russia cooperation across economic sectors.[114] Reportedly, many European companies prohibited by sanctions from exporting directly to Russia, or otherwise wary of doing so, use Turkey as a base for re-exports to Russia.[115] Additionally, since the Russian invasion, Turkey has welcomed sanctioned Russian oligarchs as tourists and investors.

Turkey's Russia-related dealings could potentially lead to Western secondary sanctions against Turkey for facilitating Russian sanctions evasion. In June 2022, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo reportedly visited Turkey to raise concerns over the movement of some Russian assets and business operations to Turkey,[116] and in August Adeyemo sent a letter to Turkish business groups warning of penalties if they worked with Russian individuals or entities facing sanctions.[117] In September, several Turkish banks that had adopted the Mir payment system (a Russian equivalent of Visa or MasterCard) stopped accepting it.[118]

Some observers have asserted that arrangements between Turkey and Russia could help Erdogan address Turkey's financial problems ahead of 2023 elections.[119] Rosatom (the Russian state-owned company building Turkey's first nuclear power plant, as mentioned above) began implementing a plan in July 2022 to wire up to $15 billion to a Turkish subsidiary, while also seeking a credit line to finance the plant's construction with Turkish treasury bonds.[120] A former Turkish central banker has argued that this transactional structure would minimize the risk of Turkish institutions facing U.S. sanctions for the movement of Russian funds to Turkey.[121] Russia also agreed that Turkey could partially pay for Russian gas imports in rubles rather than dollars.[122]

Black Sea Access

Turkey's power to regulate access to the Black Sea via the Straits (see **Figure 8**) under the 1936 Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits (the "Montreux Convention") has implications for U.S. interests.[123] In February 2022, Turkey acknowledged a state of war between Russia and

[113] "Turkey oil tanker logjam snarls Russia oil sanctions," *Reuters*, December 9, 2022.

[114] "Russia's Putin, Turkey's Erdogan agree to boost economic, energy cooperation," *Agence France Presse*, August 5, 2022.

[115] Barbara Moens et al., "Erdoğan walks a fine line as the Ukraine war's double agent," *Politico EU*, August 17, 2022.

[116] Amberin Zaman, "US deputy treasury secretary in Turkey to warn against evading Russian sanctions," *Al-Monitor*, June 22, 2022.

[117] Elif Ince et al., "Russian Superyachts, Subject to Sanctions, Find a Haven in Turkey," *New York Times*, October 24, 2022.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Sinem Ozdemir, "Turkey, Russia partnership essential to both," *Deutsche Welle*, August 12, 2022; Fehim Tastekin, "Russia offers Erdogan economic lifeline," *Al-Monitor*, August 10, 2022.

[120] Ragip Soylu, "Russia plans to buy Turkish treasury bonds via Akkuyu nuclear plant $6bn loan deal," *Middle East Eye*, July 30, 2022.

[121] Ugur Gurses, quoted in Tastekin, "Russia offers Erdogan economic lifeline."

[122] Tastekin, "Russia offers Erdogan economic lifeline."

[123] Maximilian Hess, "Welcome to the Black Sea Era of War," *Foreign Policy*, April 25, 2022. Text of the Convention is available at https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/1936-Convention-Regarding-the-Regime-of-the-Straits.pdf.

Ukraine, invoking Article 19 of the Montreux Convention, which generally bars belligerent countries' warships from traversing the Straits (except if they are returning to their base of origin).[124] Shortly after Turkey's decision, Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed appreciation for Turkey's implementation of the Convention and support for Ukraine.[125] (The United States is not a party to the Convention, but has complied with its terms since it went into effect in 1936 as a treaty that is reflective of customary international law.)

Figure 8. Map of Black Sea Region and Straits

Turkey's invocation of Article 19 for the first time since World War II may prevent Russia from replenishing ships it loses in battle. While Ukrainian coastal defenses have dealt losses to some Russian ships and present some threats with uncrewed surface vessels carrying drone aircraft, Russia's fleet remains dominant in the northern Black Sea and controls the key Ukrainian port of Mariupol as of late 2022.[126]

[124] "Turkey recognises Russia-Ukraine 'war', may block warships," *Agence France Presse*, February 27, 2022.

[125] State Department, "Secretary Blinken's Call with Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu," February 28, 2022.

[126] H.I. Sutton, "Russian Navy Pulls Warships from Black Sea into Port After Attacks," *USNI News*, November 7, 2022.

In March 10, 2022, correspondence with CRS, a Turkish official explained that Turkey (under the Montreux Convention) has formally closed the Straits only to Russia and Ukraine as belligerent countries, while advising all other non-Black Sea-littoral countries to refrain from sending warships through the Straits. Some naval analysts have expressed concern that discouraging other countries from transit could put NATO at a disadvantage.[127] One has asserted that Black Sea access is "essential for the alliance's presence and security as well as to reassure" allies Romania and Bulgaria.[128] It is unclear what might lead Turkey and other Black Sea littoral countries (aside from Russia) to take direct action or seek third-party help in asserting their interests and freedom of navigation, and how that could affect regional security.

Mediating Russia-Ukraine Differences (Including Grain Export Deal)

Turkey's maintenance of close relations with both Russia and Ukraine, and its ability to regulate access to the Straits has put it in a position to mediate between the parties on various issues of contention. A Ukrainian analyst has argued that Turkey has positioned itself as a mediator "not just in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine but more broadly in the struggle between Russia and the West, and even globally between the West and the numerous non-Western countries that have preferred to strike a more cautious and balanced approach to the war."[129] Additionally, Turkish and Ukrainian officials have signed a memorandum of understanding for Turkish involvement in helping rebuild Ukrainian infrastructure.[130]

In July 2022, Turkey and the United Nations entered into parallel agreements with Russia and Ukraine to provide a Black Sea corridor for Ukrainian grain exports that could partly alleviate global supply concerns.[131] Under the deal, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, and the U.N. have representatives at a joint coordination center in Istanbul to oversee implementation and inspect ships to prevent weapons smuggling.[132] More than eight million tons of grain and other foodstuffs had been exported from Ukrainian ports as of late October.[133] Turkey played a major role in getting guarantees from Ukraine to convince Russia to return to the deal in November after it pulled out for a few days over allegations of Ukrainian attacks on its ships and complaints about obstacles to Russian exports of grain and fertilizer.[134] Later in November, the parties renewed the initial four-month agreement for another four months (to March 2023). Ukraine has complained that Turkey and other countries have purchased stolen Ukrainian wheat from Russia, with Turkish officials promising to investigate but not announcing any conclusive findings as of December 2022.[135] In President Biden's November meeting with President Erdogan on the sidelines of the

[127] Isik, "In Turkish-Russian relations, the Ukraine grain deal is not the point"; Cornell Overfield, "Turkey Must Close the Turkish Straits Only to Russian and Ukrainian Warships," Lawfare Blog, March 5, 2022.

[128] James Kraska, "Can Turkey Legally Close Its Straits to Russian Warships? It's Complicated," foreignpolicy.com, March 1, 2022.

[129] Iliya Kusa, "Turkey's Goals in the Russia-Ukraine War," Wilson Center, June 13, 2022.

[130] "Turkey and Ukraine sign agreement for reconstruction of war-torn country," *Middle East Eye*, August 18, 2022.

[131] "Ukraine, Russia agree to export grain, ending a standoff that threatened food supply" *Associated Press*, July 22, 2022.

[132] See https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative/background.

[133] Ezgi Akin, "Russia returns to Ukraine grain deal, easing food crisis fears," *Al-Monitor*, November 2, 2022;

[134] Ibid.

[135] "Turkey says it is investigating claims of Russia shipping stolen Ukrainian grain," *Reuters*, June 23, 2022.

G20 Summit in Indonesia, he expressed appreciation for Erdogan's efforts to renew the deal, as well as a hope that it would continue.[136]

In late 2022, Turkey's mediation efforts expanded beyond the grain deal. Erdogan helped broker a Russia-Ukraine prisoner exchange in September. In November, Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns reportedly met his Russian counterpart in Ankara to convey a message about potential Russian nuclear weapons use and to discuss detained Americans in Russia.[137] A few days before Burns's visit, President Erdogan said that he was committed to moving toward a peace dialogue, while criticizing U.S. and Western stances toward Russia.[138] Erdogan's chief adviser and spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin, later said that Russia "is interested in finding and reaching a new deal with the West, and more particularly with the United States."[139]

NATO Accession Process for Sweden and Finland

Sweden and Finland formally applied to join NATO in May 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Turkey objected to the formal start of the two countries' accession process, delaying it for more than a month. Under Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the admission of new allies requires the unanimous agreement of existing members.

The Turkish objections centered around claims that Sweden and Finland have supported or harbored sympathies for groups that Turkey deems to be terrorist organizations, namely the PKK and the Fethullah Gulen movement.[140] (The United States and EU also classify the PKK as a terrorist group.) Turkey demanded that both countries lift the suspension of arms sales they have maintained against Turkey since its 2019 incursion into Syria against the PKK-linked Kurdish group (the People's Protection Units—Kurdish acronym YPG) that has partnered with the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition.[141] Turkey removed its objections to starting the accession process after NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg mediated a June 2022 agreement between Turkey, Sweden, and Finland. In the agreement, the three countries confirmed that no arms embargoes remain in place between them. Further, Sweden and Finland agreed not to support the YPG or Gulen movement, and pledged to work against the PKK.[142]

While Turkey's decision to remove its objections generally drew plaudits from other NATO members, during the delay some Western officials had raised questions about Turkey's commitment to strengthening NATO. President Erdogan maintained that Turkey might delay its parliamentary ratification of the accession process.[143] With Hungary likely to ratify Swedish and

[136] White House, "Readout of President Biden's Meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkiye," November 15, 2022.

[137] Fatma Tanis, "Turkey is friendly with both Russia and Ukraine. Now it wants them to talk peace," *NPR*, November 16, 2022.

[138] "Turkey seeks Ukraine peace talks despite Western actions, Erdogan says," *Reuters*, November 12, 2022.

[139] Tanis, "Turkey is friendly with both Russia and Ukraine."

[140] Semih Idiz, "How long can Erdogan sustain threat to veto Finnish, Swedish NATO bids?" *Al-Monitor*, May 17, 2022.

[141] Sources citing links between the PKK and YPG (or PKK affiliates in Syria) include State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020*, Syria; Berkay Mandiraci, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Regional Battleground in Flux," International Crisis Group, February 18, 2022; Barak Barfi, *Ascent of the PYD and the SDF*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2016.

[142] Agreement text available at Twitter, Ragip Soylu, June 28, 2022–2:48 PM, at https://twitter.com/ragipsoylu/status/1541856195257966592.

[143] Amberin Zaman, "Erdogan says Sweden's, Finland's NATO memberships not done deal," *Al-Monitor*, June 30, 2022.

Finnish accession by early 2023, Turkey could remain the only country delaying the process.[144] Erdogan has said that he is more concerned about Sweden than Finland, but Finland insists it will wait until both countries can join NATO together.

In November, Erdogan stated that he expected Sweden's new government to take concrete steps to implement the June 2022 agreement. He also demanded the extradition of various individuals, including a prominent journalist from a now-defunct pro-Gulen media outlet.[145] Observers note that Sweden and Finland are unlikely to make political decisions on extradition that contravene domestic judicial findings conducted under due process and the rule of law.[146] An unnamed European diplomat was quoted as saying, "It remains to be seen if Erdogan thinks he's got enough signs of goodwill from Sweden and it's therefore in his political and military interest to declare victory, or if he thinks sticking to the current line will serve his re-election campaign."[147] In December, Sweden reportedly extradited a man who had been convicted in Turkey in 2015 of being a PKK member. Turkish officials have welcomed the action and expressed hope for additional extraditions and steps on countering terrorist-related financing.[148] Also in December, Finland's defense minister signaled openness to resuming arms export permits to Turkey.[149]

At a December press conference with Sweden's and Finland's foreign ministers, Secretary of State Blinken reiterated strong U.S. support for the two countries' NATO accession and said that they have addressed Turkey's security concerns in tangible ways. He stated that "it is not a bilateral issue between the United States and Turkey and it's not going to turn into one," while also expressing confidence that the process will come to a successful conclusion soon.[150]

Issues with Other U.S. Allies and Partners

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

Greece and the Republic of Cyprus

Background

Since the 1970s, disputes between Greece and Turkey over territorial rights in the Aegean Sea and broader Eastern Mediterranean have been a major point of contention, waxing and waning at various points but bringing the sides close to military conflict on several occasions (see timeline below). The disputes, which have their roots in territorial changes after World War I, revolve around contested borders involving the two countries' territorial waters, national airspace, exclusive economic zones, and continental shelves (see **Figure 9** and **Figure 10** for maps of some

[144] William Mauldin and Michael R. Gordon, "Sweden and Finland on Track for NATO Membership," *Wall Street Journal*, December 9, 2022.

[145] Ayla Jean Yackley, "Erdoğan demands Sweden do more to get Turkey's approval to join Nato," *Financial Times*, November 8, 2022.

[146] Ben Keith, "Turkey's Erdoğan Deploys Sweden and Finland's NATO Membership Bids to Further His Repression," *Just Security*, October 28, 2022.

[147] Remi Banet, "Erdogan announces new meeting on Sweden's NATO bid," *Agence France Presse*, November 8, 2022.

[148] "Turkey welcomes Sweden's extradition of wanted convict," *Associated Press*, December 5, 2022; "Turkey asks Finland to resume defense sales amid NATO talks," *Al-Monitor*, December 6, 2022.

[149] "Finland to consider arms exports to Turkey as it seeks Ankara support for NATO bid," *Reuters*, December 8, 2022.

[150] State Department, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken with Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström and Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto at a Joint Press Availability," December 8, 2022.

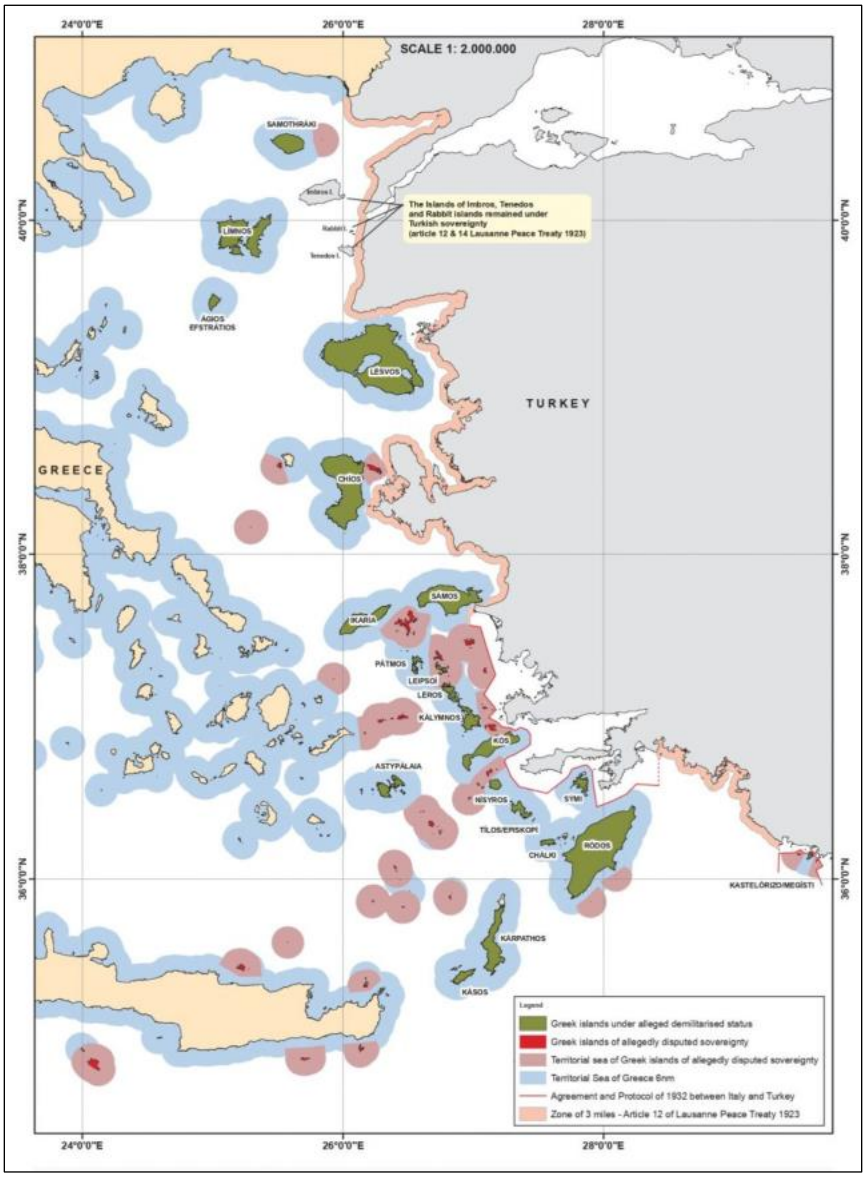
of the areas in dispute). Since a relative spike in Turkey-Greece tensions in 2019, Greece has strengthened its defense cooperation and relations with the United States and a number of regional countries such as France, Israel, and Egypt.

Timeline of Some Major Events: Disputes in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean

1923	Greek sovereignty over major Eastern Aegean islands confirmed by Treaty of Lausanne.
1930s	Greece claims 10 miles of national airspace (1931) and 6 miles of territorial waters (1936) around islands.
1947	Greece acquires Dodecanese islands from Italy in Paris Peace Treaties.
1952	International Civil Aviation Organization gives Greece (Athens) Flight Information Region (FIR) air traffic responsibility for most of the Aegean airspace.
1960s	Greece stations some military personnel and equipment on some Aegean islands as Turkey-Greece tensions grow over Cyprus. Turkey points to restrictions on militarization in Lausanne and Paris treaties.
1974	Cyprus conflict: After Greece-backed coup, Turkey invades and occupies the northern one-third of the island. Greece reinforces its military presence on some Aegean islands. Turkey starts regularly challenging (1) Greek military presence on islands, (2) some aspects of Greek maritime and airspace claims, and (3) the scope of the Athens FIR in the Aegean. Turkish military aircraft begin overflights in disputed areas, sometimes challenged by Greek military aircraft.
1976	U.N. Security Council Resolution 395 calls on Turkey and Greece to resolve disputes via negotiations, and take unresolved issues to International Court of Justice.
1996	Grey zones regarding smaller islets and rocks become a bigger issue with the Imia/Kardak sovereignty dispute, which seemed to bring Turkey and Greece close to armed conflict.
2004	Annan Plan for the reunification of Cyprus is not adopted (approved in Turkish Cypriot popular referendum, not approved in Greek Cypriot referendum). EU admits the Republic of Cyprus (ROC) as member. Turkish EU accession hopes decrease in subsequent years, partly due to continuing Turkey-ROC tensions.
2011	Turkey-ROC tensions grow and become intertwined with existing Turkey-Greece Aegean disputes with the discovery of offshore natural gas in ROC's exclusive economic zone and Turkish Cypriot demands to participate in benefits from Eastern Mediterranean energy finds.
2019-2021	Various Turkish diplomatic and maritime actions aim at countering Greek and ROC energy development aspirations in the Eastern Mediterranean. Other regional countries, including Israel, Egypt, and France, grow closer to Greece and ROC, including via the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). U.S. officials urge de-escalation while supporting EMGF.
2021	President Erdogan and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar publicly advocate independent Turkish Cypriot state, in departure from longtime internationally supported framework for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.
2022	Turkey-Greece tensions resume amid mutual claims of military overflights and provocation, signs of greater U.S.-Greece-ROC military cooperation, Greek statements discouraging U.S. arms sales to Turkey, Greek military activity in some Aegean islands, and Turkish statements questioning Greek sovereignty over those islands.

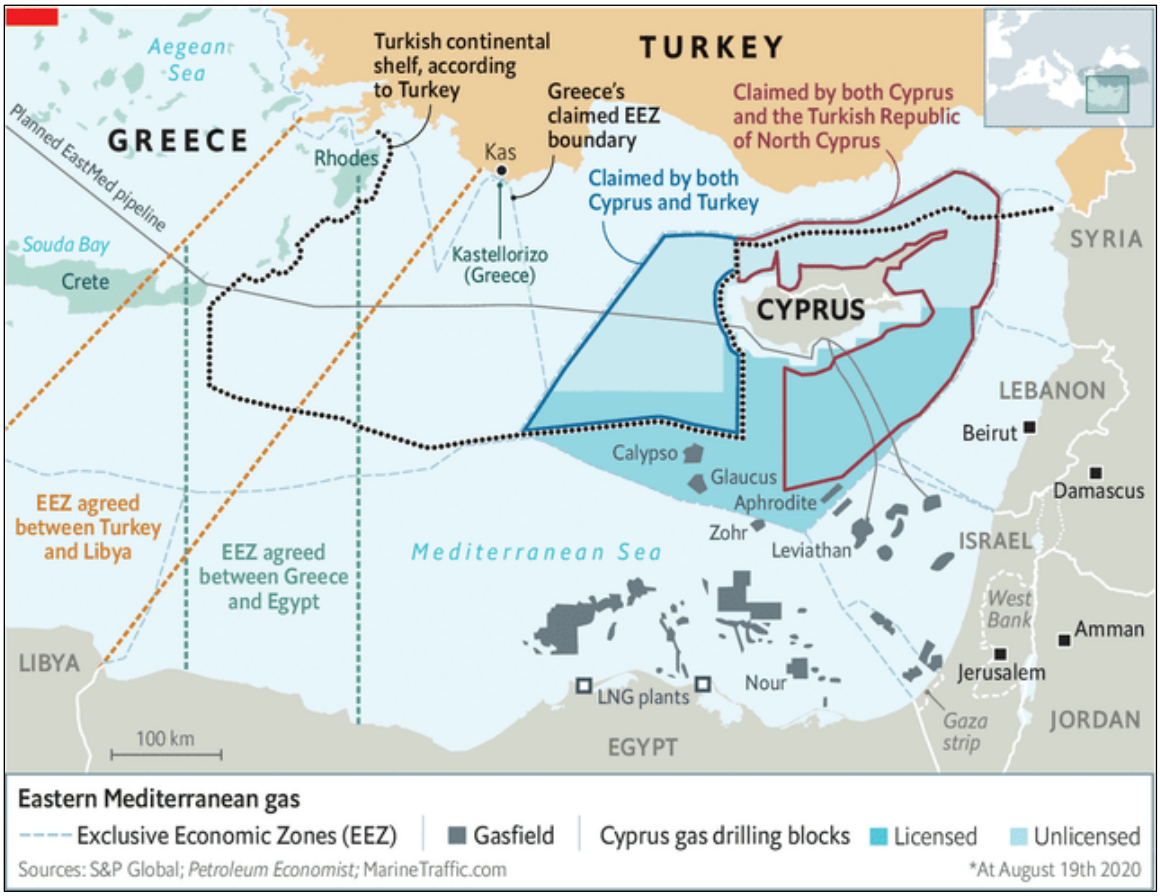
Sources: Various open sources, including Diego Cupolo, "TurkAegean or Greek Lake: The War of Words over the Aegean Sea," *Turkey recap* (Substack), July 5, 2022; Hasan Selim Özertem, "Turkish-Greek Relations in the Aegean: Is a Solution Possible?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 16, 2021; Alexis Heraclides, "The unresolved Aegean dispute: Problems and prospects," *Greece and Turkey in Conflict and Cooperation*, New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 89-108; Globalsecurity.org, Turkish-Greek Aegean Dispute, available at https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/aegean.htm.

Figure 9. Some Areas of Aegean Dispute



Source: *Greek Reporter*, June 2022 (https://greekreporter.com/2022/06/09/turkey-challenge-greece-sovereignty-16-maps/).

Figure 10. Competing Claims in the Eastern Mediterranean



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

Turkey-Greece tensions are further complicated by one of the region's major unresolved conflicts, the de facto political division of the island of Cyprus along ethnic lines. The division dates from the 1974 military clash in which Turkish forces invaded parts of the island to prevent the ethnic Greek Cypriot leadership from unifying Cyprus with Greece.[151] Since Cyprus became independent of the United Kingdom in 1960, Turkey has acted as the protector of the island's ethnic Turkish Cypriot minority from potential mistreatment by the ethnic Greek Cypriot majority.[152] The internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus (ROC), which has close ties to Greece, claims jurisdiction over the entire island, but its effective administrative control is limited to the southern two-thirds, where Greek Cypriots comprise a majority. Turkish Cypriots administer the northern one-third and are backed by Turkey, including a Turkish military contingent there since the 1974 clash.[153] In 1983, Turkish Cypriot leaders proclaimed this part of

[151] Turkey deployed its military in response to a coup d'état that had empowered pro-unification Greek Cypriot leaders.

[152] Turkey is 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.

[153] Turkey retains between 30,000 and 40,000 troops on the island (supplemented by several thousand Turkish Cypriot soldiers). This presence is countered by an ROC force of approximately 12,000 with reported access to between 50,000 and 75,000 reserves. "Cyprus - Army," *Janes Sentinel Security Assessment - Eastern Mediterranean*, February 3, 2021. The United Nations maintains a peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP) of approximately 900 personnel within a buffer zone headquartered in Cyprus's divided capital of Nicosia. The United Kingdom maintains approximately 3,000

the island the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), though no country other than Turkey recognizes it.

A dispute during the past decade between Turkey and the ROC about Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration appears to have brought Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt closer together.[154] Turkey has objected to Greek Cypriot transactions in the offshore energy sector on the grounds that they have not involved the de facto TRNC. Turkey also has supported Turkish Cypriot claims to an exclusive economic zone around part of the island.

In late 2019, the Turkey-ROC 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 then-Government of National Accord (GNA) on maritime boundaries (see **Figure 9**).[155] The dispute increased Turkey-Greece naval tensions, especially after Greece and Egypt reached a maritime agreement in August 2020 rivaling the 2019 Turkey-Libya deal.[156] Some observers have asserted that nationalistic and anti-Western sentiment within elite Turkish national security circles has driven Turkey's naval buildup and maximalist maritime claims, citing arguments within these circles that Turkey was entitled to a "Blue Homeland" in surrounding waters.[157] Turkish decisions may partly stem from concerns about potential geostrategic encirclement and exclusion from potentially lucrative commercial energy transactions. A reported U.S. decision in 2022 to withdraw support for a natural gas pipeline from Israel and Cyprus to Greece—in part for economic and environmental reasons[158]—appeared to partly assuage Turkish concerns about possible regional containment, and drew support from Erdogan.[159]

The 2019-2020 disputes involving Turkey, ROC, and Greece prompted U.S. and broader Western criticism of Turkey and some EU sanctions against Turkish individuals in the context of EU efforts to discourage Turkish drilling near Cyprus.[160] Turkish ships with naval escorts engaged in energy exploration activities; Greece, the ROC, France, and Italy held military exercises that may have sought to deter these Turkish actions.[161] The Turkish exploration activities abated near the end of 2020, significantly reducing Turkey-Greece tensions.

Tensions During 2022

After a relative relaxation of Turkey-Greece tensions in late 2020, they spiked again in 2022. First, the countries traded accusations regarding airspace violations over the Aegean. During this period of early 2022, President Erdogan maintained dialogue with Greek Prime Minister

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personnel at two sovereign base areas on the southern portion of the island at Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

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

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

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

[157] 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.

[158] Nektaria Stamouli, "A Pipeline Project That Ran Afoul of Geopolitics and Green Policies," *Politico*, January 18, 2022.

[159] "Erdogan says cost concerns force U.S. rethink on EastMed gas pipeline," *Reuters*, January 18, 2022.

[160] 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.

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

Kyriakos Mitsotakis. After Mitsotakis appeared to raise concern in May about U.S.-Turkey arms transactions while addressing a joint session of Congress, Erdogan announced that he would no longer deal with Mitsotakis.[162] With U.S. officials already having notified Congress of a possible upgrade of F-16s for Greece in 2021,[163] U.S. decisions on bolstering Turkey's F-16 fleet could have significant implications for the security balance between Turkey and Greece, and for relations involving the three countries.[164]

While Turkey-Greece contacts have continued at ministerial levels, bilateral relations have remained tense as of late 2022. Turkey has reiterated objections to Greek military presences and reinforcements on Aegean islands located only a few miles from the Turkish mainland, exacerbating Turkey-Greece disputes over the legality of the Greek actions under various 20th century international agreements.[165] In September 2022, Erdogan said that Turkey is not bound by Greece's occupation of the islands, while apparently hinting at potential future Turkish military action.[166] Later that month, the Turkish foreign ministry summoned the Greek and U.S. ambassadors to protest the deployment of U.S.-origin armored vehicles on the islands of Lesbos (alt. Lesvos) and Samos.[167] On September 28, the State Department spokesperson said that Greece's sovereignty over the islands was not in question, and called on "all countries, including our allies, to respect territorial integrity and sovereignty, and to avoid actions that could inflame tensions."[168]

Additional developments signaling closer U.S. military relations with Greece and the ROC have generated concern among Turkish officials. They have complained about the significant new U.S. military presence at the Greek port of Alexandroupoli (alt. Alexandroupolis), located around 10-15 miles from the Turkish border.[169] U.S. officials have explained that they are using the port as a transit hub to send equipment to allies and partners in the region given security concerns regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[170] Some reports speculate about U.S.-Greece discussions regarding the possibility of basing U.S. warships in Alexandropouli after the port's planned

[162] Greek Prime Minister's website, "Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' address to the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress," May 17, 2022.

[163] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Greece – F-16 Sustainment Materiel and Services, Transmittal No. 21-49," August 3, 2021.

[164] Fehim Tastekin, "Greece's growing influence frustrates Erdogan," *Al-Monitor*, September 9, 2022; Aaron Stein, "You Go to War with the Turkey You Have, Not the Turkey You Want," *War on the Rocks*, May 30, 2022.

[165] The respective Turkish and Greek arguments are set forth at https://www.mfa.gov.tr/militarization-of-eastern-aegean-islands-contrary-tp-the-provisions-of-international-agreements.en.mfa and https://www.mfa.gr/en/issues-of-greek-turkish-relations/relevant-documents/turkish-claims-regarding-the-demilitarization-of-islands-in-the-aegean-sea.html. See also Diego Cupolo, "TurkAegean or Greek Lake: The War of Words over the Aegean Sea," *Turkey recap* (Substack), July 5, 2022.

[166] "Erdogan accuses Greece of 'occupying' demilitarised islands," *Reuters*, September 3, 2022.

[167] "Turkey files protest with Greece, US in islands row," *Agence France Presse*, September 26, 2022.

[168] State Department Press Briefing, September 28, 2022. In February 2022, an EU spokesperson criticized statements by the Turkish foreign minister implying conditions on Greece's sovereignty over the islands. The spokesperson said, "Greece's sovereignty over these islands is unquestionable. Turkey should respect it, refrain from provocative statements and actions in this regard, commit unequivocally to good neighbourly relations and work to settle any disputes peacefully. International agreements must be respected." European External Action Service, "Turkey: Statement by the Spokesperson on the sovereignty of Greece over its islands," February 13, 2022.

[169] Niki Kitsantonis and Anatoly Kurmanaev, "Sleepy Greek Port Turns into Pivotal Transit Point for American Military," *New York Times*, August 19, 2022.

[170] Ibid; Department of Defense News, "Strategic Port Access Aids Support to Ukraine, Austin Tells Greek Defense Minister," July 18, 2022.

expansion.[171] In March 2022 congressional hearing testimony, Turkey expert and former congressional committee staff member Alan Makovsky referenced U.S.-Greece defense cooperation agreements from 2019 and 2021. He then said that having facilities at Alexandroupoli allows NATO to bypass logjams or closures of the Straits to transport troops and materiel overland to allies and partners.[172] (As mentioned above, Turkey has requested that warships from non-Black Sea-littoral countries refrain from transiting the Straits.) In September, the State Department announced that the ROC is permitted to receive defense articles in FY2023, fully ending the embargo that Congress legally imposed in 1987 and lifted in 2019 (per P.L. 116-94, Division J, Section 205). After Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in October 2022 that the United States no longer maintains a balanced approach in the Aegean,[173] U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Jeff Flake released a statement saying that there has been no shift in U.S. security posture to favor Turkey or Greece, and that the NATO allies' collective efforts are focused on ending Russia's war in Ukraine.[174]

In December, President Erdogan made remarks suggesting that Turkish missiles could target Athens as a response to Greek reinforcement of Aegean islands. Greece's foreign minister condemned Erdogan's comments as a threat against a NATO ally.[175]

Israel and Sunni Arab Governments

Since the 2010s, Turkey's relations with Israel and with Sunni Arab governments that support traditional authoritarian governance models in the region—notably Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt—have been fraught with tension. Under President Erdogan, Turkey and Israel have clashed politically over Israel's handling of Palestinian issues and Turkey's support for Hamas, even as the countries have continued to expand trade ties.[176] The Sunni Arab governments have regarded Turkey with suspicion largely because of the Turkish government's sympathies for Islamist political groups and its close relationship with Qatar.[177]

Developments in Libya increased the overlap between Turkey's disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean and its rivalries with the Sunni Arab governments because they supported opposing sides in Libya's civil war. As mentioned above, 2019-2020 maritime boundary agreements between Turkey and Libya's then-GNA, and Greece and Egypt, respectively, complicated the legal and economic picture in the Eastern Mediterranean. While Turkey reportedly seeks to improve relations with Egypt, Turkish agreements during 2022 to expand

[171] Ahmet Gencturk, "US wants to turn Greek port into alternative to Turkish Straits, claims Greek media," *Anadolu Agency*, September 20, 2022; "A sleepy Greek port has become vital to the war in Ukraine," *Economist*, July 21, 2022.

[172] Prepared testimony of Alan Makovsky, Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress, "Opportunities and Challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean: Examining U.S. Interests and Regional Cooperation," House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism; and Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber, March 31, 2022, available at https://www.americanprogress.org/article/opportunities-and-challenges-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-examining-u-s-interests-and-regional-cooperation/.

[173] "Cavusoglu says US siding against Turkey in the Aegean, East Med," *Kathimerini*, October 21, 2022.

[174] Twitter, U.S. Embassy Türkiye, October 18, 2022–3:32 AM, at https://twitter.com/USEmbassyTurkey/status/1582273449145212928.

[175] Andrew Wilks, "Greece compares Turkey to North Korea in latest row with Erdogan," *Al-Monitor*, December 12, 2022.

[176] Kemal Kirisci and Dan Arbell, "President Herzog's visit to Ankara: A first step in normalizing Turkey-Israel relations?" Brookings Institution, March 7, 2022.

[177] 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.

energy and defense cooperation with Libya's interim Government of National Unity may present obstacles to that goal.[178]

In the past two years, however, Turkey has sought rapprochement with some of its regional rivals. The potential economic benefits could help alleviate Turkey's financial crisis ahead of its anticipated 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections. For example, Erdogan and UAE President Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid al Nuhayyan have visited each other, and the two countries have signed a currency swap deal along with many other agreements on economic cooperation and investment.[179] In April 2022, Erdogan visited Saudi Arabia after Turkey transferred jurisdiction to the Saudis over the trial Turkey had previously convened for journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder, which allegedly occurred in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. In June, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman al Saud visited Turkey. Figures indicate that Turkey-Saudi Arabia trade volume is expanding.[180] A November 2022 media report suggested that Turkey was expecting additional foreign exchange inflows from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.[181]

An early 2022 media report anticipated UAE investment in Turkey's defense industry and Turkish defense exports to the Gulf—potentially including drones, air defense systems, and various air, sea, and land platforms.[182] In September 2022, Turkey sent 20 Bayraktar TB2 drones to the UAE, and the UAE reportedly expects to receive more.[183] Saudi Arabia also reportedly wants to acquire the TB2, and both countries have apparently raised the possibility of building production facilities for Turkish-designed drones.[184]

Moreover, Israel and Turkey have shown signs of improving ties, perhaps partly from common cause in countering Iran.[185] Some reports have suggested potential changes to Turkish policy on Hamas.[186]

In March 2022, Israeli President Isaac Herzog visited Turkey, and the two countries' foreign ministers exchanged visits in May and June. After Turkey and Israel agreed in August to exchange ambassadors for the first time since 2018, President Erdogan met with then-Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in New York in September, and Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz visited Turkey in October. Turkish officials have expressed interest in energy cooperation with Israel. However, Israeli officials reportedly remain skeptical about prospects for a subsea Israel-Turkey natural gas pipeline.[187] While Israel has pursued greater high-level interaction with

[178] Fehim Tastekin, "Libya differences stall Turkey-Egypt fence-mending," *Al-Monitor*, November 3, 2022.

[179] "UAE and Turkey central banks seek further co-operation after currency swap deal," *The National*, February 17, 2022.

[180] Sinem Cengiz, "Echoes from President Erdoğan's Saudi Arabia Visit: A Fresh Start?" *Politics Today*, May 5, 2022.

[181] Mustafa Sonmez, "Turkish government banks on Gulf financial support to save economy," *Al-Monitor*, November 30, 2022.

[182] Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey's policy changes could see defense biz grow with Gulf rivals," *Defense News*, March 1, 2022.

[183] "Exclusive: Turkey sells battle-tested drones to UAE as regional rivals mend ties," *Reuters*, September 21, 2022.

[184] Ibid; Ali Bakir, "The UAE just received twenty drones from Turkey. What's the backstory?" Atlantic Council, November 16, 2022.

[185] Galip Dalay, "Turkey's Middle East Reset? A Precursor for Re-Escalation?" Middle East Council on Global Affairs, August 2022; Ksenia Svetlova, "Iran helped Turkey and Israel mend ties. Here's how," Atlantic Council, September 9, 2022.

[186] Pinar Dost, "With an eye on Iran, Turkish-Israeli relations will deepen," Atlantic Council, November 10, 2022; Ariel Kahana, "Report: Israel, Turkey working to deport Hamas officials from Ankara," *Israel Hayom*, February 15, 2022.

[187] Lazar Berman, "FM's visit shows Turkey eager to accelerate reconciliation, but Israel more cautious," *Times of*

Turkey, it may be cautious about significant near-term improvements in bilateral relations, and appears to remain committed to close strategic ties with Greece and the ROC.[188]

It is unclear how the expected late 2022 return of Benjamin Netanyahu as Israel's prime minister might affect the improvement in Turkey-Israel relations.[189] Erdogan and Netanyahu have often engaged in contentious rhetorical exchanges, but the two spoke by phone after Netanyahu's November 2022 electoral victory and agreed to continue efforts to build positive Turkey-Israel ties.[190]

The Syrian Conflict

Background

Turkey's involvement in Syria's conflict since it started in 2011 has been complicated and costly, and has severely strained U.S.-Turkey ties. Turkey's priorities in Syria's civil war and stance toward Syrian President Bashar al Asad have evolved during the course of the conflict. Turkey has engaged in a mix of coordination and competition with Russia and Iran (which support Asad) since intervening militarily in Syria starting in August 2016. Turkey and the United States have engaged in similarly inconsistent interactions in northern Syria east of the Euphrates River, where U.S. forces have been based.

Since at least 2014, Turkey has actively sought to thwart the Syrian Kurdish YPG from establishing an autonomous area along Syria's northern border with Turkey. Turkey's government considers the YPG and its political counterpart, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), to be a major threat to Turkish security, based on Turkish concerns that YPG/PYD gains have emboldened the PKK (which has links to the YPG/PYD) in its domestic conflict with Turkish authorities.[191] 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. Turkish-led military operations in October 2019 to seize areas of northeastern Syria from the SDF—after U.S. Special Forces pulled back from the border area—led to major criticism of and proposed action against Turkey in Congress.[192] U.S. officials have continued partnering with SDF forces against the Islamic State in some areas of Syria, while the SDF has made arrangements elsewhere for protection to come from Syrian government forces.

Israel, May 24, 2022. While such a pipeline may be the most feasible pipeline option for transporting Eastern Mediterranean natural gas to Europe, political and economic obstacles may make liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports from liquefaction terminals in Egypt a more practical option. "Turkey best option for East Med gas transit to Europe: Experts," *Daily Sabah*, March 10, 2022; Sean Mathews, "Russia-Ukraine war: Conflict boosts hopes for East Mediterranean energy, experts say," *Middle East Eye*, April 5, 2022. Rina Bassist, "Israeli energy minister inks deal to export gas to Europe via Egypt," *Al-Monitor*, June 15, 2022.

[188] Steven A. Cook, "How Israel and Turkey Benefit from Restoring Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, August 31, 2022.

[189] Nazlan Ertan, "What Netanyahu's return means for Israel-Turkey ties," *Al-Monitor*, November 8, 2022.

[190] "Erdogan tells Netanyahu relations should be maintained with mutual respect," *Reuters*, November 17, 2022.

[191] See, for example, 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. For sources linking the PKK to the YPG (or PKK affiliates in Syria), see footnote 141.

[192] Rachel Oswald, "Sanctions on Turkey go front and center as Congress returns," *Roll Call*, October 15, 2019.

Turkey has set up local councils in areas of northern Syria that Turkey and Turkish-supported Syrian armed opposition groups—generally referred to under the moniker of the Syrian National Army (SNA)—have occupied since 2016 (see **Figure 11**). These councils and associated security forces provide public services in these areas with funding, oversight, and training from Turkish officials. Questions persist about future governance and Turkey's overarching role. In 2020, one Turkish analyst wrote that the migration of thousands of Sunni Arabs to these areas has significantly changed their demography.[193] Syrian Kurds maintain self-rule in some areas, even though these areas are less contiguous with each other and the Turkish border.[194] The State Department's 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights on Syria said

> Armed Syrian opposition groups supported by Turkey in the northern region of the country committed human rights abuses, reportedly targeting Kurdish and Yezidi residents and other civilians, including: extrajudicial killings; the arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of civilians; torture; sexual violence; forced evacuations from homes; looting and seizure of private property; transfer of detained civilians across the border into Turkey; recruitment of child soldiers; and the looting and desecration of religious shrines....
>
> Elements of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of Syrian Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and other minority groups that included members of the Kurdish People's Protection Units, reportedly engaged in human rights abuses, including torture, arbitrary detention, recruitment of child soldiers, and restrictions on freedom of assembly.

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

[194] Ibid.

Figure 11. Syria Conflict Map

During fall 2022, the Al Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization) made inroads in the Turkey/SNA-occupied Afrin province, reportedly due to complicated rivalries between Syrian opposition factions.[195] Turkey persuaded HTS to withdraw by November, but questions remain about the possibility of lingering HTS cells or loyalists.[196]

The Turkish military remains in a standoff with Russia and the Syrian government over the future of Syria's northwestern province of Idlib, which is largely controlled by HTS. Turkey deployed troops to Idlib in 2017, ostensibly to protect it from Syrian government forces and prevent further refugee flows into Turkey. A limited outbreak of conflict in 2020 displaced hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians and caused several Turkish and Syrian casualties. 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.[197] Factors affecting future developments, partly due to Russia's

[195] Orwa Ajjoub, "HTS, Turkey, and the future of Syria's north," Middle East Institute, October 26, 2022.

[196] Omer Ozkizilcik, "How a former al-Qaeda affiliate became an existential threat and a wake-up call for the Syrian opposition," Atlantic Council, November 14, 2022.

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

ongoing war in Ukraine, could include possible Russian changes in posture and strategy in Syria, Turkish measures to limit Russian military access to Syria by air and sea,[198] and Russia's willingness to permit humanitarian access to Syria beyond early 2023.[199]

Refugees in Turkey

Turkey hosts about 3.6 million Syrian refugees—more than any other country—along with hundreds of thousands from other countries.[200] Unofficial reports suggest these numbers may be considerably higher, constituting around 7% of Turkey's population.[201] Refugees' and other migrants' living situations, effect on Turkey's population, and access to employment, education, and public services vary based on the differing circumstances that they face. Growing numbers of Turks appear to have concerns about refugees' impact on Turkey's society and economy.[202] According to one source, about half of the two million adult Syrian refugees in Turkey work, and nearly all who do work in the informal sector, where wages are below the legal minimum and workers can face exploitation and unsafe working conditions.[203]

Turkey closed off most access to migrants from Syria in 2015[204] and has sought to repatriate refugees who are willing to return,[205] with more than 500,000 reportedly having done so to date.[206] Reportedly, Turkish authorities have forcibly returned some refugees to Syria.[207]

Per a 2016 Turkey-EU agreement to minimize the flow of migrants to the EU, Greece can return Syrian migrants to Turkey that come to its islands. As part of a structured process, the deal calls for the same number of people to be resettled from Turkey in EU countries.[208] The agreement also mandated EU economic assistance for refugees in Turkey. During some times of crisis, President Erdogan has threatened to open Turkey's borders to allow migrants into Greece and Bulgaria. Those countries implement security measures—with the assistance of the EU's border and coast guard agency—to minimize the number of crossings via land or sea. Some sources have criticized Turkey and the other countries involved for alleged ethical or international legal violations related to the treatment of refugees or migrants.[209]

Erdogan has hinted at the possibility of repairing relations with Asad, after more than a decade in which Turkey has sought an end to Asad's rule. As of late 2022, Russia is reportedly trying to broker better ties. Turkey is seeking Syria's help to push YPG fighters farther from the border and facilitate the return of Syrian refugees living in Turkey. Asad reportedly wants full Turkish withdrawal in return.[210] It is unclear whether the two leaders can compromise and how that would

idlib-revealed-1.771953.

[198] Dorian Jones, "Ankara Tightens Russian Access to Syria," *Voice of America*, May 10, 2022.

[199] Lara Jakes, "U.N. Yields to Russia's Limits on Aid Mission in Syria," *New York Times*, July 12, 2022.

[200] See https://reporting.unhcr.org/turkey#toc-narratives.

[201] Merve Tahiroglu, "Immigration Politics: Refugees in Turkey and the 2023 Elections," Heinrich Böll Stiftung, August 17, 2022.

[202] M. Murat Erdogan, *Syrians Barometer - 2020*, 2022.

[203] Tahiroglu, "Immigration Politics: Refugees in Turkey and the 2023 Elections."

[204] Ceylan Yeginsu and Karam Shoumali, "Turkey Moves to Close All Gates at Border With Syria," *New York Times*, March 29, 2015.

[205] "Turkey talks with UN over returning Syrian refugees," *Associated Press*, September 12, 2021.

[206] Mohammed Hardan, "Half a million Syrians return from Turkey, but were they forced?" *Al-Monitor*, December 6, 2022.

[207] Ibid; Sultan al-Kanj, "Turkey forcibly deports dozens of Syrians," *Al-Monitor*, February 8, 2022.

[208] Text of agreement available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/.

[209] International Organization for Migration, "IOM Concerned about Increasing Deaths on Greece-Turkey Border," February 18, 2022; "Bulgaria: Pushbacks Escalate as Government Discusses Reinforcements at Borders," European Council on Refugees and Exiles, September 10, 2021.

[210] "Syria resisting Russia's efforts to broker Turkey summit, sources say," *Reuters*, December 5, 2022.

affect Turkey's relationship with the SNA and the overall dynamic with other stakeholders in northern Syria.

Further Turkish Military Operations?

In May 2022, Erdogan began making public statements about a possible new Turkish military operation to expand areas of Turkish control in Syria as a means of countering YPG influence and providing areas for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees living in Turkey.[211] The presence of Syrian refugees has become politically charged in Turkey ahead of the scheduled 2023 elections, partly because of Turkey's ongoing economic turmoil. In June testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy Dana Stroul said that any Turkish escalation in northern Syria "risks disrupting [Defeat]-ISIS operations," including the security of SDF-managed detention facilities.[212] As of August 2022, a media report suggested that approximately 900 U.S. Special Forces personnel were deployed in northeastern Syria to help the SDF counter the Islamic State and to discourage other countries' forces from occupying the area.[213]

A November 13, 2022, bombing that killed six people in Istanbul and injured dozens more may have boosted the Turkish government's resolve to consider a military operation in Syria. Turkish officials have publicized information alleging YPG responsibility for the attack, though the YPG and PKK deny involvement.[214]

Turkey began air and artillery strikes against SDF-controlled areas of northern Syria (including civilian infrastructure) and PKK targets in northern Iraq on November 20, 2022, dubbing the strikes Operation Claw-Sword and invoking self-defense as justification. Reportedly, the strikes have killed tens of people in Syria and Iraq, including SDF and Syrian government troops (in Syria), PKK militants (in Iraq), and civilians (in both countries).[215] Apparent retaliatory mortar and rocket attacks from Syria—alleged by Turkish officials to come from YPG/PKK militants—killed two at a schoolyard in southern Turkey, and wounded others there and at a border gate.[216] One of the Turkish drone strikes reportedly killed two SDF personnel at a post near Al Hasakeh that is 130 meters from the main U.S. military base in the area, reportedly prompting calls between U.S. and Turkish military chiefs of staff and intelligence chiefs.[217] Apparent retaliatory mortar and rocket attacks from Syria—alleged by Turkish officials to come from YPG/PKK militants—have killed two civilians and wounded other people in southern Turkey.[218] President

[211] Fehim Tastekin, "The stumbling blocks facing Turkey's new operation plan in Syria," *Al-Monitor*, May 30, 2022.

[212] Statement of Dana Stroul, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy, Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "The Path Forward on U.S.-Syria Policy: Strategy and Accountability," June 8, 2022, available at https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060822_%20Stroul_Testimony.pdf.

[213] Alexander Ward et al., "What are we still doing in Syria?" *Politico*, August 26, 2022.

[214] "Turkey blames deadly bomb on Kurdish militants; PKK denies involvement," *Reuters*, November 14, 2022.

[215] Andrew Wilks, "Turkey strikes in Syria, Iraq a week after Istanbul bombing," *Associated Press*, November 20, 2022.

[216] Begum Donmez Ersoz, "Another Major Turkish Military Ground Incursion Very Likely Amid Rising Tensions in Syria Experts Say," *Voice of America*, November 22, 2022; "Rockets fired into southeastern Türkiye from northern Syria," *TRT World*, November 20, 2022.

[217] Jared Szuba, "Pentagon's concerns grow as Syria's Kurds prepare for Turkish assault," *Al-Monitor*, November 30, 2022; "Scoop: CIA warned Turkey strikes in Syria endanger U.S. troops," *Axios*, December 7, 2022.

[218] Begum Donmez Ersoz, "Another Major Turkish Military Ground Incursion Very Likely Amid Rising Tensions in Syria Experts Say," *Voice of America*, November 22, 2022; "Rockets fired into southeastern Türkiye from northern Syria," *TRT World*, November 20, 2022.

Erdogan has appeared to challenge the U.S. policy of distinguishing the YPG from the PKK, saying "It's the end of the road for those who believe they can stall Turkey by pun games, by changing names of terrorist organizations, by sharing pictures showing their soldiers next to terrorists."[219] SDF commander Mazloum Abdi (or Kobane, whose real name is Ferhat Abdi Sahin) has called for stronger statements from U.S. and Russian officials to prevent a new Turkish-led ground incursion.

Various U.S. official statements have acknowledged Turkey's right to self-defense, but have generally opposed cross-border strikes and voiced concerns that Turkey-SDF clashes could reduce the SDF's focus on countering the Islamic State.[220] In a November 30 call between Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, Secretary Austin expressed the Defense Department's "strong opposition to a new Turkish military operation."[221] Reportedly, U.S. government civilian staff in northeastern Syria have been evacuated to northern Iraq for safety.[222]

Based on open source reporting, the likely focus of a Turkish ground operation would be to eject the SDF from the towns and surroundings of Tell Rifat and Manbij (see **Figure 11**).[223] These areas include important supply routes connecting northwestern and northeastern Syria, and are not in the American military sphere of operation in northeastern Syria, but farther west in the Russian and Syrian regime sphere. Concerns about how a Turkish-led ground operation in areas surrounding Aleppo province might affect Russian, Iranian, and Syrian government sway in the province could affect Russia's stance toward a potential operation.[224] However, according to one former U.S. official, U.S. and Russian pushback against Turkish military action may be less effective than before because "The war in Ukraine has bolstered Turkey's diplomatic leverage, weakened Russia's military credibility and resources, and made multilateral pressure far less plausible."[225] One former senior U.S. official has speculated that Russia might approve a Turkish operation into Kobane/Ayn al Arab in the hope that it could drive a wedge between the United States and Turkey, and thus weaken their efforts to contain Russia in Syria.[226]

Iraq

Turkey has acted for decades in Iraq to counter threats to Turkey from the PKK, which maintains safe havens there. Turkey has conducted airstrikes and special operations against PKK targets in Iraq since 2007. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which is the leading faction within Iraq's largely autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has not generally objected to these strikes, though it has shown sensitivity to pan-Kurdish sympathies among its population.

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[219] Jared Szuba, "Turkey strikes near US base in Syria after Pentagon calls for de-escalation," *Al-Monitor*, November 22, 2022.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Defense Department, "Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III's Phone Call With Turkish Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar," November 30, 2022.

[222] Amberin Zaman, "Syrian Kurdish commander slams US response to Turkish attacks as US diplomats evacuated from Syria," *Al-Monitor*, November 29, 2022.

[223] Rich Outzen, "The risks and rewards of Erdogan's next military operation," Atlantic Council, December 1, 2022.

[224] Pepe Escobar, "Operation Claw-Sword: Erdogan's big new game in Syria," *Asia Times*, November 27, 2022; Soner Cagaptay of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, interviewed in Nadeen Ebrahim, "Will Erdogan finally deliver on his vow to invade northern Syria?" *CNN*, November 25, 2022.

[225] Outzen, "The risks and rewards of Erdogan's next military operation."

[226] James Jeffrey, "How the U.S. Can Compromise with Turkey on Syria," *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2022.

The KDP has its own rivalry with the PKK.[227] Turkey has stepped up its operations in Iraq and near the Iraq-Syria border based on Turkish officials' allegations that people and supplies from PKK safe havens in the Sinjar and Qandil regions of Iraq reinforce the Syrian YPG. Turkey's military maintains various posts inside northern Iraq and a presence at a base in Bashiqa near Mosul. Turkey has generally positive relations with the KRG—including via oil imports from northern Iraq relations—but has opposed Iraqi Kurdish moves toward independence that might spread separatist sentiment among Kurds in Turkey.

Turkey has an uneasy relationship with Iraq's central government over Turkey's military involvement in northern Iraq and ties with the KRG. Additionally, Turkish officials reportedly harbor concerns that Iraq's 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.[228] Relations with Baghdad are also strained by Iraqi concerns about the potential impact that Turkish dam construction and water management decisions have on downstream Iraqi communities.[229]

U.S. Relations

U.S. and Turkish officials maintain that bilateral cooperation on regional security matters remains mutually important,[230] despite Turkey's S-400 purchase from Russia and a number of other differences between them (such as in Syria and with Greece and Cyprus). U.S. officials have sometimes encouraged cooperation among other allies and partners to counter Turkish actions.[231] As mentioned above, however, Turkey has taken some steps to ease tensions with major U.S. partners in the Middle East—namely Israel, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

One important factor influencing Erdogan since at least 2010 appears to be a sense that U.S. actions have harmed specific Turkish interests or his own personal interests. Presumably as a result, Turkey since 2016 has adopted an approach that more actively shapes events near Turkey's borders and involves closer Turkish dealings with all relevant state actors, including Russia and Iran. Important developments animating Erdogan's purported sense of U.S.-inflicted harm on Turkey include

- **U.S. partnership with Syrian Kurds.** Close U.S. military cooperation against the Islamic State with the YPG despite its links to the PKK.
- **Islamists' regional status.** Erdogan's position 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.
- **Domestic sensitivities.** 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 that Erdogan blames on U.S.

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

[228] Sinem Cengiz, "Why Iraq's chaos is Turkey's concern," *Arab News*, September 2, 2022.

[229] Samya Kullab, "Iraq complains Turkey causing water shortages," *Associated Press*, November 18, 2022.

[230] State Department, "Joint Statement on the Meeting of Secretary Blinken and Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu," May 18, 2022.

[231] See, for example, Richard Outzen, "What Is Turkey Thinking in the Eastern Med?" Hoover Institution, December 7, 2021.

permanent resident Fethullah Gulen and his international socioreligious movement.[232]

Under President Joe Biden, some existing U.S.-Turkey tensions have continued alongside cooperation on other foreign policy matters and opportunities to improve bilateral ties. In April 2021, President Biden notably characterized Ottoman Empire (Turkey's predecessor state) mass killings and forced marches of Armenians during World War I as a genocide.[233] He has limited his meetings with President Erdogan to the sidelines of multilateral conferences. This approach may reflect a U.S. inclination to keep Turkey at arms' length until after Turkey's 2023 elections.[234]

Nevertheless, Turkey's emergence as a key mediator between Russia and Ukraine after Russia's 2022 invasion has arguably increased Turkey's importance for U.S. policy. While continued or deepening ties with Russia in certain areas remain a cause for concern for the Biden Administration and some Members of Congress, Turkey's cautious support for Ukraine's defense and openness to rapprochement with Israel, some Arab states, and Armenia have somewhat improved U.S.-Turkey relations.[235] President Biden has expressed support for selling F-16s to Turkey (see "Possible F-16 Sales" below), and the United States and Turkey launched a "strategic mechanism" dialogue in April 2022 involving various government ministries on "economic and defense cooperation, counterterrorism, and key areas of shared regional and global interest."[236]

Congressional Action and Options

Members of Congress may consider legislative and oversight options regarding Turkey. Congressional and executive branch action 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.

Increased congressional criticism and actions against Turkey have influenced the trajectory of U.S.-Turkey relations since the attempted 2016 coup, focused particularly on President Erdogan's domestic actions and Turkish foreign policy decisions on Russia, Syria, Greece, and Cyprus (discussed above) that largely diverge from U.S. stances. Congressional actions have included legislation and oversight to empower Turkish rivals Greece and the ROC, and the authorization of sanctions against Turkey and informal holds on arms sales in response to the Turkey-Russia S-400 transaction. Members may reevaluate various legislative and oversight options given Turkey's significant role in the Russian-Ukraine conflict and the Biden Administration's expressed interest in upgrading Turkey's F-16 fleet, the prospect of closely contested presidential and parliamentary elections by June 2023, and the following other factors:

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[232] CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

[233] White House, "Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day," April 24, 2021. In late 2019 during the 116th Congress, 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.

[234] Adar, "Perceptions in Turkey about the War in Ukraine."

[235] Alper Coskun, "Making the New U.S.-Turkey Strategic Mechanism Meaningful," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 12, 2022; Kali Robinson, "Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions," Council on Foreign Relations, August 24, 2022.

[236] State Department, "U.S.-Turkey Joint Statement on the Strategic Mechanism," April 4, 2022.

- Turkish decisions on whether and how to keep or use the Russian S-400 system.
- Whether and when Turkey's parliament ratifies Swedish and Finnish NATO accession.
- How various regional crises (Syria, Russia-Ukraine conflict, disputes with Greece and Cyprus) unfold and influence Turkey's relationships with key actors (including the United States, Russia, the European Union, Israel, Iran, and Sunni Arab governments).
- Whether Turkey projects greater power and increases its sphere of influence via military and economic cooperation (including defense exports) with other countries.
- The importance of Turkish bases and assets for the U.S. military, and the availability of alternatives.
- Changes to Turkish domestic political and economic freedom and stability.

More specific analysis of U.S. engagement and congressional options on some issues is set forth below.

Responses to Russian S-400 Acquisition: Removal from F-35 Program, CAATSA Sanctions, and Informal Holds

Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 system, which Turkey ordered in 2017 and Russia delivered in 2019,[237] has significant implications for U.S.-Turkey relations. For example, it has raised questions about how Turkey can stay closely integrated with NATO on defense matters, particularly if it transitions to any major Russian weapons platform with a multi-decade lifespan.

As a direct result of the transaction, the Trump Administration removed Turkey from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program in July 2019, and imposed sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA, P.L. 115-44) on Turkey's defense procurement agency in December 2020.[238] In explaining the U.S. decision to remove Turkey from the F-35 program in 2019, one official 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."[239]

Before Turkey's July 2019 removal from the F-35 program, it 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.[240] Section 1245 of the FY2020 National Defense

[237] "Turkey, Russia sign deal on supply of S-400 missiles," *Reuters*, December 29, 2017. According to this source, Turkey and Russia reached agreement on the sale of at least one S-400 system for $2.5 billion, with the possibility of a second system to come later.

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

[239] Defense Department, "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.

[240] 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.

Authorization Act (NDAA, 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. Turkish officials continue to publicly express hope that they can acquire the F-35 at some future time.

Turkish interest in procurement deals that feature technology sharing and co-production (see **Appendix B**)—thereby bolstering Turkey's domestic defense industry—may have influenced its S-400 decision. While Turkey's S-400 purchase reportedly did not feature technology sharing,[241] one reason Turkish officials gave for favoring the S-400 was a hope that it could open the door for future technology sharing on air defense with Russia.[242] Lack of agreement between the United States and Turkey on technology sharing regarding the Patriot system might have contributed to Turkey's interest in considering non-U.S. options for air defense, including an abortive attempt from 2013 to 2015 to purchase a Chinese system.[243]

Other factors may have influenced Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400. One is Turkey's apparent desire to diversify its foreign arms sources.[244] Another is President Erdogan's possible interest in defending against U.S.-origin aircraft such as those used by some Turkish military personnel in the 2016 coup attempt.[245]

Turkey has conducted some testing of the S-400 but does not appear to have made the system generally operational. President Erdogan stated in September 2021 that Turkey expected to purchase a second S-400 system.[246] Secretary of State Blinken warned Turkey that acquiring an additional system could lead to more U.S. sanctions under CAATSA.[247] Turkey may need to forgo possession or use of the S-400 in order to have CAATSA sanctions removed.

An August 2020 article reported that some Members of congressional committees placed informal holds on major new U.S.-origin arms sales to Turkey in connection with the S-400 transaction. Such a disruption had not occurred since the 1975-1978 embargo over Cyprus.[248] At the time of the article, major sales (valued at $25 million or more) on hold reportedly included 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.

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

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

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

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

[245] 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.

[246] Humeyra Pamuk, "Erdogan says Turkey plans to buy more Russian defense systems," *Reuters*, September 27, 2021.

[247] Tal Axelrod, "Blinken warns Turkey, US allies against purchasing Russian weapons," *The Hill*, April 28, 2021.

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

U.S. Aid and Arms Sales to Turkey

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).

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).

Possible F-16 Sales

In the fall of 2021, sources reported that Turkey requested to purchase 40 new F-16 fighter aircraft from the United States and to upgrade 80 F-16s from Turkey's aging fleet.[249] President Biden reportedly discussed the F-16 request with Erdogan during an October 2021 G20 meeting in Rome, indicating that the request would go through the regular arms sales consultation and notification process with Congress.[250]

Turkey's value as a NATO ally amid a new crisis implicating European security—Russia's war on Ukraine—may have subsequently boosted the Administration's interest in moving forward with an F-16 transaction with Turkey. Responding to criticism of a possible F-16 sale from 53 Members of Congress in a February 2022 letter,[251] a State Department official wrote in March that Turkey's support for Ukraine was "an important deterrent to malign influence in the region."[252] While acknowledging that any sale would require congressional notification, the official added, "The Administration believes that there are nonetheless compelling long-term NATO alliance unity and capability interests, as well as U.S. national security, economic and commercial interests that are supported by appropriate U.S. defense trade ties with Turkey."[253]

In April 2022, the Administration reportedly notified Congress informally of its intent to upgrade some of Turkey's existing F-16 fleet and provide short- and medium-range air-to-air missiles (Sidewinder AIM-9X and AMRAAM AIM-120D) at a total cost to Turkey of around $500 million.[254] In November 2021, a Turkish defense expert described what upgrades of Turkey's F-16 aircraft to the Block 70/72 Viper configuration could entail, including a new radar, other software and hardware enhancements, and structural improvements that significantly extend each aircraft's service life.[255] Other countries that are receiving or may receive new or upgraded F-16

[249] Grant Rumley and Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's F-16 Request May Not Stave Off the Inevitable," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 28, 2021.

[250] "Biden talks F-16s, raises human rights in meeting with Turkey's Erdogan," *Reuters*, October 31, 2021; Diego Cupolo, "In troubled US-Turkey relations, F-16 deal seen as path for dialogue," *Al-Monitor*, November 1, 2021. For background information, see CRS Report RL31675, *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process*, by Paul K. Kerr.

[251] Text of letter available at https://pallone.house.gov/sites/pallone.house.gov/files/20220123%20Letter%20on%20Turkey%20F-16%20Request.pdf.

[252] Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs Naz Durakoglu, quoted in Humeyra Pamuk, "U.S. says potential F-16 sale to Turkey would serve U.S. interests, NATO – letter," *Reuters*, April 6, 2022.

[253] Ibid.

[254] Jared Malsin, "Biden Administration Asks Congress to Approve New Weapons Deal with Turkey," *Wall Street Journal*, May 11, 2022; Daniel Flatley and Selcan Hacaoglu, "Turkey Wins Biden Backing for Its F-16 Fighter Jets Upgrades," *Bloomberg*, May 12, 2022. For information on informal and formal congressional notifications, see CRS Report RL31675, *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process*, by Paul K. Kerr.

[255] Arda Mevlutoglu, "F-16Vs Instead of F-35s: What's behind Turkey's Request?" *Politics Today*, November 22, 2021.

Block 70/72 Vipers include Greece, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, Morocco, Bahrain, Bulgaria, the Philippines, and Slovakia.[256]

U.S. sales to boost the capabilities and extend the lifespan of Turkey's F-16 fleet would provide Turkey time to develop its long-planned indigenous fifth-generation fighter aircraft, dubbed the TF-X and expected to come into operation over the next decade. Turkey is apparently seeking to partner with the United Kingdom (including companies BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce) to develop technology for the TF-X.[257] If unable to procure F-16s or F-16 upgrades to boost the Turkish air force's capabilities during the transition to the TF-X, Turkish officials have hinted that they might consider purchasing Russian Su-35 fighter aircraft or Western European alternatives.[258] According to some defense analysts, however, Turkey's calculus has likely changed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[259] One has written that if Turkey cannot procure F-16s, "Security needs and politics dictate Ankara to remain within the NATO scope in its fighter jet inventory. The only viable options before Turkey flies the TF-X are the [Eurofighter] Typhoon, Saab [Gripen] and F-16 Block 70."[260]

Turkey's support for Ukraine may factor into the decision-making of some Members of congressional committees regarding a possible U.S. upgrade or sale of F-16s for Turkey. A May 2022 article interviewed some congressional committee leaders with oversight responsibilities for arms sales.[261] Most signaled openness to considering F-16 transactions. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez remained skeptical, however, saying, "[Turkey] acts in ways that are contrary to our interests in a whole host of things. I think the administration has to stop seeing … the aspirational part of what we would like Turkey to be and realize that Turkey is under Erdogan."[262]

At the end of the June 2022 NATO summit in Spain, where Turkey agreed to allow the Sweden-Finland accession process to move forward (pending final Turkish ratification) and President Biden met with President Erdogan, Biden expressed support for selling new F-16s to Turkey as well as for upgrades. He also voiced confidence in obtaining congressional support.[263] It is unclear whether Turkey could use its positions on military action in Syria or ratifying Swedish and Finnish NATO accession as leverage on the United States with the F-16 issue, or vice versa.

Congressional conditions or informal (not legally binding) holds on F-16 sales remain possible. The House-passed version of the FY2023 NDAA (H.R. 7900) contained a provision (Section 1271) that would condition the transfer of new F-16s or upgrade technology to Turkey on a presidential certification (1) that the transfer is in the U.S. national interest, and (2) that includes a "detailed description of concrete steps taken to ensure that such F-16s are not used by Turkey for repeated unauthorized territorial overflights of Greece." In December, a joint explanatory

[256] Ibid.

[257] Burak Ege Bekdil, "Russian invasion of Ukraine is reviving Euro-Turkish fighter efforts," *Defense News*, March 9, 2022.

[258] "Türkiye signals it may turn to Russia if US blocks F-16 jet sales," *Daily Sabah*, September 9, 2022; Paul Iddon, "Here Are Turkey's Stopgap Options Until It Can Acquire Fifth-Generation Fighters," forbes.com, March 15, 2021.

[259] Paul Iddon, "Where can Turkey buy fighter jets if US F-16 deal falls through?" *Middle East Eye*, September 29, 2022.

[260] Bekdil, "Russian invasion of Ukraine is reviving Euro-Turkish fighter efforts."

[261] Bryant Harris, "Congress signals openness to Turkey F-16 sale amid Ukraine cooperation," *Defense News*, May 4, 2022.

[262] Ibid.

[263] "Biden supports F-16 sale to Turkey, is confident about congressional approval," *Reuters*, June 30, 2022.

statement accompanying the expected final version of the FY2023 NDAA said that the final bill (H.R. 7776) would not include the H.R. 7900 condition on F-16s, while stating, "We believe that North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies should not conduct unauthorized territorial overflights of another NATO ally's airspace."[264] Shortly thereafter, Chairman Menendez tweeted

> Contrary to some claims, the NDAA is not a win for Turkey. This is just one of many tools we have at our disposal in the Senate to deal with arms sales.
>
> I'll say it again.
>
> As SFRC Chairman, I will NOT approve F-16s for Turkey until Erdogan halts his abuses across the region.[265]

Informal congressional holds are not legally binding, but the executive branch generally gives broad deference to the chair and ranking member of the foreign affairs committees on major foreign arms sales. After formal notification of a major arms sale, any Member of Congress can privilege a joint resolution of disapproval for floor action if the Member introduces it within the time period prescribed under the Arms Export Control Act (P.L. 90-629, 82 Stat. 1320).[266] The President can veto a resolution of disapproval, subject to congressional override.

On December 7, the State Department spokesperson responded to questions about the status of possible F-16 sales to Turkey by saying

> Turkey is an important NATO Ally. It's an important security partner. We want to ensure that our defense capabilities are integrated and that Turkey has what it needs to take on the formidable threats that it faces. No NATO Ally has faced more terrorist attacks on its soil than our Turkish Allies. And so our cooperation in the security realm is of paramount importance to us....
>
> Turkey's desire for F-16s is something that we have discussed, including at the most senior levels, with our Turkish allies, but it's also something that we're discussing with the Hill.[267]

U.S./NATO Presence in Turkey

The United States has valued Turkey's geopolitical importance to and military strength within the NATO alliance, while viewing Turkey's NATO membership as helping anchor Turkey to the West. For Turkey, NATO's traditional importance has been to mitigate Turkish concerns about encroachment by neighbors, such as the Soviet Union's aggressive post-World War II posturing leading up to the Cold War. In more recent or ongoing arenas of conflict like Ukraine and Syria, Turkey's possible interest in countering Russian objectives may be partly motivating its military operations and arms exports.[268]

Turkey's location near several conflict areas has made the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the United States and NATO. In addition to Incirlik Air Base near the southern Turkish city of Adana (see text box

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[264] Joint explanatory statement available at https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/BILLS-117HR7776EAS-RCP117-70-JES.pdf.

[265] Twitter, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, December 7, 2022–10:57 AM, at https://twitter.com/SFRCdems/status/1600519759493304321.

[266] For Turkey, as a NATO ally, Members have 15 days after a formal notification of a major arms sale to introduce a privileged resolution of disapproval. CRS Report RL31675, *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process*, by Paul K. Kerr.

[267] State Department Press Briefing, December 7, 2022.

[268] Dimitar Bechev, "Russia, Turkey and the Spectre of Regional Instability," Al Sharq Strategic Research, April 13, 2022; Prothero, "Turkey's Erdogan has been humiliating Putin all year."

below), 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 12**). As mentioned above, Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through the Straits (see "Black Sea Access").

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.[269] One unofficial source tracking U.S. military bases worldwide estimates that Incirlik hosts 1,650 military personnel and around 4,850 total American citizens, when accounting for civilian employees and dependents.[270]

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 debate 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 are based at Incirlik Air Base, and if so, whether U.S. officials might consider taking them out of Turkey.[271]

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 safety and utility of Turkish territory for U.S. and NATO assets, some observers have advocated exploring alternative basing arrangements in the region.[272] 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.[273] In March 2022, Alan Makovsky said in the congressional hearing testimony mentioned above that while the United States should make efforts to keep Turkey in the "Western camp," Turkish "equivocation in recent years" justifies the United States building and expanding military facilities in Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece to "hedge its bets."[274]

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

[270] See http://www.militarybases.us/air-force/incirlik-ab/.

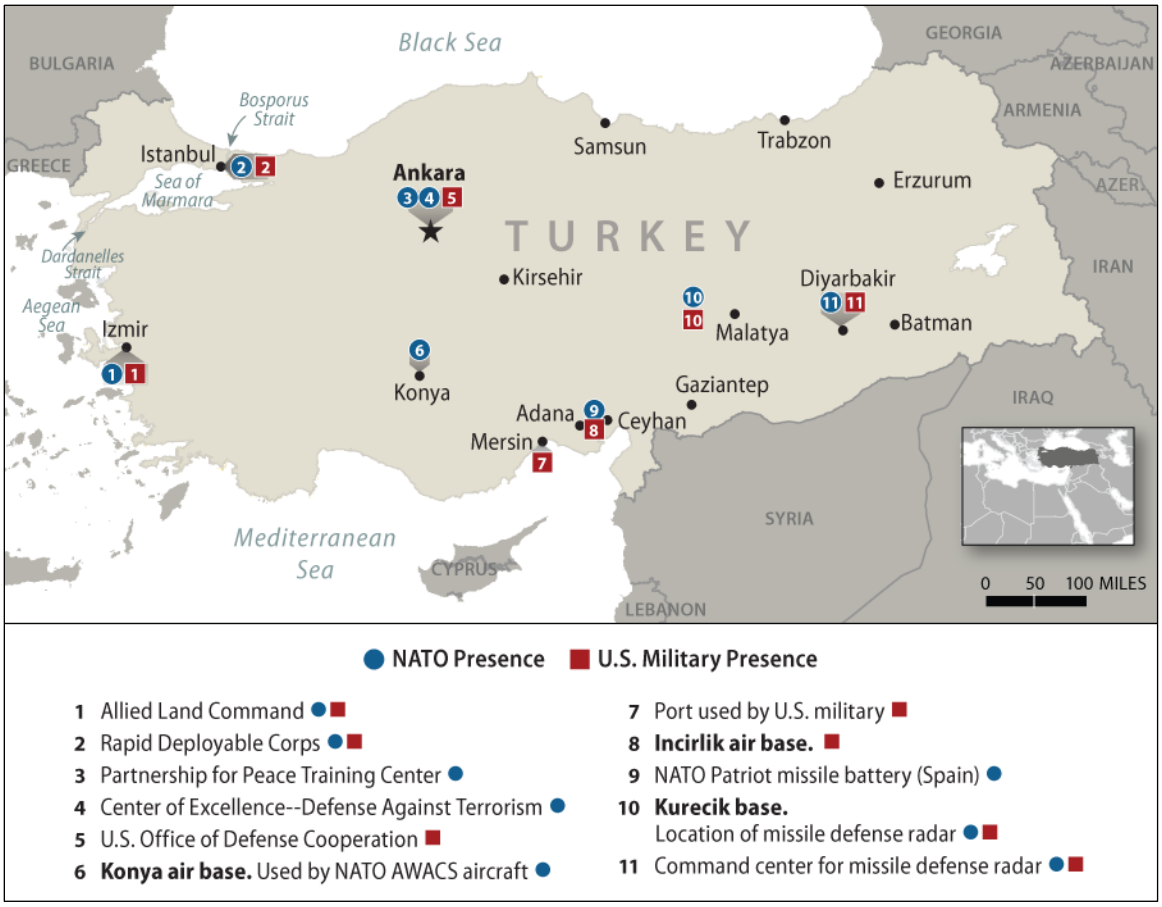
[271] Dorian Jones, "US Military Base in Turkey Has Uncertain Future," *Voice of America*, November 24, 2019; Miles A. Pomper, "Why the US has nuclear weapons in Turkey—and may try to put the bombs away," *The Conversation*, October 23, 2019.

[272] See, for example, Xander Snyder, "Beyond Incirlik," *Geopolitical Futures*, April 19, 2019.

[273] "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.

[274] Prepared testimony of Alan Makovsky, "Opportunities and Challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean: Examining U.S. Interests and Regional Cooperation."

Figure 12. Map of U.S. and NATO Military Presence in Turkey



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

Note: All locations are approximate.

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

U.S. officials and lawmakers assessing the costs and benefits of a U.S./NATO presence in Turkey, and of potential changes in U.S./NATO posture that could be influenced by military appropriations or congressional oversight, are likely to consider the following 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?

Other Sanctions

Aside from CAATSA sanctions discussed above, Congress could consider authorizing sanctions against Turkey or Turkey-linked entities or individuals in connection with Russia, Iran, or Syria. It is unclear whether sanctions would deter Turkey from the behavior defined by U.S. officials or lawmakers as objectionable, or prompt Turkey to increase economic ties with other regional countries to reduce the sanctions' impact.

Russia

As mentioned above, Deputy Treasury Secretary Adeyemo has reportedly warned Turkey that it could face penalties for helping sanctioned Russian groups or individuals. Members may assess actions to deter or penalize Turkey-Russia economic ties in light of Turkey's ongoing role in mediating and influencing military, political, and economic developments surrounding the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Iran

A U.S. federal criminal case is pending against Turkish state-owned bank Halkbank for the bank's alleged involvement in helping Iran evade U.S. sanctions a decade ago, and could lead to a multibillion dollar fine from the Treasury Department.[275] Additionally, in December 2022, the Treasury Department designated a number of actors from the Turkish private sector, including energy conglomerate ASB Group, for sanctions under Executive Order (E.O.) 13224 (as amended) for facilitating oil sales for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization.[276]

Syria

If Members of Congress assess that Turkish actions against the SDF in Syria are endangering important U.S. interests, they could reevaluate the merit of sanctions imposed or proposed during the previous major operation in 2019. At that time, the Trump Administration levied sanctions on some Turkish cabinet ministries and ministers pursuant to E.O. 13984 (which remains in effect),[277] but lifted them later that same month.[278] The 116th Congress also considered a number of sanctions bills, with the House passing the Protect Against Conflict by Turkey Act (H.R. 4695).

Election Oversight

Some Members following Turkey's upcoming campaign and election might have concerns about Erdogan's use of the government to control the process, including but not limited to judicial

[275] Amberin Zaman, "US deputy treasury secretary in Turkey to warn against evading Russian sanctions," *Al-Monitor*, June 22, 2022.

[276] Treasury Department, "Treasury Targets Sanctions Evasion Network Generating Hundreds of Millions of Dollars for Qods Force Oil Sales," December 8, 2022.

[277] 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.

[278] 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.

action against potential candidates (such as Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, as discussed above) or parties. In that context, Congress could engage in public debate and oversight of the executive branch to encourage freedom of expression, minority and women's rights, proper election practices and monitoring, and (if applicable) a peaceful transfer of power. Members may consider how public advocacy or criticism might be received by the Turkish public or used by Erdogan or other political figures.

Political and Economic Engagement with Turkey's Government

How closely Members advocate U.S. engagement with a Turkish government—under Erdogan or a different leader—could depend on their perceptions of the government's popular legitimacy, Turkish public attitudes toward U.S. credibility, and broader geopolitical, historical, and economic considerations. Such factors might also influence congressional support or opposition for U.S. or international measures to help relieve Turkey's financial problems.

As mentioned above, U.S. steps to help a potential new Turkish government—whether on arms sales, sanctions, the economy, or other matters—could encourage an improvement in bilateral relations. CRS In Focus IF10961, *U.S.-Turkey Trade Relations*, by Shayerah I. Akhtar. If, however, Turkish leaders or domestic audiences perceive that any such steps are likely to bind future Turkish actions to U.S. interests, those concerns could limit a new Turkish government's willingness to embrace them.

Appendix A. 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. 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 assess that he seeks to consolidate power and to avoid the reopening of corruption cases that could implicate him and close family members or associates.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu—Leader of Republican People's Party (CHP)
(*kuhl-utch-dahr-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 at the national level.

Ekrem Imamoglu—Mayor of Istanbul and Possible CHP Presidential Candidate
(*ee-mahm-oh-loo)*

Born in 1970 in Trabzon on the Black Sea coast, Imamoglu is the mayor of Istanbul. He received a bachelor's degree in business and masters in human resources management from Istanbul University.

Imamoglu became CEO for his family's companies in the housing and urban planning field before entering politics and becoming prominent within the CHP. He was elected mayor of Istanbul's Beylikduzu district in 2014 and grew in popularity while working to improve living standards and infrastructure in the district. He became mayor of Istanbul—giving the CHP the mayor's seat for the first time since 1980—after winning two elections: one in March 2019 that was annulled by the Supreme Board of Elections, and the following second election in June 2019. He faces obstacles in his administration from Erdogan's government and the AKP-controlled city council.

Some observers say that Imamoglu's youth, charisma, and effort to appeal to citizens of varying backgrounds would make him a better presidential candidate than Kilicdaroglu in upcoming 2023 elections. Most polls indicate that he would have more popular support. In December 2022, he was convicted of insulting members of

Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council (discussed above) and received a jail sentence and political ban that remain subject to appeal.

Mansur Yavas—Mayor of Istanbul and Possible CHP Presidential Candidate
(*yah-vahsh)*

Born in 1955 in Beypazari near Turkey's capital Ankara, Yavas is the mayor of Ankara. He received a law degree from Istanbul University.

Yavas worked as a military prosecutor during his mandatory military service, then started practicing law privately in Beypazari. He entered politics and was elected to the Beypazari municipal council in 1989, then was elected as mayor of Beypazari from 1999 to 2009 while a member of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

In 2014, he lost as the CHP candidate for mayor of Ankara, but claimed that irregularities cost him the election. He ran again in March 2019, winning and giving the CHP the mayor's seat for the first time since 1980. As with Imamoglu in Istanbul, he faces an AKP-controlled municipal council.

Yavas has generally outpolled both Kilicdaroglu and Imamoglu as a potential presidential candidate. However, because of his background with the MHP, which has taken a hard line against compromises with Kurds, he may have trouble gaining support from Kurdish constituencies seeking to make common cause with opposition parties against Erdogan and the AKP.

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.

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.

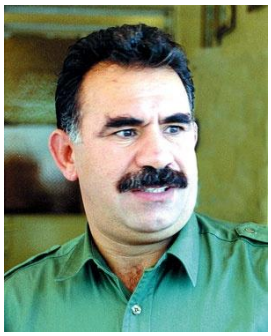
Aksener became a forceful opponent of Erdogan after the MHP agreed in 2016 to provide him the necessary parliamentary support for a constitutional referendum establishing a presidential system of government. She left the party and campaigned vigorously against the proposed changes, which won adoption 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, has received conviction sentences totaling more than seven years (four years and eight months for incitement in September 2018, and three years and six months for insulting President Erdogan in March 2021), 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. ECHR rulings and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe have called for Demirtas's release.



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 in 1984—while also attacking the traditional Kurdish chieftain class. 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 B. Some Drivers of Turkish Foreign Policy

Arms Procurement and Exports

How Turkey procures and exports 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.[279] However, U.S. arms sales to Turkey have declined over time (see **Figure B-1**).

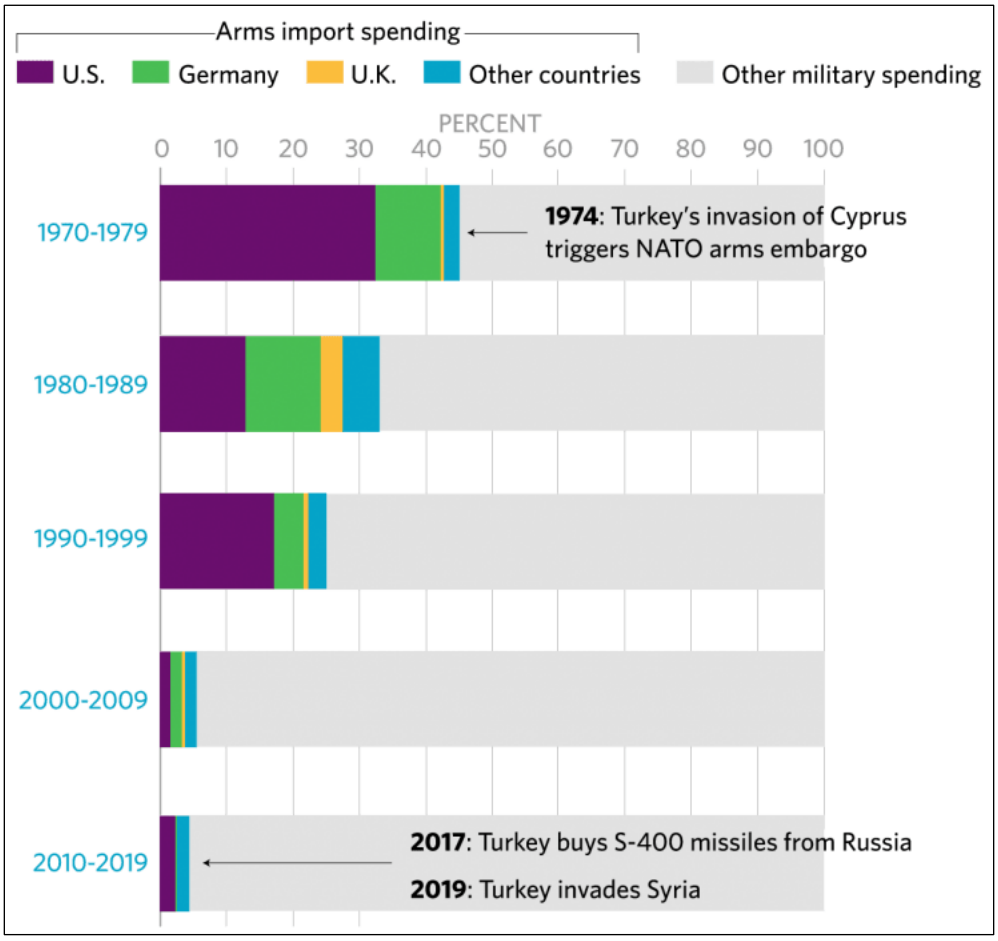
Increasing Turkish Self-Sufficiency

Turkish goals to become more self-sufficient on national security matters and increase Turkey's arms exports affect the country's procurement decisions. After a 1975-1978 U.S. arms embargo over Turkish military intervention in Cyprus significantly hampered Turkish arms acquisitions, Turkey sought to decrease dependence on foreign sources by building up its domestic defense industry (see **Figure B-1**).[280]

[279] 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).

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

Figure B-1. Arms Imports as a Share of Turkish Military Spending



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

Over time, Turkish companies have supplied an increasing percentage of Turkey's defense needs, on equipment such as armored vehicles, naval vessels, munitions, and drone aircraft. In December 2022, Erdogan said, "When we took office, the defense industry was 20% domestic; now it's 80% domestic."[281] Yet, despite this growing self-sufficiency in defense procurement, it still remains largely dependent on the United States and other Western countries for important items such as aircraft and naval engines, advanced sensors, and microchips.[282] For key equipment that Turkey cannot produce itself, its leaders generally seek deals with foreign suppliers that allow for greater co-production and technology sharing.[283] These practices have helped Turkey develop a growing arms export industry (see **Figure B-2** and **Figure B-3**).

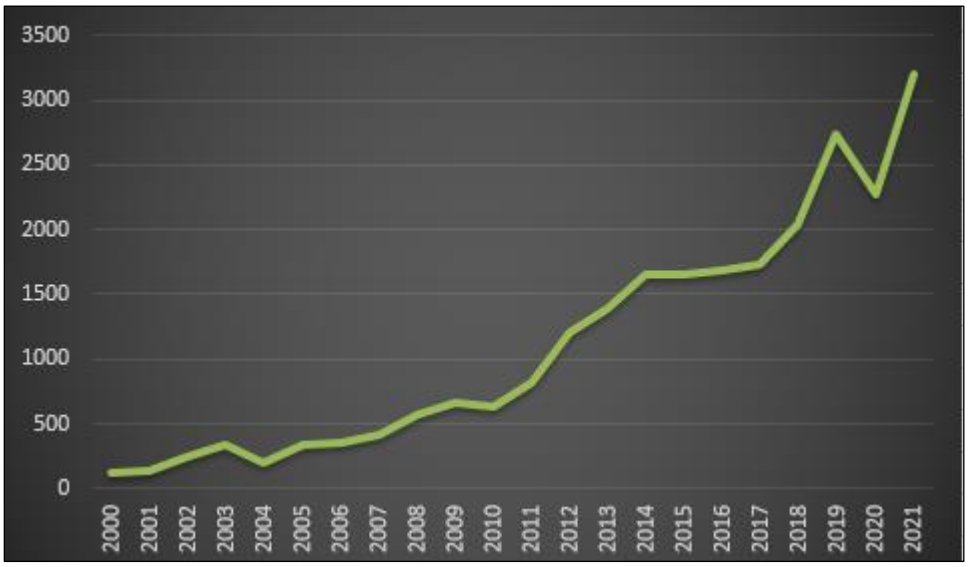
[281] Wilks, "Greece compares Turkey to North Korea in latest row with Erdogan."

[282] Arda Mevlutoglu, quoted in "Turkey is the arms industry's new upstart," *Economist,* February 12, 2022; Ferhat Gurini, "Turkey's Unpromising Defense Industry," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 9, 2020.

[283] "Turkey - Market Report," *Janes Navigating the Emerging Markets*, March 5, 2020.

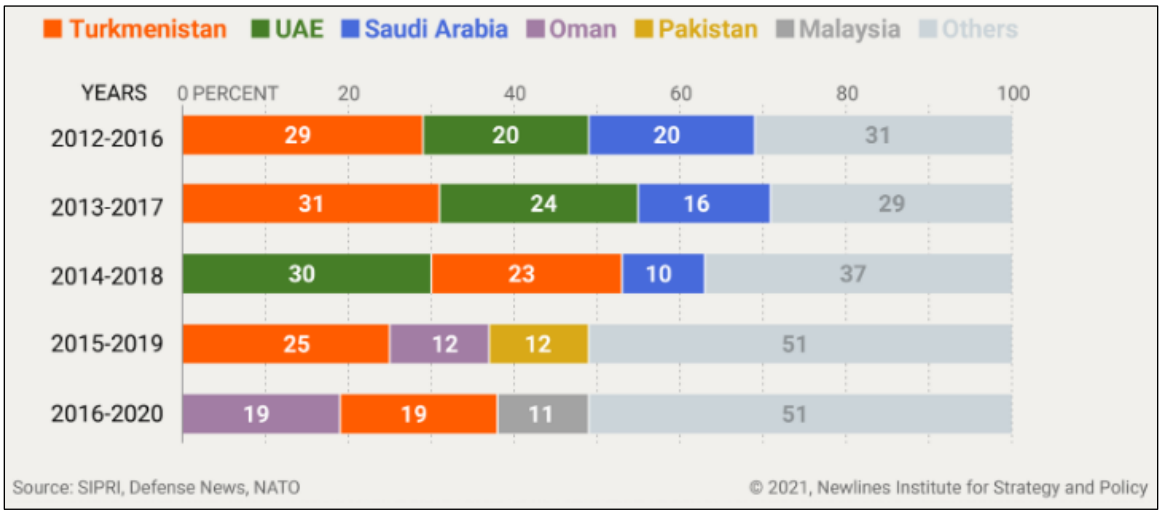
Figure B-2. Turkish Arms Exports, 2000-2021

($ millions, non-inflation-adjusted)



Sources: SIPRI and *Defense News*, based on official Turkish reports.

Figure B-3. Turkish Arms Export Partners, 2012-2020



During the period 2017-2021, Turkey increased its arms exports by 31% and decreased arms imports by 56% from the previous five years (2012-2016). Between 2017 and 2021, it was the world's 12th largest arms exporter (with a 0.9% share of worldwide exports) and 17th largest importer (with a 1.5% share of worldwide imports).[284] After an exponential increase in exports since 2010 (see **Figure B-2**), Turkish officials anticipate that arms exports for 2022 may exceed $4 billion.[285]

[284] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021," March 2022.

[285] Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey's defense industry eyes export expansion as government navigates geopolitical stage," *Defense News*, August 8, 2022.

Drone Aircraft

Turkey's demonstrated battlefield successes with its drones have significantly increased demand for exports to other countries.[286] The growing global popularity of the Bayraktar TB2 drone in particular has prompted one Western arms industry figure to call it the "Kalashnikov [rifle] of the 21st century." (see **Figure B-4** and **Figure B-5**)[287] One analyst explained the TB2's appeal by saying that it "strikes a favorable balance between price and capability, being more affordable and accessible compared to US drones while being far more reliable and effective than Chinese models."[288] Reports suggest that Turkey's integration of drones featuring attack and reconnaissance functions with other platforms in warfighting contexts has become an influential tactical innovation for other militaries. It has provided a model for regional powers seeking to compensate for disparities with larger powers in more traditional platforms such as fighter aircraft, missiles and air defense systems, and armored vehicles.[289] Turkish companies Baykar Technology, Kale Group, Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), and STM are developing a variety of additional drone and loitering munition platforms of varying sizes and functions, alongside the development of Turkish-origin unmanned systems for naval and ground combat and reconnaissance.[290]

[286] Sinan Tavsan, "Turkish drone success in Ukraine sets stage for Asia roadshow," *Nikkei Asia*, March 16, 2022.

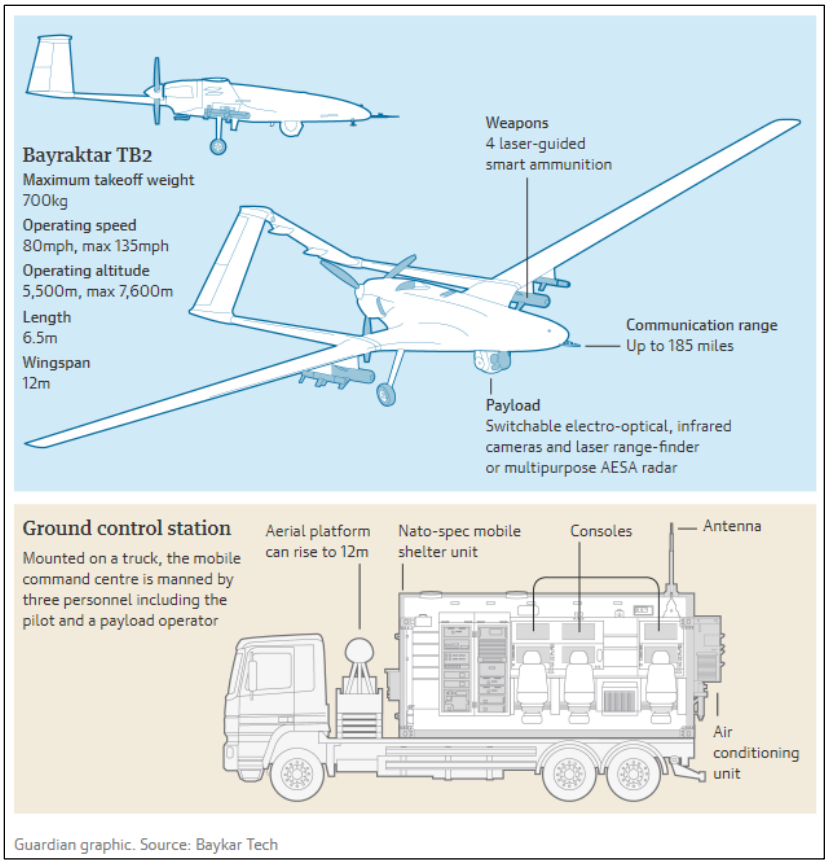
[287] Ibid.

[288] Gabriel Honrada, "The Turkish drones winning the Ukraine war," *Asia Times*, May 12, 2022.

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

[290] Ibid; "Turkey's Baykar to complete plant in Ukraine in two years –CEO," *Reuters*, October 28, 2022.

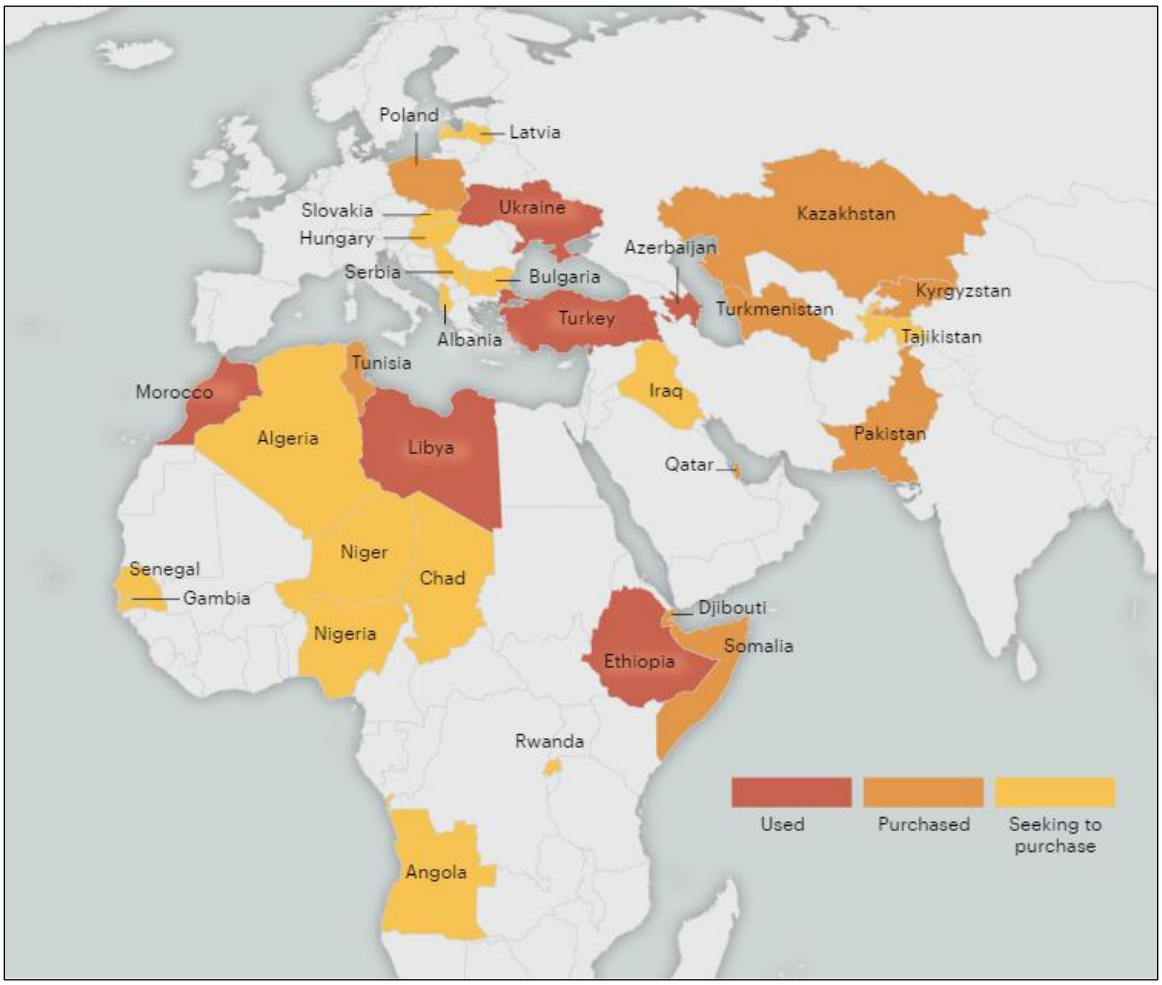
Figure B-4. Bayraktar TB2 Drone



Guardian graphic. Source: Baykar Tech

Figure B-5. Countries Interested in Bayraktar TB2 Drone Aircraft

(as of July 2022)



Sources: ProPublica, based on news reports and statements from government officials and Baykar Technology.

Notes: Since the publication of this map, the UAE has reportedly acquired TB2s and Saudi Arabia has expressed interest as well. "Türkiye sells its famed battle-tested drones to UAE as ties mend," *Daily Sabah/Reuters*, September 21, 2022. Other potential buyers include the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Uruguay, and Togo. Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey's defense industry eyes export expansion as government navigates geopolitical stage," *Defense News*, August 8, 2022; "Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 drone: Why African states are buying them," *BBC News*, August 25, 2022. A few countries (including Tunisia, Algeria, and Malaysia) have reportedly purchased or expressed interest in the TAI Anka-S drone, which has a significantly larger flight range than the TB2.

While Turkey's "drone diplomacy" appears to be helping it build important regional and global connections, some observers have raised concerns. One worry is that Turkey may enable human rights violations; an example is the Ethiopian government's use of TB2s (alongside drones originally from Iran and China) against Tigrayan rebels.[291] Another concern is that without greater

[291] Salem Solomon, "Ethiopia Ups Use of Drone Strikes in Conflict Prompting Worries About Civilian Toll," *Voice of America*, February 2, 2022.

oversight and transparency, exporting drones broadly could result in unintended, adverse consequences for Turkey's interests or those of its allies and partners.[292]

Economic and Energy Ties

Economic linkages and Turkey's dependence on imported energy sources are another driver of Turkish foreign policy. In some cases, Turkey's economic and energy considerations have been at cross-purposes with its more traditional security concerns. Examples of these linkages include

- **Europe.** Turkey's diversified, G20 economy is closely integrated with Europe's due to historical and institutional ties, including its customs union with the European Union. While this may provide some leverage to Turkey with the EU, Turkish policies that significantly harm Western interests could endanger the continued flow of European goods, services, and capital into Turkey.
- **Russia and Iran.** Despite some tensions in Turkey's relations with Russia and Iran, it has depended on both countries for energy imports (see "Energy" above). Turkey generally receives almost half of its natural gas from Russia,[293] and Iran was its leading oil supplier before the reimposition of U.S. sanctions in 2018.[294] Additionally, Russia is helping finance and build Turkey's first nuclear energy reactor. Even though Turkey has sought to diversify its energy import sources and transports some gas from Azerbaijan to Europe as an alternative to Russian gas,[295] it has increased its Russian energy imports since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.[296]

The natural gas Turkey has claimed to find in the Black Sea could reduce its dependence on rivals for energy later this decade.[297]

Leadership Approaches

Political leaders' approaches to foreign policy can affect decisions and outcomes. In determining how a leader may handle key issues, relevant questions could include

- Is the leader naturally proactive or reactive in style and temperament? Does the leader seek to change or maintain the regional or global status quo or Turkey's role within it?
- Does the leader consciously adhere to a specific foreign policy approach—be it a pragmatic, interests-based or ideological, values-based philosophy? Or does the approach depend primarily on the situation?
- What is the leader's tolerance for risk and motivation to obtain reward?

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[292] Fehim Tastekin, "Are Turkish drones complicating disputes in Central Asia?" *Al-Monitor*, September 26, 2022; Federico Borsari, "Turkey's drone diplomacy: Lessons for Europe," European Council on Foreign Relations, January 31, 2022; Alper Coskun, "Strengthening Turkish Policy on Drone Exports," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 18, 2022.

[293] David O'Byrne, "Turkey, Russia gas ties grow contentious amid Ukraine war," *Al-Monitor*, July 28, 2022.

[294] "Despite rhetoric, Turkey complies with U.S. oil sanctions on Iran," *Reuters*, May 21, 2019.

[295] Tony Wesolowsky, "Can Azerbaijan Help Europe Kick Its Russian Gas Habit as Kremlin Threatens to Shut the Taps?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 5, 2022.

[296] "Turkey doubles Russian oil imports, filling EU void," *Reuters*, August 22, 2022.

[297] Ackerman, "Turkey: A new emerging gas player with resources and infrastructure."

In 2011, a prominent Brookings Institution scholar and National War College professor set forth a framework asserting that modern Turkish leaders incline toward some combination of the following three foreign policy approaches.[298]

- **Kemalist caution.** This approach references the general admonition of republican Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to maintain peace at home and abroad. After Turkey's war of independence in the 1920s, its military-guided leadership sought to avoid global and regional conflicts unless core Turkish interests were threatened. Turkey remained neutral throughout almost all of World War II (joining the Allied side near the end, without committing troops, in order to be a charter member of the United Nations) and steered clear of postwar conflict and instability in the Middle East. Its turn to NATO and greater alignment with the United States came largely as a result of Soviet encroachment on Turkey (and especially the Straits), and Turkey's two major military campaigns of the late 20th century were on behalf of ethnic Turks on the neighboring island of Cyprus and to counter domestic PKK militancy.
- **Neo-Ottoman projection of influence.** This approach reflects the view that Turkey maintains continuity with its Ottoman past, and should actively shape regional realities with confidence in Turkish sources of military, economic, and cultural strength. Some Turkish leaders made moves in a neo-Ottoman direction during the 20th century, but it became more prominent as a feature of Turkish policy under Prime Minister and later President Erdogan, as elected civilian leaders gradually overtook the historically Kemalist military as the main architects of foreign policy.
- **Turkish "Gaullist" autonomy in foreign policy.** This approach draws from the previous two, based on the idea that Turkish leaders' caution and confidence can work hand in hand to protect Turkey from outside actors while also boosting its power and prestige. The Gaullist moniker refers to the model of France steering a largely independent course between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, while nominally remaining in the Western alliance. It helps explain some Turkish leaders' desire to have Turkey maintain its role in Western institutions and have dealings with non-Western powers like Russia and China without being constrained by any of these actors, as well as its diversification of international relationships to avoid dependence.

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[298] Omer Taspinar, "The Three Strategic Visions of Turkey," Brookings Institution, March 8, 2011.

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