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Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief

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SUMMARY

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Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief

The United States and Turkey have been NATO allies since 1952 and share some vital interests, but harmonizing their priorities has been particularly difficult in recent years. These priorities sometimes diverge irrespective of who leads the two countries, based on contrasting geography, threat perceptions, and regional roles.

Turkey's core security and economic relationships and institutional links remain with Western nations, as reflected by some key U.S. military assets based in Turkey and Turkey's strong trade ties with the European Union. However, various factors complicate U.S.-Turkey relations. For example, Turkey relies to some degree on nations such as Russia and Iran for domestic energy needs and coordination on regional security, and therefore balances diplomatically between various actors. Additionally, Turkey's president and longtime leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed concerns that the United States and some other Western countries harbor sympathies for some of the groups that have been marginalized domestically under Erdogan. Also, Turkey has played a larger role in the Middle East since the 2000s, but has faced a number of setbacks and has problematic relations with Israel and most Sunni Arab countries other than Qatar.

Bilateral relations between the Trump Administration and the Erdogan government have faced a number of recent challenges. The following are current points of interest or concern in the U.S.-Turkey relationship.

F-35 aircraft acquisition endangered by possible S-400 acquisition from Russia. Turkey's planned purchase of an S-400 air defense system from Russia could trigger U.S. sanctions under existing law and may prevent Turkey from acquiring U.S.-origin F-35 aircraft. U.S.-Turkey tensions on the issue—particularly in light of Russia's involvement—could have broad implications for defense cooperation, bilateral relations, and Turkey's role in NATO. In June 2019, then-Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan sent a letter warning Turkey that its participation in the F-35 program would end if it did not make a change by July 31, 2019, to its plans to take delivery of the S-400. U.S. officials seek to prevent the deal by offering Patriot air defense systems as an alternative to the S-400. Pending legislation proposes to prevent the transfer of F-35s to Turkey absent an executive branch certification indicating in some manner that Turkey does not plan to take delivery of or keep the S-400.

Syria and the Kurds. Turkey's political stances and military operations in Syria have fed U.S.-Turkey tensions, particularly regarding Kurdish-led militias supported by the United States against the Islamic State over Turkey's strong objections. Those Kurdish-led militias have links with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that originated in Turkey and wages an on-and-off insurgency against the Turkish government while using safe havens in both Syria and Iraq. President Trump announced in December 2018 that U.S. troops would withdraw from Syria, but subsequent adjustments to the size and scope of a continued U.S. and perhaps allied European military presence have complicated efforts to coordinate U.S. and Turkish actions. A de-escalation zone in the Syrian rebel-held province of Idlib also is under strain, raising questions about the viability of continued Turkey-Russian coordination in Syria and increasing the risk of additional refugee flows to Turkey (which hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees).

Turkey's domestic trajectory and financial distress. President Erdogan rules in an increasingly authoritarian manner, with his formal powers further consolidated in June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections. A number of developments (a globally stronger dollar, rule of law concerns and political uncertainty, significant corporate debt) led to a precipitous drop in the value of Turkey's currency during 2018, contributing to a recession in late 2018. After stabilizing somewhat, the currency has continued to struggle in 2019, amid concerns about Turkey's financial position and the possible consequences that higher interest rates might have for economic growth. Local elections in March and June 2019 against the backdrop of these economic concerns yielded some significant losses for Erdogan's political party, though it is unclear what the practical impact will be on Erdogan's rule.

The next phase in relations between the United States and Turkey will take place with Turkey facing a number of political and economic challenges. Observers question how Erdogan will govern a polarized electorate and deal with the foreign actors who can affect Turkey's financial solvency, regional security, and political influence. U.S. officials and lawmakers can refer to Turkey's complex history, geography, domestic dynamics, and international relationships in evaluating how to encourage Turkey to align its policies with U.S. interests.

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Introduction

This report provides background information and analysis on the following topics:

- Various aspects of U.S.-Turkey relations, including (1) Turkey's strategic orientation; (2) U.S./NATO cooperation and how a Turkish purchase of an S-400 air defense system from Russia could endanger its acquisition of U.S.-origin F-35 aircraft; and (3) the situation in northern Syria, including with Kurdish-led militias. The S-400/F-35 issue has attracted close congressional scrutiny, and how the United States and Turkey handle it could have broad implications for bilateral relations.
- Domestic Turkish developments, including politics under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's largely authoritarian and polarizing rule after the election of an opposition mayor in Istanbul in June 2019, and significant economic concerns.

For additional information, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

Figure 1. Turkey at a Glance

Geography	*Area:* 783,562 sq km (302,535 sq. miles), slightly larger than Texas
People	*Population:* 81,257,239 (2018) Most populous cities: Istanbul 14.8 mil, Ankara 5.3 mil, Izmir 4.2 mil, Bursa 2.9 mil, Antalya 2.3 mil (2016) *% of Population 14 or Younger:* 24.2% *Ethnic Groups:* Turks 70%-75%; Kurds 19%; Other minorities 7%-12% (2016) *Religion:* Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), Others (mainly Christian and Jewish) 0.2% *Literacy:* 95.6% (male 98.6%, female 92.6%) (2015)

Economy	*GDP Per Capita (at purchasing power parity):* $27,899
	Real GDP Growth: 3.1%
	Inflation: 20.2%
	Unemployment: 11.0%
	Budget Deficit as % of GDP: 1.9%
	Public Debt as % of GDP: 28.0%
	Current Account Deficit as % of GDP: 4.5%
	International reserves: $87 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 (2018 estimates unless otherwise specified) from International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database; Turkish Statistical Institute; World Bank; Economist Intelligence Unit; and Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*.

U.S.-Turkey Relations

Turkey's Strategic Orientation in Question

Numerous points of tension have raised questions within the United States and Turkey about the two countries' alliance. Turkish actions and statements on a number of foreign policy issues have contributed to problems with the United States and its other NATO allies, fueling concern about Turkey's commitment to NATO and Western orientation. For its part, Turkey may bristle because it feels like it is treated as a junior partner, and has arguably sought greater foreign policy diversification through stronger relationships with more countries.[1]

A number of considerations drive the complicated dynamics behind Turkey's international relationships. Turkey's history as both a regional power and an object of great power aggression translates into wide popularity for nationalistic political actions and discourse.[2] This nationalistic sentiment might make some Turks wary of Turkey's partial reliance on other key countries (for example, the United States for security, European Union countries for trade and investment, and Russia and Iran for energy). Moreover, Turkey's cooperative relationships with countries whose respective interests may conflict involves a balancing act. Turkey's vulnerability to threats from Syria and Iraq increases the pressure on it to manage this balance.[3] Involvement in Syria and Iraq by the United States, Russia, and Iran further complicates Turkey's situation. Additionally, grievances that President Erdogan and his supporters espouse against seemingly marginalized domestic foes (the military and secular elite who previously dominated Turkey, the Fethullah Gulen movement, Kurdish nationalists, and liberal activists) extend to the United States and Europe due to apparent suspicions of Western sympathies for these foes.[4]

[1] Selcuk Colakoglu, "The Rise of Eurasianism in Turkish Foreign Policy: Can Turkey Change its pro-Western Orientation?" Middle East Institute, April 16, 2019; Asli Aydintasbas and Jeremy Shapiro, "The U.S. and Turkey have bigger problems than their erratic leaders," *Washington Post*, January 15, 2019; Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "Erdogan: How Turkey Sees the Crisis With the U.S.," *New York Times*, August 10, 2018.

[2] See, e.g., Max Hoffman, Michael Werz, and John Halpin, "Turkey's 'New Nationalism' Amid Shifting Politics," Center for American Progress, February 11, 2018.

[3] See, e.g., Galip Dalay, "Turkey and Russia are Bitter Frenemies," *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2019.

[4] See, e.g., Emma Graham-Harrison, "The west is supporting terrorism against Turkey, claims Erdogan," *Guardian*, August 2, 2016; Jamie Dettmer, "Turkey's Erdogan Says He's Ready to Risk Confrontation With US," Voice of America, January 27, 2018; Statement of the Spokesperson of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Response to a Question Regarding the Turkey Chapter of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 2019 Report, May

Turkey's Middle Eastern profile expanded in the 2000s as Erdogan (while serving as prime minister) sought to build economic and political linkages—often emphasizing shared Muslim identity—with Turkey's neighbors. However, efforts to increase Turkey's influence and offer it as a "model" for other regional states appear to have been set back by a number of developments since 2011: (1) conflict and instability that engulfed the region and Turkey's own southern border, (2) Turkey's failed effort to help Muslim Brotherhood-aligned groups gain lasting power in Syria and North Africa, and (3) domestic polarization accompanied by government repression.[5] Sunni Arab states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt regard Turkey suspiciously because of the Turkish government's Islamist sympathies and close relationship with Qatar.[6] Turkey also contends with Iran for regional influence.[7] Turkey maintains relations with Israel, but these previously close ties have become distant and—at times—contentious during Erdogan's rule.

U.S./NATO Cooperation with Turkey

Overview

Turkey's location near several global hotspots makes the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the United States and NATO. From Turkey's perspective, NATO's traditional value has been to mitigate its concerns about encroachment by neighbors. Turkey initially turned to the West largely as a reaction to aggressive post-World War II posturing by the Soviet Union. In addition to Incirlik air base near the southern Turkish city of Adana, other key U.S./NATO sites include an early warning missile defense radar in eastern Turkey and a NATO ground forces command in Izmir. Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through its straits pursuant to the Montreux Convention of 1936.

Current tensions have fueled discussion from the U.S. perspective about the advisability of continued U.S./NATO use of Turkish bases. Though no major changes have apparently been made, reports in 2018 suggested that some Trump Administration officials were contemplating significant reductions in the U.S. presence in Turkey.[8] There are historical precedents for such changes. On a number of occasions, the United States has withdrawn military assets from Turkey or Turkey has restricted 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 from Turkey as part of the secret deal to end this crisis with the Soviet Union.
- **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.

1, 2019.

[5] Gonul Tol and Birol Baskan, "From 'hard power' to 'soft power' and back again: Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East," Middle East Institute, November 29, 2018.

[6] See, e.g., Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "The Middle East's Great Divide Is Not Sectarianism," *New Yorker*, March 11, 2019.

[7] Kemal Kirisci, "Post-revolutionary Iran and Turkey at 40: Pragmatism and convergence," Brookings, April 4, 2019.

[8] Gordon Lubold, Felicia Schwartz, and Nancy A. Youssef, "U.S. Pares Back Use of Turkish Base Amid Strains with Ankara," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2018.

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

Some of the plotters of an unsuccessful coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016 apparently used Incirlik air base, causing temporary disruptions of some U.S. military operations. The attempted coup and subsequent disruptions may have eroded some trust between the two countries, while also raising U.S. questions about Turkey's stability and the safety and utility of Turkish territory for U.S. and NATO assets. As a result of these questions and U.S.-Turkey tensions, some observers have advocated exploring alternative basing arrangements in the region.[9]

The cost to the United States of finding a replacement for Incirlik and other sites in Turkey would likely depend on a number of variables including the functionality and location of alternatives, where future U.S. military engagements may happen, and the political and economic difficulty involved in moving or expanding U.S. military operations elsewhere. While an August 2018 report cited a Department of Defense (DOD) spokesperson as saying that the United States is not leaving Incirlik,[10] some reports suggest that expanded or potentially expanded U.S. military presences in Greece and Jordan might be connected with concerns about Turkey.[11]

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

- To what extent and in what ways does strengthening Turkey relative to other regional actors serve U.S. interests?
- To what extent does the United States rely on the use of Turkish territory or airspace to secure and protect U.S. interests?
- To what extent does Turkey rely on U.S./NATO support, both politically and functionally, for its security and regional influence?

F-35 Aircraft Acquisition Endangered by Possible S-400 Acquisition from Russia

Turkey plans to take delivery of an S-400 air defense system from Russia sometime in 2019.[12] This has prompted Congress and the Trump Administration to take action that could prevent Turkey from acquiring U.S.-origin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft (Turkey plans to purchase 100) and from continuing to participate in the international consortium of countries that has developed the F-35.[13] The S-400 transaction also could trigger the imposition of U.S. sanctions.

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[9] Aaron Stein, "Bilateral Basing Squabbles: Incirlik and America's Out of Area Wars," Atlantic Council, August 29, 2018; Testimony of Steven Cook of the Council on Foreign Relations, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, September 6, 2017.

[10] Nimet Kirac, "US-Turkey cooperation against Islamic State ongoing, Pentagon says," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, August 27, 2018.

[11] Aaron Stein, "The Day After S-400: The Turkish-American Relationship Will Get Worse," War on the Rocks, May 23, 2019; Kyle Rempfer, "US Air Force ties to Greece may grow as relations with Turkey sour," *Air Force Times*, April 30, 2019; Joseph Trevithick, "Docs Show US To Massively Expand Footprint At Jordanian Air Base Amid Spats With Turkey, Iraq," The Drive, January 14, 2019.

[12] Media reports indicate that the S-400 deal, if finalized, would be worth approximately $2.5 billion. Tuvan Gumrukcu and Ece Toksabay, "Turkey, Russia sign deal on supply of S-400 missiles," Reuters, December 29, 2017. According to this article, the portion of the purchase price not paid for up front (55%) would be financed by a Russian loan.

[13] 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-*

U.S.-Turkey tensions on the issue—particularly in light of Russia's involvement—could have broad implications for defense cooperation, bilateral relations, and Turkey's role in NATO. At a June 29, 2019, press conference after the G-20 summit, President Trump affirmed his close relationship with President Erdogan and said that the issue is "complicated" and that "we'll see what we can do," but did not provide further specifics.[14]

S-400 Deal and Implications for NATO

Turkey justified its preliminary decision to acquire S-400s instead of U.S. or European alternatives by claiming that it turned to Russia because NATO allies rebuffed its attempts to purchase an air defense system from them.[15] Turkey also has cited various practical reasons, including cost, technology sharing, and territorial defense coverage.[16] However, one analysis from December 2017 asserted that the S-400 deal would not involve technology transfer, would not defend Turkey from ballistic missiles (because the system would not have access to NATO early-warning systems), and could weaken rather than strengthen Turkey's geopolitical position by increasing Turkish dependence on Russia.[17] Although Turkish officials later said that the deal would include technology transfer,[18] a Russian observer analyzing terms of the deal has suggested that co-production—if it happens—probably would not involve meaningful technology transfer.[19]

For some observers, the S-400 issue raises the possibility that Russia could take advantage of U.S.-Turkey friction to undermine the NATO alliance.[20] In April 2019, Vice President Mike Pence asked publicly whether Turkey wants "to remain a critical partner in the most successful military alliance in history" or "risk the security of that partnership."[21] In 2013, Turkey reached a preliminary agreement to purchase a Chinese air and missile defense system, but later (in 2015) withdrew from the deal, perhaps partly due to concerns voiced within NATO, as well as China's reported reluctance to share technology.[22]

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35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program, by Jeremiah Gertler. For details on Turkish companies' participation in the F-35 program, see https://www.f35.com/global/participation/turkey-industrial-participation.

[14] Remarks by President Trump in Press Conference, Osaka, Japan, White House, June 29, 2019.

[15] Sebastian Sprenger, "Turkey defiant on purchase of Russian S-400 anti-missile system," *Defense News*, July 11, 2018.

[16] Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey makes deal to buy Russian-made S-400 air defense system," *Defense News*, December 27, 2017; Umut Uras, "Turkey's S-400 purchase not a message to NATO: official," Al Jazeera, November 12, 2017. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu insisted in February 2018 that Turkey needs additional air defense coverage "as soon as possible," and referenced previous withdrawals of Patriot systems by NATO allies. State Department website, Remarks by Cavusoglu, Press Availability with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Ankara, Turkey, February 16, 2018.

[17] Gonul Tol and Nilsu Goren, "Turkey's Quest for Air Defense: Is the S-400 Deal a Pivot to Russia?" Middle East Institute, December 2017.

[18] "No change in Turkey's course on S-400 deal: Turkish officials," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 9, 2019.

[19] Anton Mardasov, "Can Russian, Turkish military-technical cooperation go beyond S-400 production?" *Al-Monitor*, May 28, 2019.

[20] See, e.g., Vladimir Frolov, "Our Man in NATO: Why Putin Lucked Out With Recep Erdogan," *Moscow Times*, April 15, 2019; Sinan Ulgen, "It's Not Too Late to Stop Turkey From Realigning With Russia," foreignpolicy.com, April 11, 2019; Kemal Kirisci and Seckin Kostem, "Don't let Russian S-400s peel Turkey away from the West," Brookings Institution, December 18, 2018.

[21] "U.S. VP Pence warns Turkey against buying Russian air defenses," Reuters, April 3, 2019.

[22] "Turkey confirms cancellation of $3.4 billion missile defence project awarded to China," Reuters, November 18, 2015.

Despite the strong U.S. opposition to the S-400 deal, Turkish officials appear to be forging ahead. In May 2019, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said that Turkish personnel had arrived in Russia to train on the S-400.[23] In June, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed hope that the system would be delivered to Turkey in July 2019,[24] and claimed that Turkey has already made partial payment.[25]

Possible Impact on F-35 Transaction

U.S. officials and some Members of Congress have become progressively more assertive in publicly stating that Turkey will not receive the F-35 if it takes delivery of the S-400. A June 2019 letter from then-Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan to Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said, "Turkey will not receive the F-35 if Turkey takes delivery of the S-400."[26] In an April 2019 column, the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee wrote, "By the end of the year, Turkey will have either F-35 advanced fighter aircraft on its soil or a Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile defense system. It will not have both."[27]

The central concern U.S. officials have raised regarding Turkey's operation of the S-400 is that it could compromise sensitive technology in F-35s potentially based in Turkey. According to one analysis, "the Pentagon fears that Turkey's operation of the S-400 would allow the Russian military to study how the F-35 stealth fighters [show up on] Russian-built air defense radars, and potentially facilitate the infiltration of [the F-35] computer system. This could compromise the F-35's effectiveness around the world."[28] While some Russian radars in Syria may have already monitored Israeli-operated F-35s,[29] intermittent passes at long ranges reportedly might not yield data on the aircraft as conclusive as the more voluminous data available if an S-400 in Turkey could routinely monitor F-35s.[30] Turkish officials have proposed forming bilateral working groups to explore how the S-400 might come to Turkey without threatening U.S. interests, and there have been conflicting reports about the U.S. stance on this proposal.[31]

Per then-Acting Secretary Shanahan's letter, the Administration has suspended all F-35 material deliveries to Turkey. Absent a change of course by Turkey on the S-400 transaction, Turks in the United States for the purpose of training on the F-35 will have to leave the United States by July 31, 2019; training reportedly halted in June.[32]

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[23] Sarp Ozer, "Turkish military staff in Russia for S-400 training," Anadolu Agency, May 22, 2019.

[24] "Erdoğan is clear cut for receiving Russian S-400 system in July," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 25, 2019.

[25] "Erdoğan says Turkey already bought Russian S-400 systems," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 13, 2019.

[26] Letter dated June 6, 2019. The text is available at http://www.airforcemag.com/DocumentFile/Documents/2019/SD%20Signed%20Letter%20to%20Minister%20Akar%206%20Jun%202019.pdf.

[27] Jim Inhofe, Jack Reed, Jim Risch, and Bob Menendez, "A U.S. Fighter Jet or a Russian Missile System. Not Both," *New York Times*, April 9, 2019.

[28] Sebastien Roblin, "Congress Temporarily Banned Sale of F-35 Jets to Turkey (But Turkish Pilots Are Still Training to Fly Them)," nationalinterest.org, September 2, 2018. One analysis explained the process by which infiltration could happen, writing that for an F-35 to fly within lethal range of the S-400 in Turkey, certain deconfliction equipment would need to be integrated into the S-400 system, potentially allowing for compromise of this equipment and the information it shares. Kyle Rempfer, "Here's how F-35 technology would be compromised if Turkey also had the S-400 anti-aircraft system," *Air Force Times*, April 5, 2019.

[29] Jonathan Marcus, "What Turkey's S-400 missile deal with Russia means for Nato," BBC News, June 13, 2019.

[30] Rempfer, op. cit., footnote 28.

[31] Jack Detsch and Amberin Zaman, "US denies willingness to talk over S-400 concerns with Turkey," May 31, 2019.

[32] Letter dated June 6, 2019, op. cit. footnote 26; "Turkish F-35 pilots no longer flying at US base amid S-400 row," Al

If Turkey does not receive the F-35, it might turn to other sources—possibly including Russia—to fill its capability need for next-generation aircraft and other major defense purchases.[33]

Possible End of Turkish Involvement: Impact on the F-35 Program

Because the F-35 program features multinational industrial inputs, unwinding Turkey's involvement could present financial and logistical challenges. Turkish companies are involved in about 6-7 percent of the supply chain—building displays, wiring, fuselage structures, and other parts—for F-35s provided to all countries.[34]

With some lead time to anticipate Turkey's possible removal from the program, the F-35 joint program office within DOD has identified alternative suppliers for the Turkish subsystems.[35] Absent Turkey's reversal on the S-400, existing contracts with Turkish suppliers reportedly would wind down in early 2020.[36] According to an April 2019 statement from the joint program office's director, Vice Admiral Mathias Winter, "the evaluation of Turkey stopping would be between [a] 50- and 75-airplane impact over a two-year period."[37] Were Turkey to be excluded, it is unclear whether the United States or the F-35 consortium would be liable for financial penalties beyond refunding Turkey's initial investment in the program.

Additionally, the depot to service engines for European countries' F-35s was initially slated to be in Turkey. However, according to Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen Lord, "There are two other European MRO&Us [maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade facilities] that can absorb the volume with no issue whatsoever."[38]

The CEO of Lockheed Martin, the primary contractor for the F-35, said in May 2019 that if Turkey did not purchase the 100 aircraft, the consortium would not have difficulty finding willing buyers for them. Two possible buyers include Japan and Poland.[39]

Relevant Legislation

Congress has enacted legislation that has subjected the F-35 transfer to greater scrutiny. Under Section 1282 of the FY2019 John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 115-232), DOD submitted a report to Congress in November 2018 on a number of issues affecting U.S.-Turkey defense cooperation, including the S-400 and F-35.[40]

Much of the report was classified, but an unclassified summary said that the U.S. government has told Turkey that purchasing the S-400 would have "unavoidable negative consequences for U.S.-Turkey bilateral relations, as well as Turkey's role in NATO."[41] The listed consequences included risk to Turkish participation in the F-35 program, as well as

- potential sanctions against Turkey under Section 231 of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA, P.L. 115-44);

Jazeera, June 11, 2019.

[33] Burak Ege Bekdil, "Russia pitches Turkey the Su-57 fighter jet if F-35 deal with US collapses," *Defense News*, May 6, 2019.

[34] https://www.f35.com/global/participation/turkey-industrial-participation; Paul McLeary, "F-35 Production Hurt If Turkey Kicked Out of Program: Vice Adm. Winter," Breaking Defense, April 4, 2019.

[35] Valerie Insinna, "Turkish suppliers to be eliminated from F-35 program in 2020," *Defense News*, June 7, 2019.

[36] Ibid.

[37] McLeary, op. cit. footnote 34.

[38] Insinna, op. cit. footnote 35.

[39] Marcus Weisgerber, "Lockheed: We Could Easily Sell Turkey's F-35s to Other Customers," Defense One, May 29, 2019.

[40] "Pentagon report on Turkey's F-35 program delivered to Congress," Reuters, November 15, 2018.

[41] Department of Defense, FY19 NDAA Sec. 1282 Report, Status of the U.S. Relationship with the Republic of Turkey, Unclassified Executive Summary, November 26, 2018.

- risk to other potential U.S. arms transfers to Turkey, and to broader bilateral defense industrial cooperation;
- reduction in NATO interoperability; and
- introduction of "new vulnerabilities from Turkey's increased dependence on Russia for sophisticated military equipment.[42]

Congress has prevented any U.S. funds from being used to transfer F-35s to Turkish territory until DOD submits a report—required no later than November 1, 2019—updating the November 2018 report mentioned above. Pursuant to Section 7046(d)(2) of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6), the update is to include a "detailed description of plans for the imposition of sanctions, if appropriate," for an S-400 purchase. In June 2019, the House passed H.Res. 372, a nonbinding resolution calling for consequences if Turkey does not cancel the S-400 deal.

Additionally, five separate provisions that have either passed a house of Congress or been reported by a committee in 2019 (H.R. 2500, S. 1790, S. 1102, two in H.R. 1740) would each prevent the use of funds to transfer F-35s to Turkey, with most of the provisions (other than the defense appropriations provision in H.R. 1740) subject to waiver if the executive branch can certify in some manner that Turkey does not plan to take delivery of or keep the S-400.

U.S. Offer of Patriot System as Alternative to S-400

In July 2018, a State Department official confirmed ongoing U.S. efforts to persuade Turkey to purchase a Patriot air defense system instead of an S-400.[43] Previously, Turkish officials had indicated some concern about whether Congress would approve a Patriot sale,[44] perhaps because of some congressional opposition for other arms sales to Turkey.[45]

The unclassified summary of the November 2018 DOD report to Congress indicated that U.S. officials were continuing to offer a Patriot system to Turkey:

> The Administration has developed an alternative package to provide Turkey with a strong, capable, NATO-interoperable air and missile defense system that meets all of Turkey's defense requirements. Parts of the package require Congressional Notification. Congressional support for Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales to Turkey is essential to provide a real alternative that would encourage Turkey to walk away from a damaging S-400 acquisition.[46]

In December 2018, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress that "the State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale [FMS] of eighty (80) Patriot MIM-104E Guidance Enhanced Missiles (GEM-T) missiles, sixty (60) PAC-3 Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of $3.5 billion."[47]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] "U.S. in Talks with Turkey to Sell Patriot Missile System to Block Russian Purchase," Reuters, July 16, 2018.

[44] Kerry Herschelman, "US discourages Turkey from buying S-400s," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 19, 2018.

[45] Josh Lederman, "US nixes proposal to let Turkey guards buy guns," Associated Press, September 18, 2017; "U.S. said to have canceled drone delivery to Turkey," UPI, October 22, 2013.

[46] Department of Defense, FY19 NDAA Sec 1282 Report, Status of the U.S. Relationship with the Republic of Turkey, Unclassified Executive Summary, November 26, 2018.

[47] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Turkey – Patriot Missile System and Related Support and Equipment," December 18, 2018. In 2009, DSCA notified Congress of a possible FMS to Turkey of Patriot missiles and associated equipment,[47] but the countries did not enter into a transaction for that equipment.

Reportedly, the United States has offered to deploy an existing Patriot system (borrowed from a U.S. ally) to Turkey in 2020, and a new system around 2024.[48] Turkish officials maintain that the S-400 is a "done deal" and any purchase of Patriot would be in addition to the S-400.[49]

Syria

Turkey's involvement in Syria's conflict since 2011, which includes a military presence in parts of the country since 2016, has been complicated and costly. During that time, Turkey's priorities in Syria appear to have evolved. While Turkey still officially calls for Syrian President Bashar al Asad to leave power, it has engaged in a mix of coordination and competition with Russia and Iran (both Asad supporters) on some matters since intervening militarily in Syria starting in August 2016. Turkey may be seeking to protect its borders, project influence, promote commerce, and counter other actors' regional ambitions.

Turkey's chief objective has been to thwart the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) from establishing an autonomous area along Syria's northern border with Turkey. The YPG has links with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that for decades has waged an on-and-off insurgency against the Turkish government while using safe havens in both Syria and Iraq. Turkey appears to view the YPG and its political counterpart, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), as the top threat to its security, given the boost the YPG/PYD's military and political success could provide to the PKK's insurgency within Turkey.[50] The YPG plays a leading role in the umbrella group known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which also includes Arabs and other non-Kurdish elements.

Since 2014, the SDF has been the main U.S. ground force partner against the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS/ISIL). Even though Turkey is also a part of the anti-IS coalition, U.S. operations in support of the SDF—largely based from Turkish territory—has fueled U.S.-Turkey tension because of Turkey's view of the YPG as a threat.[51] As part of SDF operations to expel the Islamic State from the Syrian city of Raqqah in 2017, the U.S. government pursued a policy of arming the YPG directly while preventing the use of such arms against Turkey,[52] and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis announced an end to the direct arming of the YPG near the end of the year.[53]

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[48] Jack Detsch, "Why Turkey's reliance on Trump for S-400 sanctions waiver appears misguided," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse,* April 19, 2019.

[49] "Turkey says S-400 purchase from Russia a 'done deal,' cannot be canceled," Reuters, April 4, 2019.

[50] See, e.g., Selim Sazak, "Don't Blame Everything on Erdogan," foreignpolicy.com, January 10, 2019.

[51] U.S. military commanders have generally differentiated between the YPG and the PKK, but in February 2018, U.S. Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats submitted written testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence stating that the YPG was the Syrian militia of the PKK. Daniel R. Coats, Director of National Intelligence, Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearing, February 13, 2018.

[52] Pentagon statement quoted in Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "Trump to Arm Syrian Kurds, Even as Turkey Strongly Objects," *New York Times*, May 9, 2017; Anne Barnard and Patrick Kingsley, "Arming Syrian Kurds Could Come at a Cost," *New York Times,* May 11, 2017.

[53] Lead Inspector General Report to the U.S. Congress, *Overseas Contingency Operations: Operation Inherent Resolve, Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines,* October 1, 2017-December 31, 2017, p. 25. The House version of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1222 of H.R. 2500) would specifically name the SDF as an authorized recipient of U.S. support under the program and restrict the types of weaponry that could be transferred in the future to U.S. partner forces in Syria to small arms. The Senate version of the bill (Section 1221 of S. 1790) would amend the authorized purposes of U.S. assistance under the program to include "securing territory formerly controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" and "supporting the temporary detention and repatriation of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria foreign terrorist fighters."

Following the Raqqah operation, U.S. officials contrasted their long-standing alliance with Turkey with their current but temporary cooperation with the YPG.[54]

After Turkey moved against IS-held territory in northern Syria as a way to prevent the YPG from consolidating its rule across much of the border area between the two countries (Operation Euphrates Shield, August 2016-March 2017), Turkey launched an offensive directly against the YPG in the Afrin province in January 2018. In Afrin and the other areas Turkey has occupied since 2016 with the help of allied Syrian opposition militias, Turkey has organized local councils and invested in infrastructure.[55] Questions persist about how deeply Turkey will influence future governance in these areas.

President Trump announced in December 2018 that the United States would withdraw the approximately 2,000 U.S. troops stationed in Syria, but subsequent administration statements indicate that at least several hundred U.S. troops will remain. The future of the U.S. military presence in Syria could have important implications for Turkey and the YPG. Turkey has refused to guarantee the YPG's safety, with Erdogan insisting that Turkey should have a free hand with the YPG and other groups it considers to be terrorists.[56] Various analyses surmise that a U.S. troop withdrawal could lead the YPG toward an accommodation with Russia and the Syrian government.[57]

In January, amid reports that the U.S. military had begun preparing for withdrawal,[58] President Trump tweeted that he would "devastate Turkey economically" if it hit the Kurds, and at the same time proposed the creation of a 20-mile-deep "safe zone" on the Syria side of the border.[59] Some sources suggest that U.S. officials favor having a Western coalition patrol any kind of buffer zone inside the Syrian border, with some U.S. support, while Turkey wants its forces and Syrian rebel partners to take that role.[60] Despite periodic claims of progress, no arrangement has yet been reached, though some European countries have reportedly committed to increase their military presence in Syria to compensate for U.S. troop withdrawals.[61]

Syrian Refugees in Turkey

In addition to its ongoing military activities in Syria, Turkey hosts about 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees—more than any other country. Turkish officials estimate that they have spent approximately $30 billion on refugee

[54] Selva Unal, "US determined to keep its word about YPG in Manbij, official says," *Daily Sabah*, March 1, 2018.

[55] Ferhat Gurini, "Turkey's Lack of Vision in Syria," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 26, 2019. The U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a report in June 2018 alleging possible violations by the de facto authorities of international humanitarian and human rights laws—including actions or omissions that prevent Kurds from returning to their homes. U.N. OHCHR, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place – Civilians in North-western Syria," Monthly Human Rights Digest, June 2018.

[56] Steve Holland and Orhan Coskun, "Turkey's Erdogan rebukes Trump's top security adviser over Kurds in Syria," Reuters, January 8, 2019.

[57] Jane Ferguson, "Kurdish control in Syria threatened by U.S. troop withdrawal," PBS, May 11, 2019.

[58] Nancy A. Yousef and Dion Nissenbaum, "U.S. Starts Moving Materiel Out of Syria," *Wall Street Journal*, January 12, 2019.

[59] Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, January 13, 2019, 2:53 p.m., https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1084584259510304768.

[60] Lubold and Gordon, op. cit.; Semih Idiz, "Erdogan-Putin summit highlights differences over Syria," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, January 25, 2019.

[61] Amberin Zaman, "Turkey claims progress on Syria safe zone," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, July 2, 2019; Lara Seligman, "Britain, France Agree to Send Additional Troops to Syria," *Foreign Policy*, July 9, 2019.

assistance.[62] According to these official estimates, the Syrian refugee population in Turkey increased in 2018 even though around 291,000 refugees returned to Syria.[63]

With the large-scale return of refugees to Syria uncertain, Turkey has focused on how to manage their presence in Turkish society by addressing their legal status, basic needs, employment, education, and impact on local communities.[64] Problems in the Turkish economy may be fueling some negative views of the refugees among Turkish citizens—especially in areas where refugees are concentrated—and some violence between the two groups has been reported.[65]

How U.S.-Turkey coordination plays out in northeastern Syria could influence Turkey's presence in western Syria, particularly in key contested areas like Idlib province, where Russian and Syrian government forces operate in proximity to Turkish forces as part of a "de-escalation zone" agreement reached between Turkey and Russia in September 2018. Turkey-backed forces stationed at points around the province appear to have failed to prevent territorial gains by Al Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) jihadists who also oppose the Syrian government. A Russian-backed Syrian government offensive against rebels in Idlib that began in May 2019 raises questions about the continued viability of Turkish-Russian coordination in northwest Syria and has the potential to create new refugee flows to Turkey.[66]

Domestic Turkish Developments

Political Developments Under Erdogan's Rule

President Erdogan has ruled Turkey since becoming prime minister in 2003. After Erdogan became president in August 2014 via Turkey's first-ever popular presidential election, he claimed a mandate for increasing his power and pursuing a "presidential system" of governance. Analyses of Erdogan sometimes characterize him as one or more of the following: a pragmatic populist, a protector of the vulnerable, a budding authoritarian, an indispensable figure, and an Islamic ideologue.[67] Erdogan is a polarizing figure, with about half the country supporting his rule, and half the country against it. U.S. and European Union officials have expressed a number of concerns about rule of law and civil liberties in Turkey,[68] including the government's influence on media[69] and Turkey's reported status as the country with the most journalists in prison.[70]

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,

[62] Semih Idiz, "Debate over Syrian refugees gathers steam in Turkey," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, January 11, 2019.

[63] Ibid.

[64] See, e.g., Laura Batalla and Juliette Tolay, *Toward Long-Term Solidarity with Syrian Refugees? Turkey's Policy Response and Challenges*, Atlantic Council, September 2018.

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

[66] Fehim Tastekin, "Turkey's risky route in Idlib," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, June 11, 2019.

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

[68] See, e.g., State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018, Turkey; European Commission, Turkey 2019 Report, May 29, 2019.

[69] See, e.g., "Turkish Media Group Bought by Pro-Government Conglomerate," *New York Times*, March 22, 2018.

[70] "Turkey leads the world in jailed journalists," *Economist*, January 16, 2019.

Turkey's economy cannot rely on significant rents from natural resources if foreign sources of revenue or investment dry up. Unlike Russia and China, Turkey does not have nuclear weapons under its command and control. Additionally, unlike all three others, Turkey's economic, political, and national security institutions and traditions have been closely connected with those of the West for decades.

Erdogan's consolidation of power has continued amid domestic and international concerns about growing authoritarianism in Turkey. He outlasted the July 2016 coup attempt, after which Turkey's government detained tens of thousands and took over or closed various businesses, schools, and media outlets.[71] The government's measures appear to have targeted many who are not connected with Fethullah Gulen, the U.S.-based former cleric whom Turkey's government has accused of involvement in the plot.[72] Turkey's government calls for the extradition of Fethullah Gulen and the matter remains pending before U.S. officials.[73] Additionally, as part of the post-coup crackdown, Turkey has detained a number of Turks employed by the U.S. government at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Turkey.[74] Over 150 people, mostly from the military, were sentenced to life in prison in June 2019 for various charges related to the coup attempt.[75]

Erdogan scored key victories in the April 2017 constitutional referendum and the June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections—emerging with the expanded powers he had sought. Some allegations of voter fraud and manipulation surfaced in both elections.[76] Erdogan's Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, or AKP) maintained the largest share of votes in March 2019 local elections, but lost some key municipalities to opposition candidates, mostly from the secular-leaning Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi,* or CHP). Disputes over the Istanbul mayoral election led to a re-run of that race in June 2019 that yielded a significant victory for the CHP candidate over his AKP rival, a former prime minister. Despite its symbolic importance, it remains unclear to what extent, if at all, losing control of Turkey's largest city poses a real threat to Erdogan's rule.[77] Possible reasons for the AKP's defeat include voters' fatigue with Erdogan and what some view as his divisive governing style, as well as the economic downturn.[78]

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[71] Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Events of 2018," World Report 2019.

[72] Chris Morris, "Reality Check: The numbers behind the crackdown in Turkey," BBC, June 18, 2018. Turkey established a commission in 2017 (based on advice from the Council of Europe) to allow for public officials to appeal their dismissals, and the commission has provided redress to 2,300 people after reviewing about 40% of the appeals. Human Rights Watch, op. cit..

[73] CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas. For information on Turkish allegations about Gulen's link to the coup plot, see Carlotta Gall, "104 Turks Get Life Terms for Failed Coup," *New York Times*, May 23, 2018.

[74] Carlotta Gall, "Turkish Trial of U.S. Consular Employee Highlights Rift in Relations," *New York Times*, March 28, 2019; Aykan Erdemir and Merve Tahiroglu, "Turkey Doubles Down on Persecution of U.S. Consular Employees," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, February 1, 2019. U.S. citizens Pastor Andrew Brunson and Serkan Golge were released from prison in October 2018 and May 2019, respectively.

[75] Carlotta Gall, "Turkey Jails 151 for Life for Roles in Failed 2016 Coup," *New York Times*, June 20, 2019.

[76] Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Limited Referendum Observation Mission Final Report, Turkey, April 16, 2017 (published June 22, 2017); OSCE, International Election Observation Mission, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Turkey, Early Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, June 24, 2018 (published June 25, 2018).

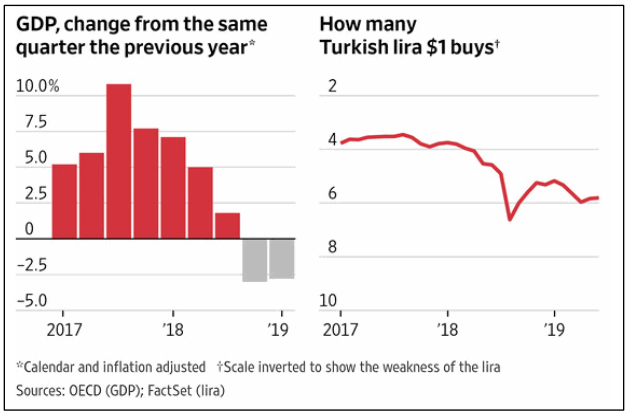
[77] Howard Eissenstat, "Five lessons from the latest elections in Turkey," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2019.

[78] Laura Pitel, "Istanbul mayoral loss seen as wake-up call for Erdogan," *Financial Times*, June 30, 2019.

Economic Concerns

The Turkish economy appears to be slowing down, with negative consequences both for consumer demand and for companies seeking or repaying loans in global markets.[79] Economic growth slowed over 7% in 2017 to around 3% in 2018. Turkey entered a recession in late 2018, with the economy contracting in the third and fourth quarters. Despite a slight recovery in the first quarter of 2019, forecasts for the year generally are negative, mostly due to the currency crisis.[80] During 2018, the Turkish lira depreciated close to 30% against the dollar in an environment featuring a globally stronger dollar, rule of law concerns and political uncertainty, and significant corporate debt. In August 2018, amid U.S.-Turkey tensions on the Pastor Brunson matter, President Trump announced a doubling of tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminum imports.[81] This prompted retaliatory action from Turkey.[82] The lira plunged in value, but recovered somewhat in the final months of 2018 after Turkey's central bank raised its key interest rate by 6.25% in September; the bank has held rates at that level since.[83] Inflation remains around 20%.

Figure 2.Selected Turkish Economic Indicators



Source: *Wall Street Journal*, June 2019

Some observers speculate that Turkey may need to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a financial assistance package.[84] This would be a sensitive challenge for President Erdogan because his political success story is closely connected with helping Turkey become independent from its most recent IMF intervention in the early 2000s.[85] Before the central bank's rate hike in September 2018, some commentators voiced concerns about the bank's independence as Erdogan

[79] See, e.g., Nevzat Devranoglu, "Turkey's economy to contract in 2019, longer recession ahead," Reuters, April 12, 2019.

[80] Cagan Koc, "Turkey Risks Double-Dip Recession After First-Quarter Bounce," *Bloomberg*, May 14, 2019.

[81] Donald J. Trump, Twitter post, August 10, 2018, 5:47 a.m., https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1027899286586109955. The formal presidential proclamation only explicitly referred to action on steel tariffs. White House, Presidential Proclamation Adjusting Imports of Steel into the United States, August 10, 2018. Earlier in the year, President Trump had applied new tariffs on steel and aluminum globally, with exceptions for some countries, but not Turkey. Ceyda Caglayan, "U.S. steel tariffs slash Turkey's exports; future orders recovering –association," Reuters, June 27, 2018.

[82] Jethro Mullen, "Turkey ramps up US spat with huge tariffs on cars and other goods," CNN, August 15, 2018.

[83] Jonathan Spicer and Ali Kucukgocmen, "Turkish central bank holds rates, goes quiet on further hikes," Reuters, April 25, 2019.

[84] "Why some Turkish media rejoice at negative economic data," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, January 16, 2019.

[85] Onur Ant, et al., "Erdogan's Road Map out of Market Meltdown Is Full of U-Turns," Bloomberg, August 8, 2018.

publicly opposed increasing rates.[86] In January 2019, Turkey's parliament voted to grant Erdogan broader emergency powers in case of a financial crisis.[87]

The government appears to be trying to stimulate growth via familiar measures to boost consumer demand. A former Turkish economic official has claimed that by offloading the "debt crisis of the real sector" onto the banking sector, the government has exacerbated the crisis and that a "harsh belt-tightening policy" with or without the IMF is thus inevitable.[88] Greater political turmoil in Turkey, or increased tensions with the U.S. or other partners (including potential U.S. sanctions related to Turkey's S-400 acquisition), could spur further economic decline.

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[86] See, e.g., Roger Blitz and Laura Pitel, "Turkey's central bank faces test of independence," *Financial Times*, September 13, 2018.

[87] Firat Kozok, "Erdogan Gets Emergency Powers Over the Turkish Economy," Bloomberg, January 17, 2019.

[88] Ufuk Soylemez, quoted in "Why some Turkish media rejoice at negative economic data," op. cit. footnote 81.