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Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief

Updated September 1, 2020

Congressional Research Service
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R44000

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

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SUMMARY

R44000

September 1, 2020

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U.S.-Turkey tensions have raised questions about the future of bilateral relations and have led to congressional action against Turkey, including the specter of possible sanctions. Nevertheless, both countries' officials emphasize the importance of continued U.S.-Turkey cooperation and Turkey's membership in NATO. Observers voice concerns about the largely authoritarian rule of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan faces challenges in governing a polarized electorate and dealing with foreign actors who may affect Turkey's regional security and financial solvency. The global Coronavirus Disease 2019 outbreak and the over 3.6 million Syrian refugees that Turkey hosts have implications for Turkish political developments and existing economic vulnerabilities. The following are key points of concern in the U.S.-Turkey relationship.

Turkey's strategic orientation and U.S.-NATO defense cooperation. A number of complicated situations in Turkey's surrounding region—including those involving Syria, Libya, and Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration—could affect its foreign relationships, as Turkey seeks a more independent role on regional and global matters. Since Turkey's 2019 agreement with Libya's Government of National Accord on Eastern Mediterranean maritime boundaries, and its increased involvement in Libya's civil war, Turkey's tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean with countries such as Cyprus, Greece, and Israel have become more intertwined with its rivalry with Sunni Arab states such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia. The August 2020 agreement between Israel and the UAE to normalize their ties could increase tensions between Turkey and these other regional U.S. allies and partners.

Traditionally, Turkey has relied closely on the United States and NATO for defense cooperation, European countries for trade and investment, and Russia and Iran for energy imports. While Turkey-Russia cooperation on some issues may not reflect a general Turkish realignment toward Russia, Russia may be content with helping weaken Turkey's ties with the West to reduce obstacles to Russian actions and ambitions. Given U.S.-Turkey tensions and questions about the safety and utility of Turkish territory for U.S. and NATO assets—including a possible arsenal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons at Incirlik Air Base—some observers have advocated that the United States explore alternative basing arrangements.

Russian S-400 purchase and U.S. response (F-35 and possible sanctions). Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system and its exploration of possibly acquiring Russian fighter aircraft may raise the question: If Turkey transitions to major Russian weapons platforms with multi-decade lifespans, how can it stay closely integrated with NATO on defense matters? After Russia began delivering S-400 components to Turkey in July 2019, the United States announced that Turkey would not receive the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft it had planned to purchase and would also stop manufacturing components for F-35s.

The S-400 deal also could trigger U.S. sanctions under Section 231 of the Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017 (CRIEEA, title II of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA; P.L. 115-44). President Trump has reportedly delayed CAATSA sanctions while seeking to persuade Turkey to refrain from operating the S-400. It is unclear how sanctions against Turkey could affect its economy, trade, and defense procurement. How the United States responds to Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 could affect U.S. arms sales and sanctions with respect to other key partners who have purchased or may purchase advanced weapons from Russia—including India, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

Syria. U.S.-Turkey tensions in Syria have largely focused on Kurdish-led militias that have partnered with the United States against the Islamic State over Turkey's strong objections. These Kurdish-led militias have links with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that originated in Turkey and has waged an on-and-off insurgency against the Turkish government while using safe havens in both Syria and Iraq. In October 2019, after U.S. troops pulled back from the area, Turkey's military (and allied Syrian opposition groups) occupied parts of northeastern Syria to thwart Syrian Kurdish aspirations for autonomy. The 2019 operation was the third Turkish-led incursion into northern Syria; the others took place in 2016-2017 and 2018.

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Introduction

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

- Turkey's strategic orientation—including toward the United States and Russia—as affected by ongoing regional developments, the U.S./NATO presence in Turkey, problems with other U.S. allies and partners in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, and Turkish defense procurement decisions such as the purchase of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system;
- points of tension between the United States and Turkey, including specific issues of U.S. concern and sanctions or other measures against Turkey;
- Turkey's efforts to manage threats and influence outcomes in Syria, including its occupation of some northern Syrian areas to thwart Syrian Kurds partnering with the U.S. military from gaining autonomy; and
- domestic Turkish political and economic developments under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's largely authoritarian and polarizing rule, including those connected to the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak.

For additional information, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas. See **Figure A-1** for a map and key facts and figures about Turkey.

Turkey's Strategic Orientation

Overview

Numerous points of tension have raised questions within the United States and Turkey about the two countries' alliance, as well as Turkey's commitment to NATO and its Western orientation. Nevertheless, U.S. and Turkish officials maintain that bilateral cooperation on a number of issues—including regional security and counterterrorism—remains mutually important.[1]

Concerns among Turkish leaders that U.S. policy might hinder Turkey's security date back at least to the 1991 Gulf War,[2] but the following developments have fueled them since 2010:

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

[1] 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.

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

Turkish imam who leads a worldwide socioreligious movement and lives in the United States.

Turkey arguably seeks a more independent foreign policy course than at any time since joining NATO in 1952, driven partly by geopolitical and economic considerations. Traditionally, Turkey has relied closely on the United States and NATO for defense cooperation, European countries for trade and investment, and Russia and Iran for energy imports. Turkish leaders' interest in reducing their dependence on the West for defense and discouraging Western influence over their domestic politics may partly explain their willingness to coordinate some actions with Russia in Syria and purchase a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system.[3] Nevertheless, Turkey retains significant differences with Russia—with which it has a long history of discord—including over political outcomes in Syria and Libya. While Turkey-Russia cooperation on some issues may not reflect a general Turkish realignment toward Russia, Russia may be content with helping weaken Turkey's ties with the United States, NATO, and the European Union (EU) to reduce obstacles to Russian actions and ambitions.[4]

Turkish leaders appear to compartmentalize their partnerships and rivalries with other global powers as each situation dictates, partly in an attempt to reduce Turkey's dependence on and maintain its leverage with these actors.[5] While this approach may to some extent reflect President Erdogan's efforts to consolidate control domestically, it also has precedent in Turkish foreign policy from before Turkey's Cold War alignment with the West.[6] Additionally, Turkey's history as both a regional power and an object of great power aggression translates into wide domestic popularity for nationalistic political actions and discourse.

U.S./NATO Presence[7]

Turkey's location near several global hotspots has made the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the United States and NATO. From Turkey's perspective, NATO's traditional value has been to mitigate its concerns about encroachment by neighbors. Turkey initially turned to the West largely as a reaction to aggressive post-World War II posturing by the Soviet Union. In addition to Incirlik Air Base near the southern Turkish city of Adana, other key U.S./NATO sites include an early warning missile defense radar in eastern Turkey and a NATO ground forces command in Izmir (see **Figure A-2**). Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through its straits pursuant to the Montreux Convention of 1936.

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

[3] After reaching a low point in Turkey-Russia relations in 2015-2016 (brought about by the Turkish downing of a Russian plane near the Turkey-Syria border and Russia's temporary imposition of sanctions), President Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin cultivated closer ties. Putin showed support for Erdogan during the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, and subsequently allowed Turkey to carry out military operations in northern Syria over the next two years that helped roll back Kurdish territorial control and reduce refugee flows near Turkey's border.

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

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

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

[7] For additional information on NATO issues regarding Turkey, see CRS Report R46066, *NATO: Key Issues Following the 2019 Leaders' Meeting*, by Paul Belkin.

exploring alternative basing arrangements in the region.[8] 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.[9] Several open source media outlets have speculated about whether U.S. tactical nuclear weapons may be based at Incirlik Air Base, and if so, whether U.S. officials might consider taking them out of Turkey.[10] A bill introduced in the Senate in October 2019 (S. 2644) would, among other provisions, require the President to provide an interagency report to Congress "assessing viable alternative military installations or other locations to host personnel and assets of the United States Armed Forces currently stationed at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey."

There are historical precedents for such actions. 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. Most prominently, Turkey closed most U.S. defense and intelligence installations in Turkey during the 1975-1978 U.S. arms embargo that Congress imposed in response to Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus.

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

Problems with Other U.S./NATO Allies

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

Eastern Mediterranean and Offshore Natural Gas

A dispute during the past decade between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus about Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration arguably has brought Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt closer together.[11] Turkey has objected to Greek Cypriot transactions in the offshore energy sector because they have not involved the de facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus that controls the northern one-third of the island. Turkey also has supported Turkish Cypriot claims to an exclusive economic zone around part of the island (see **Figure A-3**). Cyprus, Greece, and Israel have discussed possible cooperation to export gas finds to Europe via a pipeline bypassing Turkey.[12]

In late 2019, the Turkey-Cyprus dispute became intertwined with longtime Turkey-Greece disagreements over continental shelves, territorial waters, airspace, and exclusive economic zones

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

[9] Dorian Jones, "US Military Base in Turkey Has Uncertain Future," *Voice of America*, November 24, 2019; Joseph Trevithick, "Docs Show US To Massively Expand Footprint At Jordanian Air Base Amid Spats With Turkey, Iraq," *The Drive*, January 14, 2019.

[10] Jones, "US Military Base in Turkey"; Miles A. Pomper, "Why the US has nuclear weapons in Turkey—and may try to put the bombs away," *The Conversation*, October 23, 2019.

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

[12] "Battling over boundaries," *Economist*, August 22, 2020.

when Turkey signed an agreement with Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) on maritime boundaries.[13] The dispute has increased Turkey-Greece naval tensions, especially after Greece and Egypt reached a maritime agreement in August 2020 rivaling the 2019 Turkey-Libya deal.[14]

The disputes involving Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece have prompted broader Western criticism of Turkey and some EU sanctions against Turkish individuals aimed at discouraging Turkish drilling near Cyprus.[15] A State Department spokesperson said on August 10, 2020, that the United States was "deeply concerned" about Turkish plans to survey for natural resources in disputed areas, and urged Turkey to halt its plans.[16] France bolstered its naval presence in the area in support of Greece and Cyprus, and increased criticism of Turkish actions, after a July standoff between French and Turkish vessels near Libya.[17] Diplomatic prospects to reduce the Turkey-Greece tensions, which could undermine NATO unity, remain uncertain as Turkish ships with naval escorts have engaged in exploration activities and Greece, Cyprus, France, and Italy have held military exercises aimed at deterring these Turkish actions.[18]

In August 2020, President Erdogan announced a Turkish discovery of offshore natural gas deposits in the Black Sea. It is unclear how this news might impact the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey's overall energy policies.[19] Even if the deposits can be accessed, commercially developing them for domestic consumption or trade could take years.[20]

Middle East and Libyan Civil War

In the Middle East, Sunni Arab states that support traditional authoritarian governance models in the region—notably Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt—regard Turkey with suspicion, largely because of the Turkish government's sympathies for Islamist political groups and its close relationship with Qatar.[21] Ties with Turkey bolster Qatar amid its isolation from other Arab states, and Turkey has relied on Qatari resources to strengthen its troubled financial position and support its regional military efforts.[22]

One sign of Turkey's rivalry with some Sunni Arab states is their support for opposing sides in Libya's civil war. Turkey and Qatar have supported forces aligned with the U.S.- and U.N. Security Council-recognized GNA, while Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (along with Russia

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

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

[15] 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.

[16] "State Department 'deeply concerned' over Turkey's 'provocative' actions in East Med," ekathimerini.com, August 10, 2020.

[17] "Battling over boundaries." The standoff involved Turkish ships suspected of violating the United Nations arms embargo on Libya threatening a French ship that was part of a NATO mission to uphold the embargo.

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

[19] For more on Turkey's energy policies, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations,* by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas; and John V. Bowlus, "Pulling Back the Curtain on Turkey's Natural Gas Strategy," *War on the Rocks,* August 26, 2020.

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

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

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

and possibly France) have supported those of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA). Turkey has sent troops and allied Syrian fighters to Libya, and suffered some casualties in helping GNA-allied forces drive back an LNA offensive against Tripoli in early 2020.[23] GNA-allied forces have advanced east, but face threats of heightened intervention from Egypt if they attempt to take the key port city of Sirte.[24] Further signs of tension between Turkey and Sunni Arab states come from a Turkish military presence at bases in Qatar and Somalia.[25]

Turkey's involvement in Libya and maritime dealings with the GNA have increased the overlap between Turkey's disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean and its rivalry with Sunni Arab states. The U.S.-brokered agreement between Israel and the UAE in August 2020 to normalize their relations could further solidify common cause among Eastern Mediterranean countries and Arab Gulf states to counter Turkish regional influence.[26] In denouncing the Israel-UAE deal, President Erdogan threatened to suspend Turkey's diplomatic relations with the UAE.

Turkish Defense Procurement

Background

Turkish goals to become more self-sufficient on national security matters and increase Turkey's arms exports affect the country's procurement decisions. After the 1975-1978 U.S. arms embargo over Cyprus significantly hampered Turkish arms acquisitions, Turkey sought to decrease dependence on foreign sources by building up its domestic defense industry (see **Figure A-4**).[27] Over time, Turkish companies have supplied an increased percentage of Turkey's defense needs, on equipment ranging from armored personnel carriers and naval vessels to drone aircraft. For key items that Turkey cannot produce itself, its leaders generally seek deals with foreign suppliers that allow for greater co-production and technology sharing.[28]

Procurement and Turkey's Relationships: S-400, F-35, Patriot

How Turkey procures key weapons systems affects its partnerships with major powers. For decades, Turkey has relied on important U.S.-origin equipment such as aircraft, helicopters, missiles, and other munitions to maintain military strength.[29] Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system and its exploration of possibly acquiring Russian Sukhoi fighter

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

[24] For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11556, *Libya and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

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

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

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

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

[29] 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).

aircraft may raise the question: If Turkey transitions to major Russian weapons platforms with multi-decade lifespans, how can it stay closely integrated with NATO on defense matters?

A number of factors may have influenced Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400 instead of the U.S.-origin Patriot system. One is Turkey's apparent desire to diversify its foreign arms sources.[30] Another is Erdogan's possible interest in defending against U.S.-origin aircraft such as those used by Turkish military personnel in the 2016 coup attempt.[31]

Turkey's general interest (discussed above) in procurement deals that feature technology sharing and co-production also may have affected its S-400 decision. Lack of agreement between the United States and Turkey on technology sharing regarding the Patriot system over a number of years possibly contributed to Turkey's interest in considering other options.[32] While Turkey's S-400 purchase reportedly does not feature technology sharing,[33] Turkish officials express hope that a future deal with Russia involving technology sharing and co-production might be possible to address Turkey's longer-term air defense needs, with another potential option being Turkish co-development of a system with European partners.[34]

In response to the beginning of S-400 deliveries to Turkey, the Trump Administration announced in July 2019 that it was removing Turkey from participation in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program. In explaining the U.S. decision to remove Turkey from the F-35 program, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen Lord said, "Turkey cannot field a Russian intelligence collection platform [within the S-400 system] in proximity to where the F-35 program makes, repairs and houses the F-35. Much of the F-35's strength lies in its stealth capabilities, so the ability to detect those capabilities would jeopardize the long-term security of the F-35 program."[35] Additionally, Section 1245 of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92) prohibits the use of U.S. funds to transfer F-35s to Turkey unless the Secretaries of Defense and State certify that Turkey no longer possesses the S-400.

Turkey had planned to purchase at least 100 U.S.-origin F-35s and was one of eight original consortium partners in the development and industrial production of the aircraft.[36] According to U.S. officials, most of the supply chain handled by Turkish companies was due to move elsewhere by March 2020, with a few contracts in Turkey continuing until completion.[37] The cost

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

[31] 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.

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

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

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

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

[36] For information on the consortium and its members, see CRS Report RL30563, *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

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

of shifting the supply chain, beyond some production delays,[38] was estimated in July 2019 to be between $500 million and $600 million.[39]

Into 2020, Turkey continued discussions with the Trump Administration about having the United States deploy or sell Patriot surface-to-air defense systems to Turkey if Turkey returned the S-400 to Russia or limited its use,[40] but the discussions have stalemated.[41] Since 2013, various NATO countries have stationed air defense batteries in southern Turkey as a means of assisting Turkey during Syria's civil war. The United States removed its contribution of Patriot batteries from Turkey in 2015, explaining the action in terms of its global missile defense priorities while contributing to doubts among Turkish leaders about the U.S. commitment to their security.[42] As of September 2020, Spain operates a Patriot system in the Turkish city of Adana under NATO auspices (see **Figure A-2**).

U.S.-Turkey Tension Points

Issues of U.S. Concern

The following issues involving Turkey raise concerns among U.S. officials and many Members of Congress:

- **Russia and the S-400** (as discussed above). How the United States responds to Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 air defense system from Russia could affect U.S. arms sales and sanctions with respect to Turkey, as well as other key partners who have purchased or may purchase advanced weapons platforms from Russia—including India, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.[43]
- **Eastern Mediterranean tensions with Greece and Cyprus** (as discussed above).
- **Syria and the YPG** (see "Syria" below). U.S. concerns regarding Turkish actions in Syria have largely focused on Turkish military operations against the People's Protection Units (Kurdish acronym YPG). The PKK-linked YPG is the leading element in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which has been the main ground force partner in Syria for the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State organization (IS, or ISIS/ISIL).
- **Halkbank and alleged Iran sanctions evasion.** In October 2019, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York announced a six-count indictment against Halkbank (a large Turkish bank that is majority-owned by the

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

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

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

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

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

[43] Paul Iddon, "Why Are Egypt and Turkey Risking U.S. Sanctions for These Russian Weapons Systems?" forbes.com, August 5, 2020; Omar Lamrani, "How Washington's CAATSA Threat Could Backfire," *Stratfor*, December 12, 2019.

government) for "fraud, money laundering, and sanctions offenses related to the bank's participation in a multibillion-dollar scheme to evade U.S. sanctions on Iran."[44] Some evidence surrounding the indictment is sensitive for Erdogan because it may implicate him directly and is tied to his domestic struggles against the Gulen Movement. Some observers have speculated that Turkey's prosecution of three Turkish nationals employed by U.S. consulates may be an effort by Erdogan to gain leverage with the United States in the Halkbank matter.[45]

- **Democracy and rule of law in Turkey.** Many domestic and international observers allege that Erdogan and other Turkish officials are undermining democracy and the rule of law by unduly influencing elections, controlling the media, exploiting Turkey's legal system to punish political opponents, suppressing civil liberties, and unfairly targeting or repressing Turkey's Kurds and other ethnic and religious minorities.[46]
- **Israel and Hamas.** Turkey maintains relations with Israel, but previously close ties have become more distant and—at times—contentious during Erdogan's time as prime minister and president. Also, Erdogan's Islamist sympathies have contributed to close Turkish relations with the Palestinian Sunni Islamist militant group Hamas (a U.S.-designated terrorist organization).[47] Some reports claim that some Hamas operatives are located in Turkey and involved in planning attacks on Israeli targets.[48] In September 2019, the Treasury Department designated an individual and an entity based in Turkey—under existing U.S. counterterrorism sanctions authorities—for providing material support to Hamas.[49]
- **Hagia Sophia mosque designation.** Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and some Members of Congress lamented or criticized the Turkish government's July 2020 reclassification of Istanbul's iconic Hagia Sophia as a mosque.[50] The structure—built as a Christian cathedral in the 6th century and converted to a mosque by the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century—had been designated as a museum in 1934, shortly after Turkey's establishment as a secular republic. In re-converting the building into a mosque, President Erdogan may be seeking support from Turkish nationalist and pious Muslim constituencies at a time when Turkey is facing difficulties related to the economy and COVID-19.[51] The building remains open to non-Muslim visitors outside of religious services.

[44] Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York, "Turkish Bank Charged In Manhattan Federal Court For Its Participation In A Multibillion-Dollar Iranian Sanctions Evasion Scheme," October 15, 2019.

[45] Amberin Zaman, "Turkey seeks reduced charges against US consulate employee," *Al-Monitor*, March 10, 2020. One of the employees (Hamza Ulucay) was convicted but released in January 2019 on the basis of time served. Another (Mete Canturk) is out of prison but still facing prosecution. The third (Metin Topuz) remains in prison pending his trial.

[46] Human Rights Watch, "Turkey," *World Report 2020*; Freedom House, "Turkey," *Freedom in the World 2019*.

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

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

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

[50] Ali Cinar, "Attempts to make Hagia Sophia a US-Turkey crisis have failed," *TRTWorld*, July 28, 2020.

[51] David Gauthier-Villars, "Hagia Sophia, Once Again a Mosque," *Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 2020.

Possible Sanctions and Other Measures

Some U.S. concerns have led to sanctions and other measures against Turkey, and could lead to more in the future. This could, in turn, affect U.S.-Turkey relations more broadly.

Sanctions' effect on Turkish behavior may be difficult to gauge. One financial strategist said in October 2019 that measures constraining Turkish banks from transacting in dollars could particularly affect Turkey's financial system.[52] While negative effects on Turkey's economy could lead to domestic pressure to change Turkish policies,[53] they also could increase popular support for the government. While Turkey has long-standing, deeply rooted ties with the West, some sanctions could potentially create incentives for Turkey to increase trade, investment, and arms dealings with non-Western actors.[54] President Erdogan has stated that U.S. actions against Turkey could lead to the ejection of U.S. military personnel and assets from Turkey.[55]

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

- **Congressional holds on U.S. arms sales.** An August 2020 article reported that some Members of congressional committees have placed informal holds on major new U.S.-origin arms sales to Turkey (valued at $25 million or more) over the past two years in connection with the Turkey-Russia S-400 transaction. Such a disruption has not occurred since the 1975-1978 embargo over Cyprus.[56]
- **CAATSA sanctions.** The S-400 acquisition also could trigger the imposition of U.S. sanctions under the Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017 (CRIEEA, title II of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA; P.L. 115-44; 22 U.S.C. 9525). Under Section 231 of CAATSA, the President is required to impose sanctions on any party that he determines has knowingly engaged in "a significant transaction with a person that is part of, or operates for or on behalf of, the defense or intelligence sectors of the Government of the Russian Federation." Section 1292 of the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act passed by the House in July 2020 (H.R. 6395) has a provision that would require the Administration to impose CAATSA sanctions on Turkey. The Administration imposed CAATSA sanctions against China in September 2018, roughly eight months after it took possession of Russian S-400-related components and fighter aircraft.[57] President Trump has appeared to favor an "interim solution" allowing Turkey to avoid sanctions if it

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

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

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

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

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

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

does not operate the S-400. Reportedly, Turkey has delayed plans to put the system into use, but did test it against U.S.-origin Turkish F-16s in late 2019.[58]

- **Sanctions related to Syria.** In October 2019, the Trump Administration imposed sanctions on some Turkish cabinet ministries and ministers in response to Turkey's armed incursion against the YPG/SDF in Syria, but lifted them later that same month.[59] The sanctions came pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13984, which President Trump signed on October 14, 2019, and which remains in effect.[60] That same month, Congress considered a number of sanctions bills in response to Turkey's incursion into Syria, with the House passing the Protect Against Conflict by Turkey Act (H.R. 4695).
- **End of arms embargo against Cyprus.** Section 1250A of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92), enacted in December 2019, lifted a 32-year-old embargo on U.S. arms sales to the Republic of Cyprus, amid the Turkey-Greece-Cyprus tensions over Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration described above. In July 2020, the U.S. embassy in Cyprus announced that the United States would begin providing some International Military Education and Training to Cyprus in FY2021.[61]
- **Reduced U.S.-Turkey cooperation against the PKK.** One media report citing U.S. and Turkish officials stated that in response to Turkey's October 2019 military operations against the YPG, the U.S. military stopped drone flights that had been sharing intelligence to help Turkey target PKK locations in northern Iraq for more than a decade.[62]
- **House and Senate 2019 resolutions on Armenians.** After Turkey's October 2019 military operations, the House and Senate passed nonbinding resolutions (H.Res. 296 in October 2019 and S.Res. 150 in December 2019) characterizing as genocide the killing of approximately 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire (Turkey's predecessor state) from 1915 to 1923.[63] Turkish officials roundly criticized both resolutions, but did not announce any changes in U.S.-Turkey defense cooperation, despite having threatened to do so in years past in connection with similar proposed resolutions.

[58] Stein, "Finding Off Ramps"; Joyce Karam, "Turkey tests S-400 Russian missile system with US jets, defying Washington," *The National*, November 25, 2019.

[59] 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.

[60] 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.

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

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

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

Syria[64]

In Syria's ongoing conflict, Turkey seeks to manage and reduce threats to itself and to influence political and security outcomes (see **Appendix B** for a timeline of Turkey's involvement). Turkish-led forces have occupied and administered parts of northern Syria since 2016 (see **Figure A-5**). Turkey's chief objective has been to thwart the PKK-linked Syrian Kurdish YPG from establishing an autonomous area along Syria's northern border with Turkey. Turkish-led military operations to that end have included Operation Euphrates Shield (August 2016-March 2017) against an IS-controlled area in northern Syria, and Operation Olive Branch in early 2018 directly against the Kurdish enclave of Afrin.

Turkey has considered the YPG and its political counterpart, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), to be a top threat to Turkish security because of Turkish concerns that YPG/PYD gains have emboldened the PKK in Turkey.[65] The YPG/PYD has a leading role within the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—an umbrella group including Arabs and other non-Kurdish elements that became the main U.S. ground force partner against the Islamic State in 2015. Shortly after the YPG/PYD and SDF began achieving military and political success, Turkey-PKK peace talks broke down, tensions increased, and occasional violence resumed within Turkey.

In October 2019, Turkey's military attacked some SDF-controlled areas in northeastern Syria after President Trump ordered a pullback of U.S. Special Forces following a call with President Erdogan.[66] The declared aims of what Turkey called Operation Peace Spring (OPS) were to target "terrorists"—both the YPG and the Islamic State—and create a "safe zone" for the possible return of some of the approximately 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey.[67] The ground component of the Turkish operation—as during previous Turkish operations in Syria—was carried out to a major extent by Syrian militia forces comprised largely of Sunni Arab opponents of the Syrian government.

Turkey's capture of territory from the SDF during OPS separated the two most significant Kurdish-majority enclaves in northern Syria, complicating Syrian Kurdish aspirations for autonomy. Turkey then reached agreements with the United States and Russia that ended the fighting, created a buffer zone between Turkey and the YPG, and allowed Turkey to directly monitor some areas over the border (see **Figure A-5**).[68]

Ultimate Turkish and YPG objectives regarding the northern Syrian areas in question remain unclear. U.S. officials have continued partnering with SDF forces against the Islamic State in

[64] See CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by Carla E. Humud.

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

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

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

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

some areas of Syria south of the zones from which YPG personnel were cleared,[69] while the SDF has made some arrangements for its own protection by Syrian government forces.

Syrian Refugees in Turkey

In addition to its ongoing military activities in Syria, Turkey hosts about 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees—more than any other country. Turkey has largely closed its border to additional refugee influxes since 2016, though it also assists thousands of displaced Syrians in makeshift camps near the border.[70] President Erdogan claimed in 2019 that Turkey had spent $40 billion on refugee assistance,[71] though one source estimated in November 2019 that the amount could be closer to $24 billion.[72] Turkey closed several refugee camps in 2019 and encouraged Syrians in those camps to integrate into Turkish society while resolution of their long-term status is pending.

Economic competition—particularly at a time of general economic uncertainty in Turkey—may fuel some tensions between refugees and Turkish citizens.[73] While a July 2019 study indicated that 84% of refugee households had at least one member working, most Syrians' jobs are in the informal sector, where wages are below the legal minimum and workers can face exploitation and unsafe working conditions.[74] The United Nations estimates that 64% of Syrian refugees in Turkish cities (where the vast majority reside) live below the poverty line.

The return of refugees to Syria is a sensitive issue. Some reports claim that, in light of domestic pressure,[75] Turkey may have forcibly returned thousands of Syrian refugees to Syria,[76] though Turkish officials deny these claims.[77]

Domestic Turkish Developments

Political Developments Under Erdogan's Rule

President Erdogan has ruled Turkey since becoming prime minister in 2003 and, during that time, has significantly expanded his control over Turkey and its institutions. 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, which he achieved in a 2017 referendum and 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections. Some allegations of voter fraud and manipulation surfaced in both elections.[78] Since the July 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan and his Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (Turkish acronym AKP) have adopted more nationalistic domestic and foreign policy approaches, partly because of their reliance on parliamentary support from the Nationalist Movement Party (Turkish acronym

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

[70] Alan Makovsky, "Turkey's Refugee Dilemma," *Center for American Progress*, March 13, 2019.

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

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

[73] Makovsky, "Turkey's Refugee Dilemma"; Sarah Dadouch, "'They want to kill you': Anger at Syrians erupts in Istanbul," *Reuters*, July 9, 2019.

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

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

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

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

[78] 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).

MHP). During 2020, nationalistic policies have arguably appealed even more to Erdogan in an effort to distract domestic political attention from Turkey's COVID-19-driven economic woes (discussed below).[79]

Erdogan is generally seen as a polarizing figure, with about half the country supporting his rule, and half the country opposing it. The AKP maintained the largest share of votes in 2019 local elections, but lost some key municipalities, including Istanbul, to opposition candidates. It remains unclear to what extent, if at all, these losses pose a threat to Erdogan's rule.[80]

U.S. and EU officials have expressed a number of concerns about authoritarian governance and erosion of rule of law and civil liberties in Turkey.[81] In the government's massive response to the 2016 coup attempt, it detained tens of thousands, enacted sweeping changes to the military and civilian agencies, and took over or closed various businesses, schools, and media outlets.[82]

Economic Status

Since 2018, Turkey has confronted economic problems that have fueled speculation about potential crises that could affect Erdogan's status and domestic political stability. The government and an increasingly less independent central bank intervene periodically to stimulate the economy, but concerns persist about rule of law, significant external financing needs, and the possibility of U.S. sanctions.

The global COVID-19 outbreak and accompanying economic slowdown are having a major impact on Turkey's economy (see **Figure A-1**). As of September 2020, the value of Turkey's currency, the lira, had declined almost 18% for the year. With net foreign currency reserves probably in negative territory, and interest rates about 3% below the rate of inflation, analysts have predicted that tighter monetary policy or significant external assistance will be necessary to address Turkey's financial fragility.[83] Turkey unsuccessfully sought currency swap lines from the U.S. Federal Reserve earlier in the year, having relied to date for some liquidity on swaps from Qatar and China.[84]

[79] Yasmeen Serhan, "The End of the Secular Republic," theatlantic.com, August 13, 2020.

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

[81] See, e.g., Department of State, "Turkey," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019*; Department of State deputy spokesperson, Osman Kavala Should Be Released, July 27, 2020; European Commission, *Turkey 2019 Report*, May 29, 2019;

[82] Ibid.; see also footnote 46.

[83] Economist Intelligence Unit, "Lira plunges to new all-time low," August 19, 2020; Economist Intelligence Unit, Turkey country report (retrieved September 1, 2020).

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

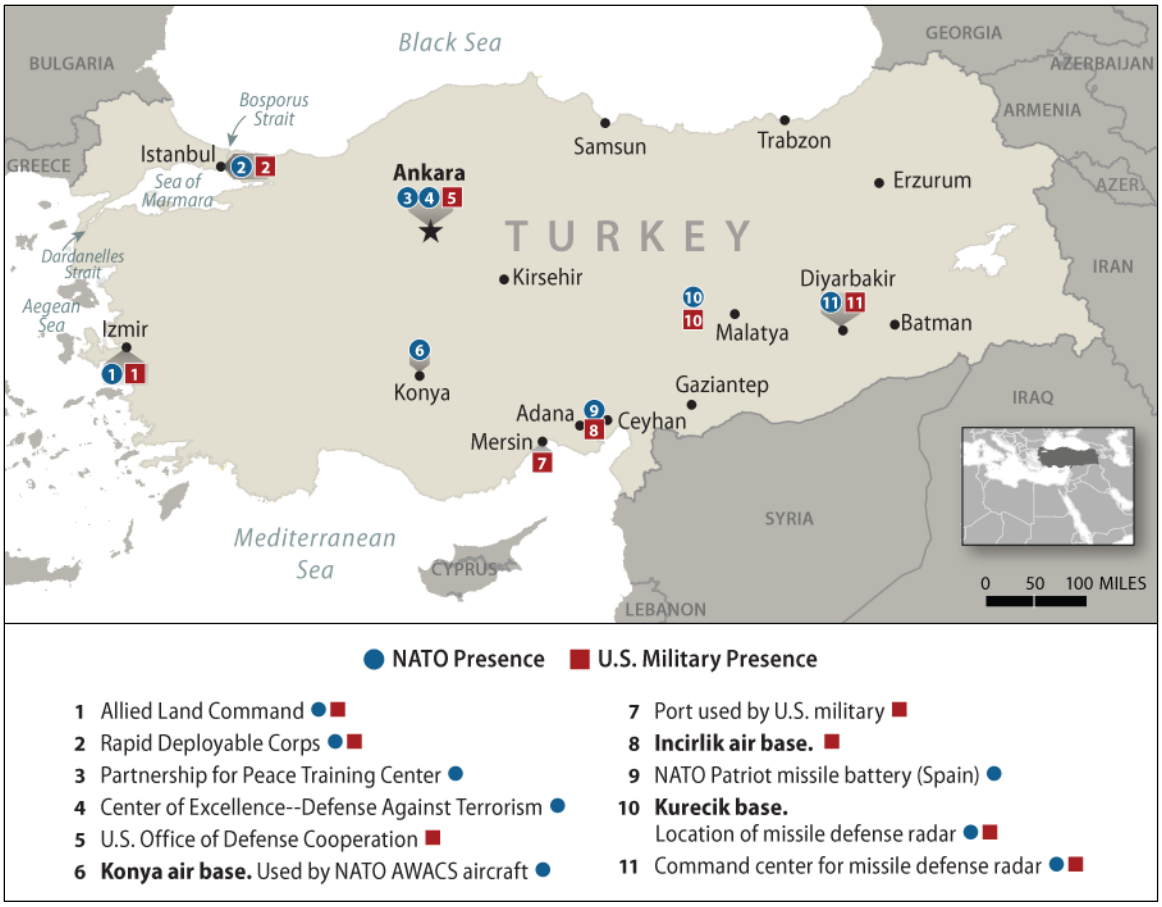
Appendix A. Maps, Facts, and Figures

Figure A-1. Turkey at a Glance

Geography	*Area:* 783,562 sq km (302,535 sq. miles), slightly larger than Texas
People	*Population:* 82,017,514 (2020) 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:* 23.4% *Ethnic Groups:* Turks 70%-75%; Kurds 19%; Other minorities 7%-12% (2016) *Religion:* Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), Others (mainly Christian and Jewish) 0.2% *Literacy:* 96.2% (male 98.8%, female 93.5%) (2017)
Economy	*GDP Per Capita (at purchasing power parity):* $27,971 *Real GDP Growth:* -5.2% (2020), 4.8% (2021) *Inflation:* 11.6% *Unemployment:* 14.4% *Budget Deficit as % of GDP:* 5.9% *Public Debt as % of GDP:* 38.7% *Current Account Deficit as % of GDP:* 2.5% *International reserves:* $78 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 (2020 estimates unless otherwise specified) from International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database; Turkish Statistical Institute; Economist Intelligence Unit; and Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*.

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



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

Notes: All locations are approximate.

Figure A-3. Competing Eastern Mediterranean Claims

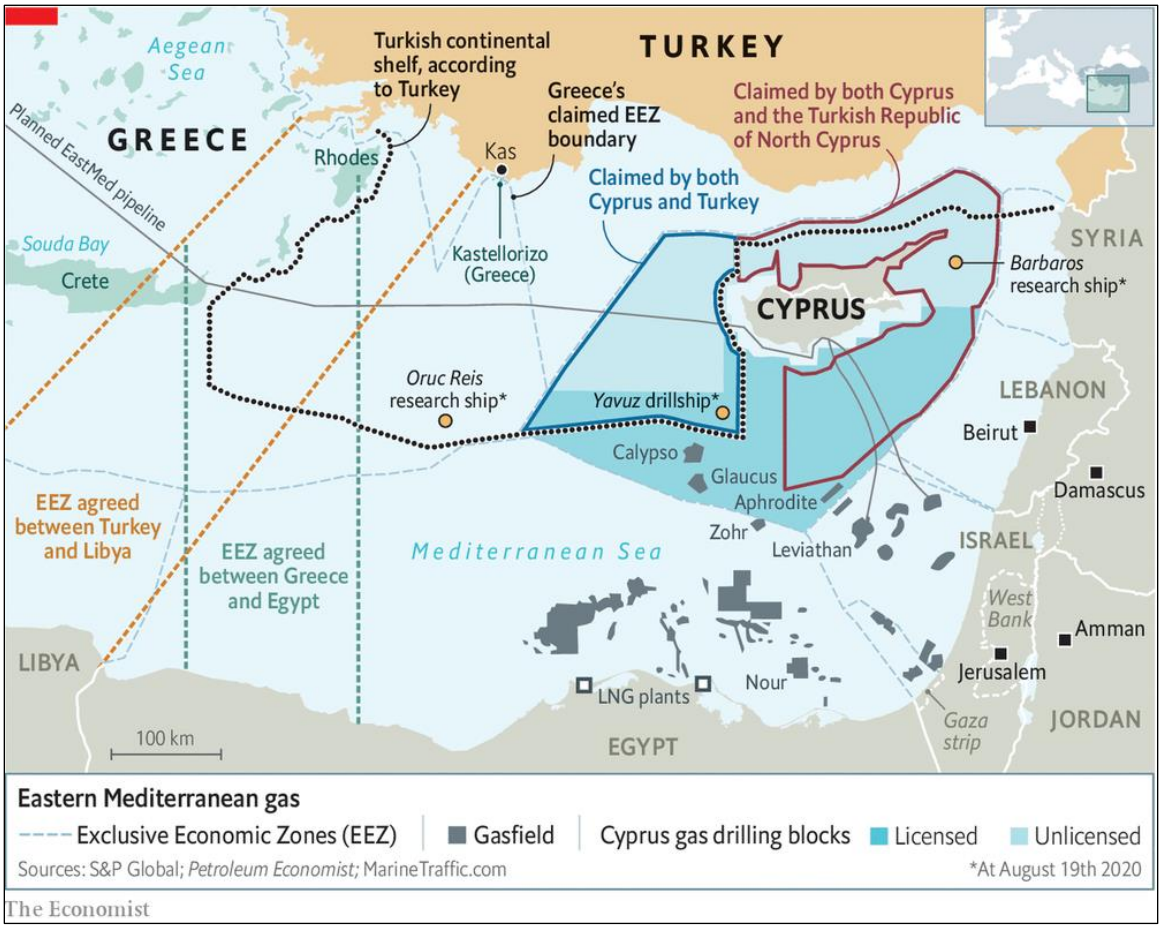
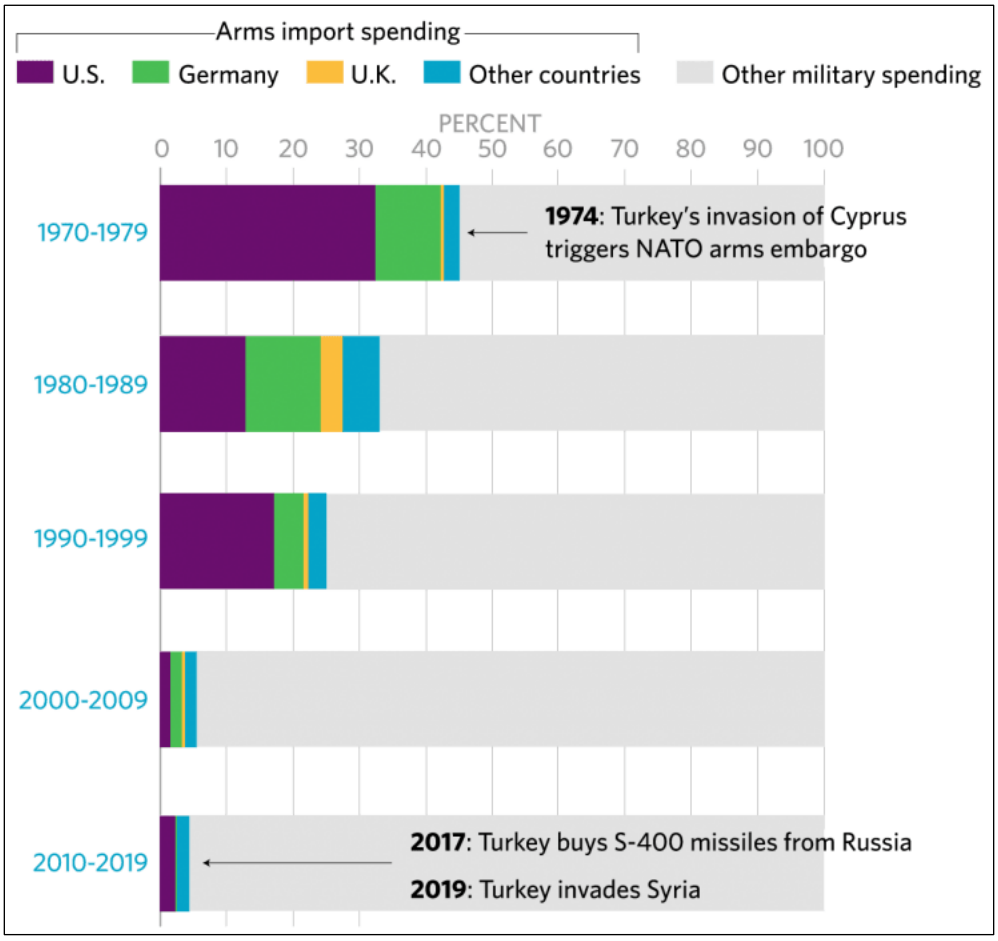
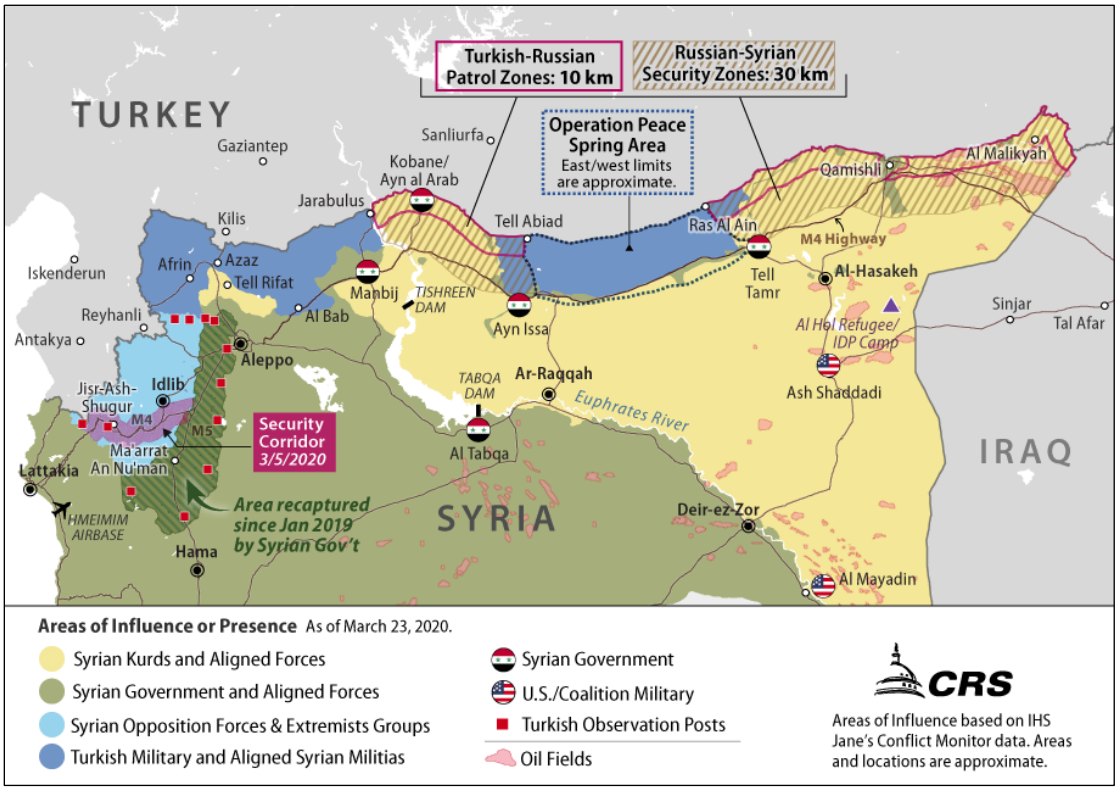


Figure A-4. Arms Imports as a Share of Turkish Military Spending



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

Figure A-5. Syria-Turkey Border



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

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

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

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

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

Sources: Various open sources.

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