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Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief

Updated June 7, 2022

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R44000



Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief

U.S. relations with Turkey take place within a complicated environment and—as of mid-2022—with Turkey in economic distress. Existing U.S.-Turkey tensions that worsened after a failed 2016 coup in Turkey—including via disagreements over Syrian Kurds and Turkey’s 2019 procurement of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system—have raised questions about the future of bilateral relations. Nevertheless, both countries’ officials emphasize the importance of continued U.S.-Turkey cooperation and Turkey’s membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The following are major factors in the U.S.-Turkey relationship.

Erdogan’s rule and Turkey’s economic challenges. Many observers voice worries about President Erdogan’s largely authoritarian rule. In late 2021, an ongoing currency crisis accelerated after he installed a central bank governor who lowered interest rates, generating major domestic concern about inflation and the country’s future financial stability. Presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for June 2023, and public opinion polls suggest that Erdogan may be vulnerable to defeat. Some observers debate whether (1) free and fair elections could take place, (2) opposition parties can attract support across ideological lines, and (3) Erdogan would cede power after an electoral loss.

Turkey’s strategic orientation. 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. Turkey’s ongoing economic struggles highlight the risks it faces if it jeopardizes these ties. A number of complicated situations in Turkey’s surrounding region affect its relationships with the United States and other key actors, as Turkey seeks a more independent foreign policy. These include Russia’s 2022 renewed invasion of Ukraine, Syria’s civil war (during which more than 3.6 million refugees have come to Turkey), and other challenges involving Greece, Cyprus, and Libya. Since 2021, Turkey has made some headway in easing tensions and boosting trade with Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.

Key NATO Issues: Russia’s war on Ukraine and Swedish/Finnish accession. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has heightened challenges Turkey faces in balancing relations with the two countries, with implications for U.S.-Turkey ties. Turkey has not joined sanctions against Russia, with which it has close trade and energy ties, likely because it hopes to minimize spillover effects to its national security and economy. However, U.S. and Turkish interests in countering Russian revisionist aims may have converged, as Turkey has joined other NATO countries in strengthening Ukraine’s defense capabilities. Under Turkey’s authority to regulate access to the Black Sea under the 1936 Montreux Convention, it has generally barred Russian and Ukrainian warships from transiting the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, drawing statements of support from U.S. officials. Turkey also has advised other countries’ naval vessels to avoid the Straits, leading some observers to raise questions about security and freedom of navigation for other Black Sea countries, and about NATO’s role in the region.

Turkey has sold several Turkish-origin Bayraktar TB2 drones to Ukraine as part of deepening bilateral defense cooperation, and the drones appear to have successfully played a role in targeting Russian armored vehicle convoys, air defense batteries, helicopters, and ships. These reported successes have bolstered the TB2’s already strong reputation from conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh, increasing the demand for Turkish defense exports from other countries, as well as opportunities for Turkey to build broader ties with those countries.

As Sweden and Finland formally applied for NATO membership in May 2022, Turkish officials demanded that the two countries address certain Turkish concerns before agreeing to their accession. These demands center on having Sweden, Finland, and other NATO allies (including the United States) end support for Kurdish individuals or groups that Turkey considers to be connected to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Kurdish acronym PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization), including a Syrian Kurdish group helping the anti-Islamic State coalition. Given the other NATO allies’ support for Sweden and Finland’s access, continued Turkish objections might increase U.S.-Turkey tensions and Turkish isolation within NATO.

U.S.-Turkey arms sales issues (including F-16s). Turkey’s acquisition of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system in July 2019 has had significant repercussions for U.S.-Turkey relations, leading to Turkey’s removal from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program and U.S. sanctions on Turkey’s defense procurement agency. The continuing U.S.-Turkey impasse over the S-400 could prevent or complicate major Western arms sales to Turkey. In April 2022, the Biden Administration reportedly notified Congress informally of its intent to upgrade Turkey’s aging F-16 fleet, with Members of Congress expressing mixed views about the transaction. The potential sale could affect the military balance between Turkey and Greece.

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June 7, 2022

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Introduction and Key U.S.-Turkey Considerations

This report provides background information and analysis on key issues affecting U.S.-Turkey relations, including domestic Turkish developments and various foreign policy and defense matters.

Under President Joe Biden, some existing U.S.-Turkey tensions have continued alongside cooperation on other matters and opportunities to improve bilateral ties. He has limited his meetings with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the sidelines of multilateral conferences. This approach may reflect a U.S. and European inclination to keep Turkey at arms' length until after the 2023 elections.¹ Nevertheless, Turkey's geostrategic significance, cautious support for Ukraine's defense against Russia's 2022 invasion, and openness to rapprochement with Israel, some Arab states, and Armenia have somewhat improved U.S.-Turkey relations.²

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.

Domestic Issues

Political Developments Under Erdogan's Rule

President Erdogan has ruled Turkey since becoming prime minister in 2003, and has steadily deepened his control over the country's populace and 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 cemented in a 2017 referendum and 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections. Some allegations of voter fraud and manipulation surfaced after the referendum and the elections.³ Since a failed July 2016 coup attempt by elements within the military, 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 Action Party (Turkish acronym MHP).

Many observers describe Erdogan as a polarizing figure, and elections have reflected roughly equal portions of the country supporting and opposing his rule.⁴ The AKP won the largest share of votes in 2019 local elections, but lost some key municipalities, including Istanbul, to candidates from the secular-leaning Republican People's Party (Turkish acronym CHP).

¹ Sinem Adar, "Perceptions in Turkey about the War in Ukraine," *SWP Comment* (German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)), April 6, 2022.

² Alper Coskun, "Making the New U.S.-Turkey Strategic Mechanism Meaningful," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 12, 2022; Kali Robinson, "Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions," Council on Foreign Relations, May 19, 2022.

³ 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).

⁴ Kemal Kirisci and Berk Esen, "Might the Turkish Electorate Be Ready to Say Goodbye to Erdoğan After Two Decades in Power?" *Just Security*, November 22, 2021.

U.S. and European Union (EU) officials have expressed a number of concerns about authoritarian governance and erosion of rule of law and civil liberties in Turkey.⁵ In response to the 2016 coup attempt, the government detained tens of thousands of its citizens, enacted sweeping changes to military and civilian agencies, and took over or closed various businesses, schools, and media outlets.⁶ Erdogan has argued, with considerable popular support, that the Fethullah Gulen movement orchestrated the coup attempt, in which more than 250 people were killed and thousands were injured.⁷ Forces and citizen groups loyal to the government ultimately thwarted the apparent efforts of some renegade military personnel (which included airstrikes targeting Turkey's presidential palace and parliament building) to seize state control. Some leading opposition figures in Turkey have accused Erdogan of planning, controlling, and/or using the failed coup to suppress dissent and consolidate power.⁸

In April 2022, a Turkish court sentenced civil society figure Osman Kavala to life imprisonment after convicting him of conspiring against the government. The European Court of Human Rights, whose rulings are supposed to be binding for Turkey due to its Council of Europe membership, had demanded Kavala's release in 2019. The State Department spokesperson said that Kavala's "unjust conviction is inconsistent with respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law," while also criticizing "continued judicial harassment of civil society, media, political and business leaders in Turkey, including through prolonged pretrial detention, overly broad claims of support for terrorism, and criminal insult cases."⁹

With national elections scheduled for 2023 (discussed below), the Erdogan government has pursued a Constitutional Court ruling to close down the Kurdish-oriented Peoples' Democratic Party (Turkish acronym HDP), the third largest party in Turkey's parliament. The government claims that the HDP has ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Kurdish acronym PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization).¹⁰ The State Department has said that banning the HDP "would unduly subvert the will of Turkish voters, further undermine democracy in Turkey, and deny millions of Turkish citizens their chosen representation."¹¹ How Kurds who feel politically marginalized might respond to the HDP's ban is unclear. Major violence between Turkish authorities and PKK militants—which has taken place on and off since the 1980s—wracked Turkey's mostly Kurdish southeast in 2015 and 2016, and the Turkish military has continued targeting PKK and PKK-aligned personnel in Iraq and Syria.¹²

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

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gareth Jenkins, "Five Years After July 15: Erdogan's New Turkey and the Myth of Its Immaculate Conception," *Turkey Analyst*, July 15, 2021; Dorian Jones, "Turkey Looks Back at Failed Coup," *Voice of America*, July 15, 2019. Partly because of Gulen's residence in the United States, many Turks reportedly subscribe to conspiracy theories about possible U.S. involvement. Jenkins, "Five Years After July 15." For more on Gulen, see CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

⁸ Jenkins, "Five Years After July 15"; "Turkey coup: Top officers given life terms in mass trial," *BBC News*, April 7, 2021.

⁹ State Department, "Turkey's Conviction of Osman Kavala," April 25, 2022.

¹⁰ Alex McDonald, "Threat to close pro-Kurdish party echoes long tradition in Turkey's politics," *Middle East Eye*, March 20, 2021.

¹¹ State Department, "Actions in Turkey's Parliament," March 17, 2021.

¹² Berkay Mandiraci, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Regional Battleground in Flux," International Crisis Group, February 18, 2022.

Major Economic Challenges

Ongoing economic problems in Turkey have considerably worsened in the past year as its currency, the *lira*, depreciated in value nearly 45% against the U.S. dollar in 2021 and has continued its slide during 2022. In May 2022, official annual inflation in Turkey swelled to 73.5% (see **Figure A-2**), the highest since 1998.¹³ Many analysts link the spike in inflation to the Turkish central bank's reduction of its key interest rate from 19% to 14% between September and December 2021, with additional inflationary pressure possibly coming from external events such as Russia's war on Ukraine and interest rate hikes in the United States and other major economies.¹⁴ The lira has been trending downward for more than a decade, with its decline driven by broader concerns about Turkey's rule of law and economy.¹⁵

Throughout this time, President Erdogan has assertively challenged the conventional economic theory that higher interest rates stem inflation, attract foreign capital, and support the value of the currency. In replacing Turkey's central bank governor and finance minister in 2021, Erdogan established greater control over Turkish fiscal and monetary policy. In public statements, Erdogan has argued that lower interest rates boost production, employment, and exports.¹⁶ Erdogan also has criticized high interest rates as contrary to Islamic teachings and as exacerbating the gap between rich and poor.¹⁷

The currency and inflation crisis in Turkey has dramatically affected consumers' cost of living and the cost of international borrowing (mostly conducted in U.S. dollars) for banks and private sector companies.¹⁸ The government has sought to stop or reverse inflation by providing tax cuts and subsidies for basic expenses and borrowing incentives for banks that hold liras.¹⁹ According to one source, by December 2021 almost 65% of Turkish bank deposits were in foreign currencies²⁰—up from around 41% at the time of the 2016 coup attempt.²¹ In that month, the government announced a plan to insure lira-denominated bank accounts against currency depreciation, in apparent coordination with a significant state-backed market intervention.²² It is unclear whether the government's credit and domestic savers' confidence will be sufficient to prevent future financial panic.²³

¹³ Mustafa Sonmez, "Turkish consumer inflation soars to 73.5%," *Al-Monitor*, June 3, 2022.

¹⁴ Baris Balci and Inci Ozbek, "Turkey Rewrites All Inflation Forecasts but Won't Budge on Rates," *Bloomberg*, April 28, 2022.

¹⁵ Mikolaj Rogalewicz, "Economic crisis in Turkey," *Warsaw Institute Review*, April 25, 2022.

¹⁶ "EXPLAINER: Turkey's Currency Is Crashing. What's the Impact?" *Associated Press*, December 3, 2021; Carlotta Gall, "Keeping His Own Counsel on Turkey's Economy," *New York Times*, December 11, 2021.

¹⁷ Mustafa Akyol, "How Erdogan's Pseudoscience Is Ruining the Turkish Economy," *Cato Institute*, December 3, 2021; Gall, "Keeping His Own Counsel on Turkey's Economy."

¹⁸ "EXPLAINER: Turkey's Currency Is Crashing. What's the Impact?" *Associated Press*.

¹⁹ "Turkey's inflation surges to 70%, putting Erdogan in bind," *Reuters*; Balci and Ozbek, "Turkey Rewrites All Inflation Forecasts."

²⁰ Mustafa Sonmez, "Turkish lira sinks further with Erdogan's latest rate cut," *Al-Monitor*, December 16, 2021.

²¹ Capital Economics graphic, from Caitlin Ostroff, "Investors Fear Turkish Lira Has Further to Fall," *Wall Street Journal*, December 7, 2021.

²² "Turkish lira erodes last week's gains," *Reuters*, December 28, 2021.

²³ Mustafa Sonmez, "Turkish taxpayers outraged at cost of lira protection scheme," *Al-Monitor*, March 25, 2022.

Future Elections

Turkey's next presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place by June 2023. Largely in the context of Turkey's economic problems, public opinion polls suggest that support for Erdogan and the AKP is at a historic low.²⁴ Observers speculate about whether Erdogan and the existing AKP-MHP parliamentary coalition can remain in power.²⁵ How Kurdish citizens of Turkey (numbering nearly 20% of the population) vote—with or without the HDP's participation—could impact the outcome.²⁶ Additionally, some observers debate whether (1) free and fair elections could take place under Erdogan,²⁷ (2) opposition parties can convince potential swing voters to side with them despite their personal or ideological affinity for Erdogan,²⁸ or (3) Erdogan would cede power after an electoral defeat.²⁹

The CHP and some other opposition parties have agreed on some steps toward a joint platform focused on strengthening legislative and judicial checks on executive power.³⁰ However, it remains unclear which opposition candidate will challenge Erdogan for president: CHP party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu (from the Alevi religious minority), or either of the two mayors who won control of Istanbul and Ankara for the party in 2019 (Ekrem Imamoglu and Mansur Yavas, respectively) and generally poll higher than Kilicdaroglu.³¹ In a sign to some of government attempts to sideline opponents, Istanbul mayor Imamoglu could face a ban from political activity because of criminal charges accusing him of insulting members of Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council in 2019.³²

Erdogan controls whether to initiate elections before June 2023 and has thus far stated his unwillingness to do so. Rather than compel elections in Turkey, domestic instability could lead Erdogan's cabinet to initiate a state of emergency with the potential to delay elections.³³

How closely U.S. and other international actors engage Erdogan's government ahead of elections could depend on perceptions of his popular legitimacy, likely staying power, and the extent to which a successor might change his policies in light of geopolitical and domestic considerations.

²⁴ Laura Pitel, "Defeating Erdogan: Turkey's opposition searches for a champion," *Financial Times*, May 5, 2022.

²⁵ Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, "It Is Not Too Early to Think About Political Change in Turkey," German Marshall Fund of the United States, January 10, 2022.

²⁶ Mesut Yegen, "Erdogan and the Turkish Opposition Revisit the Kurdish Question," *SWP Comment* (German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)), April 2022.

²⁷ Unluhisarcikli, "It Is Not Too Early to Think About Political Change in Turkey"; Kirisci and Esen, "Might the Turkish Electorate Be Ready to Say Goodbye to Erdoğan After Two Decades in Power?"

²⁸ Ozer Sencar of Metropoll, in Laura Pitel, "Will the ailing Turkish economy bring Erdogan down?" *Financial Times*, November 1, 2021.

²⁹ Unnamed Western diplomat quoted in Pitel, "Defeating Erdogan."

³⁰ Andrew Wilks, "Turkish opposition forms plan to oust Erdogan, restore parliament's power," *Al-Monitor*, February 15, 2022.

³¹ Ibid.; Pitel, "Defeating Erdogan."

³² Andrew Wilks, "Cases against opposition politicians mount ahead of Turkish elections," *Al-Monitor*, June 2, 2022.

³³ "Professor says Turkey may declare state of emergency following economic crisis," *Duvar English*, December 14, 2021.

Turkey's Strategic Orientation: Foreign Policy and Defense

General Assessment

Turkey's strategic orientation is a major consideration for the United States. Trends in Turkey's relations with the United States and other countries reflect changes to this orientation, as Turkey has sought greater independence of action as a regional power within a more multipolar global system. Turkish leaders' interest in reducing their dependence on the West for defense and discouraging Western influence over their domestic politics may partly explain their willingness to coordinate some actions with Russia, such as in Syria and with Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system. Nevertheless, Turkey retains significant differences with Russia—with which it has a long history of discord—including in political and military crises involving Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh (a region disputed by Armenia and Azerbaijan).

In recent years, Turkey has involved its military in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, and South Caucasus in a way that has affected its relationships with the United States and other key actors. U.S. officials have sometimes encouraged cooperation among other allies and partners to counter Turkish actions.³⁴ In the past year, however, Turkey has taken some steps to ease tensions with major U.S. partners in the Middle East—namely Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia (see **Appendix B**). U.S. and Turkish officials maintain that bilateral cooperation on regional security matters remains mutually important.³⁵

Turkish leaders appear to compartmentalize their partnerships and rivalries with other influential countries as each situation dictates, partly in an attempt to reduce Turkey's dependence on these actors and maintain its leverage with them.³⁶ Traditionally, Turkey has relied closely on the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for defense cooperation, European countries for trade and investment (including a customs union with the EU since the late 1990s), and Russia and Iran for energy imports. Without a means of global power projection or major natural resource wealth, Turkey's military strength and economic well-being appear to remain largely dependent on these traditional relationships. Turkey's ongoing economic struggles (discussed above) highlight the risks it faces if it jeopardizes these ties.³⁷

Turkey's compartmentalized approach may to some extent reflect President Erdogan's efforts to maintain power domestically. Because Erdogan's control over parliament depends on the AKP's coalition with the more traditionally nationalist MHP, efforts to preserve support from core constituencies may imbue Turkish policy with a nationalistic tenor. A largely nationalistic foreign policy also has precedent from before Turkey's Cold War alignment with the West.³⁸ Turkey's history as both a regional power and an object of great power aggression contributes to wide

³⁴ Ahmed Qandil, "East Med Gas Forum turns into regional organisation, in blow to Turkey," *Arab Weekly*, September 23, 2020.

³⁵ State Department, "Joint Statement on the Meeting of Secretary Blinken and Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu," May 18, 2022.

³⁶ Nur Ozcan Erbay, "Ankara to use compartmentalization in managing relations," *Daily Sabah*, June 24, 2021; Stephen J. Flanagan et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army*, RAND Corporation, 2020.

³⁷ Rich Outzen and Soner Cagaptay, "The Third Age of Erdoğan's Foreign Policy," Center for European Policy Analysis, February 17, 2022.

³⁸ William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*, New York: Routledge, 2013 (3rd edition).

domestic popularity for nationalistic political actions and discourse, as well as sympathy for Erdogan’s “neo-Ottoman” narrative of restoring Turkish regional prestige.

Turkish Hard Power and “Drone Diplomacy”

During Erdogan’s first decade as prime minister (2003-2012), Turkey’s main approach in its surrounding region (with the exception of its long-running security operations against the PKK in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq) was to project political and economic influence, or “soft power,” backed by diplomacy and military deterrence. As regional unrest increased near Turkey’s borders with the onset of conflict in Syria, however, Turkey’s approach shifted dramatically in light of newly perceived threats. This was especially the case after Erdogan (elected president in 2014) began courting Turkish nationalist constituencies in 2015 and consolidating power following the July 2016 coup attempt.

Under this modified approach, Turkey has relied more on hard power to affect regional outcomes. Specifically, Turkey has focused on a relatively low-cost method of using armed drone aircraft and/or proxy forces (particularly Syrian fighters who oppose the Syrian government and otherwise have limited sources of income) in theaters of conflict including northern Syria and Iraq, western Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁹ Partly because the drones and proxy forces limit Turkey’s political and economic risk, Turkish leaders have shown less restraint in deploying them, and they have reportedly proven effective at countering other actors’ more expensive but less mobile armored vehicles and air defense systems (such as with Russian-origin equipment in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh).⁴⁰

Turkey’s demonstrated battlefield successes with its drones have significantly increased demand for exports to other countries.⁴¹ The growing global popularity of the Bayraktar TB2 drone in particular (see **Figure A-3**) has prompted one Western arms industry figure to call it the “Kalashnikov [rifle] of the 21st century.”⁴² One analyst explained the TB2’s appeal by saying that it “strikes a favorable balance between price and capability, being more affordable and accessible compared to US drones while being far more reliable and effective than Chinese models.”⁴³ At the same time Turkey markets drones to other countries with fewer constraints than Western countries, it generally seeks to broaden military, political, and economic linkages with them.⁴⁴

While this “drone diplomacy” appears to be helping Turkey build important regional and global connections, some observers have raised concerns. One worry is that Turkey may enable human rights violations; an example is the Ethiopian government’s use of TB2s (alongside drones originally from Iran and China) against Tigrayan rebels.⁴⁵ Another concern is that without greater oversight and transparency, exporting drones broadly could result in unintended, adverse consequences for Turkey’s interests or those of its allies and partners.⁴⁶

U.S./NATO Strategic Considerations

The United States has valued Turkey’s geopolitical importance to and military strength within the NATO alliance, while viewing Turkey’s NATO membership as helping anchor Turkey to the West. For Turkey, NATO’s traditional importance has been to mitigate Turkish concerns about

³⁹ See, e.g., Rich Outzen, *Deals, Drones, and National Will: The New Era in Turkish Power Projection*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 2021.

⁴⁰ James Marson and Brett Forrest, “Low-Cost Armed Drones Reshape War and Geopolitics,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2021; Mitch Prothero, “Turkey’s Erdogan has been humiliating Putin all year—here’s how he did it,” *Business Insider*, October 22, 2020.

⁴¹ Sinan Tavsan, “Turkish drone success in Ukraine sets stage for Asia roadshow,” *Nikkei Asia*, March 16, 2022.

⁴² Ibid. For background information on the initial development of Turkey’s drone aircraft industry, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

⁴³ Gabriel Honrada, “The Turkish drones winning the Ukraine war,” *Asia Times*, May 12, 2022.

⁴⁴ Rich Outzen, “Ukraine’s Security Model Should be Turkey,” *New/Lines Magazine*, April 26, 2022.

⁴⁵ Salem Solomon, “Ethiopia Ups Use of Drone Strikes in Conflict Prompting Worries About Civilian Toll,” *Voice of America*, February 2, 2022.

⁴⁶ Federico Borsari, “Turkey’s drone diplomacy: Lessons for Europe,” European Council on Foreign Relations, January 31, 2022; Alper Coskun, “Strengthening Turkish Policy on Drone Exports,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 18, 2022.

encroachment by neighbors, such as the Soviet Union’s aggressive post-World War II posturing leading up to the Cold War. In more recent or ongoing arenas of conflict like Ukraine and Syria, Turkey’s possible interest in countering Russian objectives may be partly motivating its military operations and arms exports.⁴⁷

Turkey’s location near several conflict areas has made the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the United States and NATO. In addition to Incirlik Air Base near the southern Turkish city of Adana, 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-4**).

Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine

Overview

Russia’s 2022 renewed invasion of Ukraine—a country Russia first invaded and partly occupied in 2014—has heightened challenges Turkey faces in balancing its relations with the two countries and managing Black Sea access, with implications for U.S.-Turkey ties. In recent years, Turkey’s links with Russia—especially its 2019 acquisition of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system—have fueled major U.S.-Turkey tensions, triggering sanctions and reported informal congressional holds on arms sales (discussed below). However, following the renewed Russian invasion of Ukraine, U.S. and Turkish interests in countering Russian revisionist aims—including along the Black Sea coast—may have converged as Turkey has participated alongside other NATO countries to strengthen Ukraine’s defense capabilities.⁴⁸

While Turkey has denounced Russia’s invasion and supplied Ukraine with armed drone aircraft (see text box below) and humanitarian assistance, Turkey likely hopes to minimize spillover effects to its national security and economy. The Turkish government has not joined economic sanctions against Russia or closed its airspace to Russian civilian flights. As mentioned above, the conflict appears to have worsened Turkey’s ongoing inflation crisis. Additionally, decreases in Russian and Ukrainian tourism are likely to hurt Turkey’s economy, as could cutoffs of imported Russian natural gas and wheat, or Russian military actions in Syria that create new refugee flows.⁴⁹ Turkey has engaged in mediation between Russia and Ukraine, including some involvement in broader international efforts seeking a corridor through Russian-blockaded waters for Ukrainian grain exports that could alleviate global supply concerns.⁵⁰

With Turkish officials arguably motivated to improve the country’s economic profile while anticipating closely contested national elections in 2023, they have welcomed sanctioned Russian oligarchs as tourists and investors. Turkey’s actions raise questions about whether it can and will prevent Russian investors from evading Western sanctions.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Dimitar Bechev, “Russia, Turkey and the Spectre of Regional Instability,” Al Sharq Strategic Research, April 13, 2022; Prothero, “Turkey’s Erdogan has been humiliating Putin all year.”

⁴⁸ Saban Kardas, “The War in Ukraine and Turkey’s Cautious Counter-Balancing Against Russia,” German Marshall Fund of the United States, March 3, 2022.

⁴⁹ Adar, “Perceptions in Turkey about the War in Ukraine.”

⁵⁰ William Mauldin et al., “The Ukraine Crisis: Talks Press Plan to Free Shipments of Grain,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 2, 2022.

⁵¹ Giacomo Tognini, “Why Turkey Could Become the Next Haven for Russian Oligarchs Fleeing Sanctions,” *forbes.com*, May 3, 2022; Karen Gilchrist, “Turkey may become the new playground for Russian oligarchs – but it’s a

Ukraine's Use of Bayraktar TB2 Drones and Broader Implications

Turkey has sold several Turkish-origin Bayraktar TB2 drones to Ukraine as part of deepening bilateral defense cooperation since 2019,⁵² and some reports have suggested that the manufacturer has periodically delivered additional TB2s to Ukraine since Russia's invasion.⁵³ Multiple accounts have surfaced of Ukraine's successful use of TB2s to target Russian armored vehicle convoys, air defense batteries, helicopters, and ships—often in coordination with other Ukrainian weapons platforms. A May 2022 report stated that Russia may have destroyed Ukrainian TB2s in sufficient number to significantly reduce their likely future impact on the war.⁵⁴

Because the Turkish defense industry has made deals with Ukrainian contractors to provide engines for newer combat drone platforms, as well as various manned aircraft projects, threats posed to Ukraine's manufacturing capacity from Russia's invasion could delay some of Turkey's plans.⁵⁵ Ukraine became an important alternative source for Turkey in procuring engines after a 2019-2020 decrease in Western supply due to concerns about Turkish actions against Syrian Kurds and Armenians.⁵⁶

Expanding Turkish defense cooperation—including drone exports—with countries near Russia may present opportunities to renew common cause between the West and Turkey in countering Russia.⁵⁷ Alternatively, Turkey's interactions with these other countries could possibly check both U.S. and Russian ambitions,⁵⁸ or increase regional tensions potentially leading toward conflict.⁵⁹

Black Sea Access

Turkey's power to regulate access to the Black Sea via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits (see **Figure A-5**) under the 1936 Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits (the "Montreux Convention") is important to U.S. interests.⁶⁰ In February 2022, Turkey acknowledged a state of war between Russia and Ukraine, invoking Article 19 of the Montreux Convention, which generally bars belligerent countries' warships from traversing the Straits (except if they are returning to their base of origin).⁶¹ Shortly after Turkey's decision, Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed appreciation for Turkey's implementation of the Convention and support for Ukraine.⁶² (The United States is not a party to the Convention, but has complied with its terms since it went into effect in 1936 as a treaty that is reflective of customary international law.)

Turkey's invocation of Article 19 for the first time since World War II may limit Russia from replenishing ships it loses in battle. While Ukrainian coastal defenses have dealt losses to some

risky strategy," *CNBC*, March 30, 2022.

⁵² Dorian Jones, "Turkey Strengthens Defense Industry with Its Ukraine Partnership," *Voice of America*, February 4, 2022.

⁵³ David Hambling, "New Bayraktar Drones Still Seem to Be Reaching Ukraine," *forbes.com*, May 10, 2022.

⁵⁴ Stephen Witt, "Weapon of Influence," *New Yorker*, May 16, 2022.

⁵⁵ Fehim Tastekin, "Will Ukraine crisis help Turkey dodge Western arms embargoes?" *Al-Monitor*, March 28, 2022.

⁵⁶ Aykan Erdemir and Ryan Brobst, "Engines of Influence: Turkey's Defense Industry Under Erdogan," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 24, 2022.

⁵⁷ Suat Kiniklioglu, "Necessary friends: Turkey's improving relationship with the West," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, April 7, 2022.

⁵⁸ Outzen, "Ukraine's Security Model Should be Turkey."

⁵⁹ Aaron Stein, "From Ankara with Implications: Turkish Drones and Alliance Entrapment," *War on the Rocks*, December 15, 2021.

⁶⁰ Maximilian Hess, "Welcome to the Black Sea Era of War," *foreignpolicy.com*, April 25, 2022. Text of the Convention is available at <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/1936-Convention-Regarding-the-Regime-of-the-Straits.pdf>.

⁶¹ "Turkey recognises Russia-Ukraine 'war', may block warships," *Agence France Presse*, February 27, 2022.

⁶² State Department, "Secretary Blinken's Call with Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu," February 28, 2022.

Russian ships, Russia's existing Black Sea fleet remains powerful, now controls the key Ukrainian port of Mariupol, and has essentially disabled Ukraine's navy.⁶³

In March 10 correspondence with CRS, a Turkish official explained that (under the Montreux Convention) Turkey has only formally closed the Straits to Russia and Ukraine as belligerent countries, while advising all other countries to refrain from sending warships through the Straits. Some naval analysts have expressed concern that discouraging other countries from transit could put NATO at a disadvantage.⁶⁴ One has asserted that Black Sea access is "essential for the alliance's presence and security as well as to reassure" allies Romania and Bulgaria.⁶⁵ It is unclear what might lead Turkey and other Black Sea littoral countries (aside from Russia) to take direct action or seek third-party help in asserting their interests and freedom of navigation, and how that could affect regional security.

Conditions on NATO Accession for Sweden and Finland

When Sweden and Finland formally applied to join NATO in May 2022 (sparked by growing security concerns in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine), President Erdogan indicated that Turkey has objections that he wants the two countries to overcome before Turkey will agree to their accession. Under Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the admission of new allies can only happen with the unanimous agreement of existing members. Addressing Turkey's parliament on May 18, Erdogan said, "The expansion of NATO is meaningful for us, in proportion to the respect that is shown to our sensitivities."⁶⁶

Erdogan and other Turkish officials have complained that Sweden and Finland support or harbor sympathies for groups that Turkey deems to be terrorist organizations, namely the PKK and the Fethullah Gulen movement.⁶⁷ (The United States and EU also classify the PKK as a terrorist group.) Turkey is demanding that both countries lift the arms embargoes they have maintained against Turkey since its 2019 incursion into Syria against a PKK-linked Kurdish group (the People's Protection Units—Kurdish acronym YPG) that has partnered with the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition (see "Syria").⁶⁸ Turkish officials also have requested the extradition of alleged PKK members from Sweden and Finland, and reportedly seek to have both countries curtail PKK- and Gulen movement-related activities on their territory.⁶⁹

After meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken in New York on May 18, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that Turkey expected more support from all NATO allies related to its concerns about the PKK and YPG. He called for U.S. officials to remove the sanctions

⁶³ Jon Jackson, "Russia Risks Losing Its Power in the Black Sea," *Newsweek*, May 2, 2022.

⁶⁴ Cornell Overfield, "Turkey Must Close the Turkish Straits Only to Russian and Ukrainian Warships," *Lawfare Blog*, March 5, 2022.

⁶⁵ James Kraska, "Can Turkey Legally Close Its Straits to Russian Warships? It's Complicated," *foreignpolicy.com*, March 1, 2022.

⁶⁶ Emily Rauhala et al., "Turkey blocks start of NATO talks on Finland, Sweden," *Washington Post*, May 19, 2022. See also "Recep Tayyip Erdogan on NATO expansion," *Economist*, May 30, 2022.

⁶⁷ Semih Idiz, "How long can Erdogan sustain threat to veto Finnish, Swedish NATO bids?" *Al-Monitor*, May 17, 2022.

⁶⁸ Sources citing links between the PKK and YPG (or PKK affiliates in Syria) include State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020*, Syria; Mandiraci, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Regional Battleground in Flux"; Barak Barfi, *Ascent of the PYD and the SDF*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2016.

⁶⁹ Ragip Soylu, "Turkey demands extradition of PKK members from Sweden, Finland for Nato bid," *Middle East Eye*, May 16, 2022; Richard Milne and Laura Pitel, "Erdogan blocks Nato accession talks with Sweden and Finland," *Financial Times*, May 18, 2022.

placed on Turkey for its acquisition of an S-400 system from Russia and suspend their support for the YPG in Syria.⁷⁰ Such calls, which Cavusoglu did not explicitly say were conditions of Swedish and Finnish accession, may be connected with Turkey's proposed plans to expand its areas of control in northern Syria at the YPG's expense (see "Syria").

Many U.S. and NATO officials, including President Biden, strongly support Swedish and Finnish accession and have voiced confidence that Turkey will not block it.⁷¹ In 2009, Turkey ultimately withdrew objections it had to former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen serving as NATO Secretary General, and in 2019 NATO countries resolved a Turkish delay to defense planning—with both cases at least partly related to Kurdish issues.⁷² Erdogan might be adopting a nationalistic tone on a globally prominent issue for domestic political gain.⁷³

Some observers express concern that Turkish actions to delay accession could increase its isolation within NATO at a time when the Russia-Ukraine war has presented opportunities to highlight Turkey's value to NATO and bolster the alliance's strength.⁷⁴ Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez has called on the Administration to tell Erdogan "you've got to act in a different way if you want consideration for anything," such as the upgrade to its fleet of F-16 aircraft that Turkey is seeking from the United States (discussed below). Senator Thom Tillis, Co-Chair of the Senate NATO Observer Group, has said that the United States could act to compel Turkey's cooperation, but expressed a preference for not escalating tensions.⁷⁵

U.S.-Turkey Arms Sales Issues

How Turkey procures key weapons systems is relevant to U.S. policy in part because it affects Turkey's partnerships with major powers and the country's role within NATO. For decades, Turkey has relied on certain U.S.-origin equipment such as aircraft, helicopters, missiles, and other munitions to maintain military strength.⁷⁶ Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air defense system (discussed below) has raised questions about whether Turkey can remain closely integrated with the United States and NATO on defense matters. However, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkey appears less inclined to consider purchases of additional Russian arms. One source quoted a senior Turkish diplomat as saying, "The war has practically killed all potential Turkish-Russian deals in strategic weapons systems."⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Jared Szuba, "US assures Sweden, Finland of military support as Turkey delays NATO entry," *Al-Monitor*, May 19, 2022.

⁷¹ Rauhala et al., "Turkey blocks start of NATO talks on Finland, Sweden"; State Department, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg at a Joint Press Availability," June 1, 2022.

⁷² Idiz, "How long can Erdogan sustain threat to veto Finnish, Swedish NATO bids?"; Zaman, "Turkey continues to play hard ball over Sweden, Finland NATO membership."

⁷³ Amberin Zaman, "Turkey continues to play hard ball over Sweden, Finland NATO membership," *Al-Monitor*, May 16, 2022.

⁷⁴ Idiz, "How long can Erdogan sustain threat to veto Finnish, Swedish NATO bids?"; Zaman, "Turkey continues to play hard ball over Sweden, Finland NATO membership."

⁷⁵ Rauhala et al., "Turkey blocks start of NATO talks on Finland, Sweden."

⁷⁶ 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).

⁷⁷ Burak Ege Bekdil, "Russian invasion of Ukraine is reviving Euro-Turkish fighter efforts," *Defense News*, March 9, 2022.

Russian S-400 Acquisition: Removal from F-35 Program and U.S. Sanctions

Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 system, which Turkey ordered in 2017 and Russia delivered in 2019,⁷⁸ has significant implications for Turkey's relations with Russia, the United States, and other NATO countries. As a direct result of the transaction, the Trump Administration removed Turkey from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program in July 2019, and imposed sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA, P.L. 115-44) on Turkey's defense procurement agency in December 2020.⁷⁹ In explaining the U.S. decision to remove Turkey from the F-35 program, then-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."⁸⁰

Before Turkey's July 2019 removal from the F-35 program, it had planned to purchase at least 100 U.S.-origin F-35s and was one of eight original consortium partners in the development and industrial production of the aircraft.⁸¹ 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. Turkish officials continue to publicly express hope that they can acquire the F-35 at some future time.

Turkish interest in procurement deals that feature technology sharing and co-production—thereby bolstering Turkey's domestic defense industry—may have affected its S-400 decision. Strengthening its defense industry became a priority for Turkey after the 1975-1978 U.S. arms embargo over Cyprus.⁸² Over time, Turkish companies have supplied an increased percentage of Turkey's defense needs, with equipment ranging from armored personnel carriers and naval vessels to drone aircraft. While Turkey's S-400 purchase reportedly did not feature technology sharing,⁸³ one reason Turkish officials favored the S-400 was a hope that it could open the door for future technology sharing on air defense with Russia.⁸⁴ Lack of agreement between the United States and Turkey on technology sharing regarding the Patriot system possibly contributed to Turkey's interest in considering non-U.S. options for air defense, including an abortive attempt from 2013 to 2015 to purchase a Chinese system.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ "Turkey, Russia sign deal on supply of S-400 missiles," *Reuters*, December 29, 2017. According to this source, Turkey and Russia reached agreement on the sale of at least one S-400 system for \$2.5 billion, with the possibility of a second system to come later.

⁷⁹ CRS Insight IN11557, *Turkey: U.S. Sanctions Under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

⁸⁰ Defense Department, "Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen M. Lord and Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy David J. Trachtenberg Press Briefing on DOD's Response to Turkey Accepting Delivery of the Russian S-400 Air and Missile Defense System," July 17, 2019.

⁸¹ A 2007 memorandum of understanding among the consortium participants is available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/102378.pdf>, and an earlier 2002 U.S.-Turkey agreement is available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/196467.pdf>. For information on the consortium and its members, see CRS Report RL30563, *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

⁸² Omar Lamrani, "Facing Sanctions, Turkey's Defense Industry Goes to Plan B," *Stratfor*, November 7, 2019.

⁸³ Aaron Stein, "Putin's Victory: Why Turkey and America Made Each Other Weaker," Foreign Policy Research Institute, July 29, 2019.

⁸⁴ Burak Ege Bekdil, "West's reluctance to share tech pushes Turkey further into Russian orbit," *Defense News*, January 10, 2020.

⁸⁵ Flanagan et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course*.

Other factors may have influenced Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400. One is Turkey's apparent desire to diversify its foreign arms sources.⁸⁶ Another is Turkish President Erdogan's possible interest in defending against U.S.-origin aircraft such as those used by some Turkish military personnel in the 2016 coup attempt.⁸⁷

Turkey has conducted some testing of the S-400 but has not made the system generally operational. President Erdogan stated in September 2021 that Turkey expected to purchase a second S-400 system.⁸⁸ Secretary of State Blinken warned Turkey that acquiring an additional system could lead to more U.S. sanctions under CAATSA.⁸⁹ Turkey may need to forgo possession or use of the S-400 in order to have CAATSA sanctions removed.

Possible F-16 Upgrades and Congressional Views

In the fall of 2021, Turkish officials stated that they had requested to purchase 40 new F-16 fighter aircraft from the United States and to upgrade 80 F-16s from Turkey's aging fleet. President Biden reportedly discussed the F-16 request with Erdogan during an October 2021 G20 meeting in Rome, indicating that the request would go through the regular arms sales consultation and notification process with Congress.⁹⁰

Turkey's value as a NATO ally amid a new crisis implicating European security—Russia's war on Ukraine—may have boosted the Administration's interest in moving forward with an F-16 transaction with Turkey. Responding to criticism of a possible F-16 sale from 53 Members of Congress in a February 2022 letter,⁹¹ a State Department official wrote in March that Turkey's support for Ukraine was “an important deterrent to malign influence in the region.”⁹² While acknowledging that any sale would require congressional notification, the official added, “The Administration believes that there are nonetheless compelling long-term NATO alliance unity and capability interests, as well as U.S. national security, economic and commercial interests that are supported by appropriate U.S. defense trade ties with Turkey.”⁹³

In April 2022, the Administration reportedly notified Congress informally of its intent to upgrade some of Turkey's existing F-16 fleet and provide short- and medium-range air-to-air missiles (Sidewinder AIM-9X and AMRAAM AIM-120D) at a total cost to Turkey of around \$500 million.⁹⁴ In November 2021, a Turkish defense expert described what upgrades of Turkey's F-16

⁸⁶ “Turkey is buying Russian missiles to diversify supply,” *Oxford Analytica*, January 26, 2018.

⁸⁷ 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.

⁸⁸ Humeyra Pamuk, “Erdogan says Turkey plans to buy more Russian defense systems,” *Reuters*, September 27, 2021.

⁸⁹ Tal Axelrod, “Blinken warns Turkey, US allies against purchasing Russian weapons,” *The Hill*, April 28, 2021.

⁹⁰ “Biden talks F-16s, raises human rights in meeting with Turkey's Erdogan,” *Reuters*, October 31, 2021; Diego Cupolo, “In troubled US-Turkey relations, F-16 deal seen as path for dialogue,” *Al-Monitor*, November 1, 2021. For background information, see CRS Report RL31675, *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process*, by Paul K. Kerr.

⁹¹ Text of letter available at <https://pallone.house.gov/sites/pallone.house.gov/files/20220123%20Letter%20on%20Turkey%20F-16%20Request.pdf>.

⁹² Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs Naz Durakoglu, quoted in Humeyra Pamuk, “U.S. says potential F-16 sale to Turkey would serve U.S. interests, NATO – letter,” *Reuters*, April 6, 2022.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Jared Malsin, “Biden Administration Asks Congress to Approve New Weapons Deal with Turkey,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 11, 2022; Daniel Flatley and Selcan Hacaoglu, “Turkey Wins Biden Backing for Its F-16 Fighter Jets Upgrades,” *Bloomberg*, May 12, 2022. For information on informal and formal congressional notifications, see CRS

aircraft to the Block 70/72 Viper configuration could entail, including a new radar, other software and hardware enhancements, and structural improvements that significantly extend each aircraft's service life.⁹⁵ Other countries that may receive new or upgraded F-16 Block 70/72 Vipers include Greece, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, Morocco, Bahrain, Bulgaria, the Philippines, and Slovakia.⁹⁶

U.S. sales to boost the capabilities and extend the lifespan of Turkey's F-16 fleet would provide Turkey time to develop its long-planned indigenous fifth-generation fighter aircraft, dubbed the TF-X and expected to come into operation over the next decade. Turkey is apparently seeking to partner with the United Kingdom (including companies BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce) to develop technology for the TF-X.⁹⁷ If unable to procure F-16s or F-16 upgrades to boost the Turkish air force's capabilities during the transition to the TF-X, Turkish officials had previously hinted that they might consider purchasing Russian Su-35 fighter aircraft.⁹⁸ After the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, Turkey's calculus reportedly changed. According to a Turkish defense analyst, "Security needs and politics dictate Ankara to remain within the NATO scope in its fighter jet inventory. The only viable options before Turkey flies the TF-X are the [Eurofighter] Typhoon, Saab [Gripen] and F-16 Block 70."⁹⁹

Turkey's support for Ukraine may be inclining some key Members of Congress toward accepting a possible U.S. upgrade or sale of F-16s for Turkey. After the S-400 transaction, some Members reportedly placed informal holds on major new U.S.-origin arms sales to Turkey, in the biggest disruption to U.S.-Turkey arms sales since the 1975-1978 embargo over Cyprus.¹⁰⁰ However, in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a May 2022 article interviewed some congressional committee leaders with oversight responsibilities for arms sales.¹⁰¹ Most signaled openness to considering F-16 transactions. Chairman Menendez remained skeptical, saying, "[Turkey] acts in ways that are contrary to our interests in a whole host of things. I think the administration has to stop seeing ... the aspirational part of what we would like Turkey to be and realize that Turkey is under Erdogan."¹⁰² In a later interview after Turkey announced conditions on its support for Swedish and Finnish NATO accession, House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Mike McCaul indicated that this Turkish stance could present problems for upgrading Turkey's F-16s.¹⁰³

With U.S. officials already having notified a possible upgrade of F-16s for Greece to Congress in 2021,¹⁰⁴ U.S. willingness to upgrade Turkish F-16s could have significant implications for the

Report RL31675, *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process*, by Paul K. Kerr.

⁹⁵ Arda Mevlutoglu, "F-16Vs Instead of F-35s: What's behind Turkey's Request?" *Politics Today*, November 22, 2021.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bekdil, "Russian invasion of Ukraine is reviving Euro-Turkish fighter efforts."

⁹⁸ Paul Iddon, "Here Are Turkey's Stopgap Options Until It Can Acquire Fifth-Generation Fighters," *forbes.com*, March 15, 2021.

⁹⁹ Bekdil, "Russian invasion of Ukraine is reviving Euro-Turkish fighter efforts."

¹⁰⁰ Valerie Insinna et al., "Congress has secretly blocked US arms sales to Turkey for nearly two years," *Defense News*, August 12, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Bryant Harris, "Congress signals openness to Turkey F-16 sale amid Ukraine cooperation," *Defense News*, May 4, 2022.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Bryant Harris, "Greece seeks to join F-35 program as it lobbies against Turkey F-16 sale," *Defense News*, May 17, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Greece – F-16 Sustainment Materiel and Services, Transmittal No. 21-49," August 3, 2021.

security balance between Turkey and Greece, and for relations involving the three countries.¹⁰⁵ Erdogan announced in May 2022 that he would no longer deal with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, after Mitsotakis appeared to raise concern about U.S.-Turkey arms transactions while addressing a May 17 joint session of Congress.¹⁰⁶ Turkey and Greece have long-standing disputes over maritime and airspace boundaries, energy exploration, and the status of Cyprus (see text box). A recent 2019-2020 spike in tensions has somewhat subsided, but during that time Greece strengthened its relations with the United States and a number of regional countries such as France, Israel, and Egypt.¹⁰⁷

Turkish Disputes Regarding Greece and Cyprus: Historical Background¹⁰⁸

Since the 1970s, disputes between Greece and Turkey over territorial rights in the Aegean Sea and broader Eastern Mediterranean have been a major point of contention, bringing the sides close to military conflict on several occasions. The disputes, which have their roots in territorial changes after World War I, revolve around contested borders involving the two countries' territorial waters, national airspace, exclusive economic zones, and continental shelves (see **Figure A-6**). These tensions are related to and further complicated by one of the region's major unresolved conflicts, the de facto political division of Cyprus along ethnic lines that dates from the 1974 military clash in which Turkish forces invaded parts of the island to prevent the ethnic Greek leadership from unifying Cyprus with Greece. The internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus, which has close ties to Greece, claims jurisdiction over the entire island, but its effective administrative control is limited to the southern two-thirds, where Greek Cypriots comprise a majority. Turkish Cypriots administer the northern third and are backed by Turkey, including a Turkish military contingent there since the 1974 clash.¹⁰⁹ In 1983, Turkish Cypriot leaders proclaimed this part of the island the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, although no country other than Turkey recognizes it.

Syria¹¹⁰

Turkey's involvement in Syria's conflict since 2011 has been complicated and costly and has severely strained U.S.-Turkey ties.¹¹¹ Turkey's priorities in Syria's civil war have evolved during the course of the conflict. While Turkey still opposes Syrian President Bashar al Asad, it has engaged in a mix of coordination and competition with Russia and Iran (which support Asad) on some matters since intervening militarily in Syria starting in August 2016. Turkey and the United States have engaged in similarly inconsistent interactions in northern Syria east of the Euphrates River where U.S. forces have been based.

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. Turkey's

¹⁰⁵ Aaron Stein, "You Go to War with the Turkey You Have, Not the Turkey You Want," *War on the Rocks*, May 30, 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Greek Prime Minister's website, "Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' address to the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress," May 17, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ See CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Turkey retains between 30,000 and 40,000 troops on the island (supplemented by several thousand Turkish Cypriot soldiers). This presence is countered by a Greek Cypriot force of approximately 12,000 with reported access to between 50,000 and 75,000 reserves. "Cyprus - Army," *Janes Sentinel Security Assessment - Eastern Mediterranean*, February 3, 2021. The United Nations maintains a peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP) of approximately 900 personnel within a buffer zone headquartered in Cyprus's divided capital of Nicosia. The United Kingdom maintains approximately 3,000 personnel at two sovereign base areas on the southern portion of the island at Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

¹¹⁰ See CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by Carla E. Humud.

¹¹¹ For background, see Burak Kadercan, "Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A 'Turkish Tragedy' in the Making," *War on the Rocks*, August 4, 2017.

government considers the YPG and its political counterpart, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), to be a major threat to Turkish security because of Turkish concerns that YPG/PYD gains have emboldened the PKK (which has links to the YPG/PYD) in its domestic conflict with Turkish authorities.¹¹² The YPG/PYD has a leading role within the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an umbrella group including Arabs and other non-Kurdish elements that became the main U.S. ground force partner against the Islamic State in 2015. Turkish-led military operations in October 2019 to seize areas of northeastern Syria from the SDF—after President Trump agreed to have U.S. Special Forces pull back from the border area—led to major criticism of and proposed action against Turkey in Congress.¹¹³

In May 2022, Erdogan said that Turkey was considering a military operation to expand areas of Turkish control in Syria as a means of countering YPG influence.¹¹⁴ In response, the State Department spokesperson recognized Turkey’s “legitimate security concerns” but condemned any escalation and said that the United States supports maintenance of the current ceasefire lines to avoid destabilization and putting U.S. forces at risk in the campaign against the Islamic State.¹¹⁵ In early June, Turkey announced plans that involve areas west of the Euphrates River away from U.S. forces, which are concentrated on the river’s east side (see **Figure A-7**).¹¹⁶ Russian officials also have raised some concerns about how a new Turkish offensive might escalate tensions and may seek to encourage greater Turkish coordination with Syrian government forces.¹¹⁷

In areas of northern Syria that Turkey has occupied since 2016, Turkey has set up local councils. These councils and associated security forces provide public services in these areas with funding, oversight, and training from Turkish officials. Questions persist about future governance and Turkey’s overarching role.

The Turkish military remains in a standoff with Russia and the Syrian government over the future of Syria’s northwestern province of Idlib, the last part of the country held by anti-Asad groups (including some with links to Al Qaeda). Turkey deployed troops to Idlib to protect it from Syrian government forces and prevent further refugee flows into Turkey. A limited outbreak of conflict in 2020 displaced hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians and caused several Turkish and Syrian casualties. Russian willingness to back Syrian operations in Idlib perhaps stems in part from Turkey’s unwillingness or inability to enforce a 2018 Turkey-Russia agreement by removing heavy weapons and “radical terrorist groups” from the province.¹¹⁸ Questions related to the Russia-Ukraine war about the effect of Turkish measures to limit Russian military access to Syria

¹¹² 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. For sources linking the PKK to the YPG (or PKK affiliates in Syria), see footnote 68.

¹¹³ Rachel Oswald, “Sanctions on Turkey go front and center as Congress returns,” rollcall.com, October 15, 2019.

¹¹⁴ Fehim Tastekin, “The stumbling blocks facing Turkey’s new operation plan in Syria,” *Al-Monitor*, May 30, 2022.

¹¹⁵ State Department Press Briefing, May 24, 2022. The United States and Russia established separate arrangements with Turkey in October 2019 for managing certain areas of northeast Syria. White House, “The United States and Turkey Agree to Ceasefire in Northeast Syria,” October 17, 2019; State Department, “Special Representative for Syria Engagement James F. Jeffrey Remarks to the Traveling Press,” October 17, 2019; President of Russia, “Memorandum of Understanding Between Turkey and the Russian Federation,” October 22, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Nazlan Ertan, “Erdogan announces military operations in Syria’s Manbij, Tal Rifaat,” *Al-Monitor*, June 1, 2022.

¹¹⁷ Fehim Tastekin, “Ukraine, Syria top Lavrov’s agenda in Turkey,” *Al-Monitor*, June 6, 2022.

¹¹⁸ Text of agreement available at <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/full-text-of-turkey-russia-memorandum-on-idlib-revealed-1.771953>.

by air and sea,¹¹⁹ and possible Russian moves to limit humanitarian access, could affect future developments.¹²⁰

Refugees in Turkey

Turkey hosts about 3.6 million Syrian refugees—more than any other country—along with hundreds of thousands from other countries.¹²¹ A few weeks after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine began, Turkey estimated that 20,000 Ukrainians had come to Turkey.¹²² Refugees' and other migrants' living situations, effect on Turkey's population, and access to employment, education, and public services vary based on the differing circumstances that they face. Turkey closed off most access to migrants from Syria in 2015¹²³ and has sought to repatriate refugees who are willing to return,¹²⁴ with a few hundred thousand reportedly having done so to date.¹²⁵ Reportedly, Turkish authorities have forcibly returned some refugees to Syria.¹²⁶

Per a 2016 Turkey-EU agreement to minimize the flow of migrants to the EU, Greece can return Syrian migrants to Turkey that come to its islands. As part of a structured process, the deal calls for the same number of people to be resettled from Turkey in EU countries.¹²⁷ The agreement also mandated EU economic assistance for refugees in Turkey. During some times of crisis, President Erdogan has threatened to open Turkey's borders to allow migrants into Greece and Bulgaria. Those countries implement security measures—with the assistance of the EU's border and coast guard agency—to minimize the number of crossings via land or sea, and some sources have criticized them for alleged ethical or international legal violations related to the treatment of refugees or migrants.¹²⁸

¹¹⁹ Dorian Jones, "Ankara Tightens Russian Access to Syria," *Voice of America*, May 10, 2022.

¹²⁰ Lara Jakes, "Fear That Russia Plans to Leverage Syrian Aid for an Edge in Ukraine," *New York Times*, June 1, 2022.

¹²¹ See <https://reporting.unhcr.org/turkey#toc-narratives>.

¹²² Nazlan Ertan, "Erdogan steps up pro-refugee rhetoric as 20,000 Ukrainians come to Turkey," *Al-Monitor*, March 17, 2022.

¹²³ Ceylan Yeginsu and Karam Shoumali, "Turkey Moves to Close All Gates at Border With Syria," *New York Times*, March 29, 2015.

¹²⁴ "Turkey talks with UN over returning Syrian refugees," *Associated Press*, September 12, 2021.

¹²⁵ Durrie Bouscaren, "Syrian refugees and migrants in Turkey face a difficult decision to return home," *The World*, September 23, 2021.

¹²⁶ Sultan al-Kanj, "Turkey forcibly deports dozens of Syrians," *Al Monitor*, February 8, 2022.

¹²⁷ Text of agreement available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>.

¹²⁸ "Greece: Pushbacks and violence against refugees and migrants are de facto border policy," Amnesty International, June 23, 2021; "Bulgaria: Pushbacks Escalate as Government Discusses Reinforcements at Borders," European Council on Refugees and Exiles, September 10, 2021.

Appendix A. Maps, Facts, and Figures

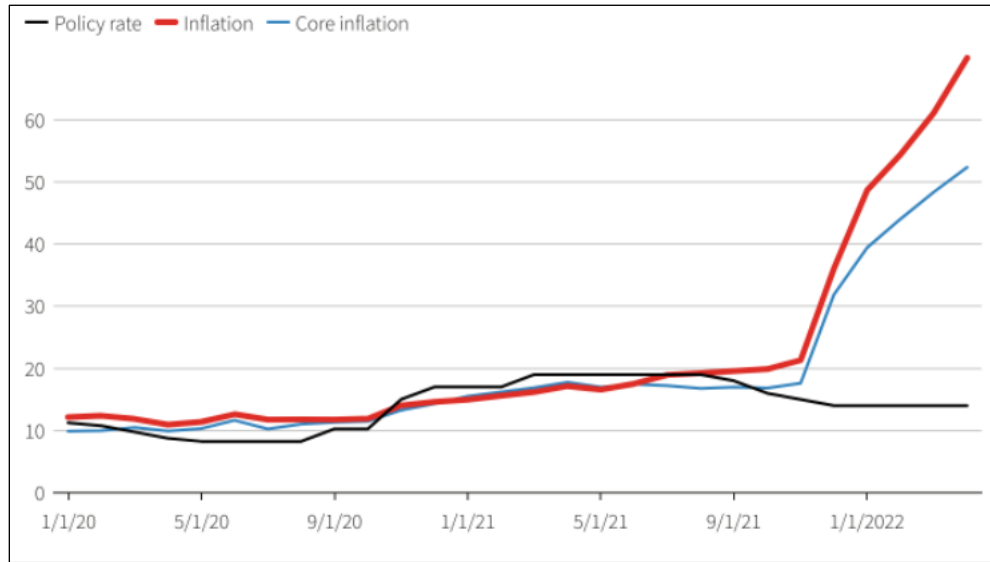
Figure A-I. Turkey at a Glance



Geography	Area: 783,562 sq km (302,535 sq. mile), slightly larger than Texas
People	<p>Population: 83,047,706</p> <p>Most populous cities: Istanbul 15.6 mil, Ankara 5.3 mil, Izmir 3.1 mil, Bursa 2.1 mil, Adana 1.8 mil, Gaziantep 1.8 mil.</p> <p>% of Population 14 or Younger: 23.4%</p> <p>Ethnic Groups: Turks 70%-75%; Kurds 19%; Other minorities 6%-11% (2016)</p> <p>Religion: Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), Others (mainly Christian and Jewish) 0.2%</p> <p>Literacy: 96.7% (male 99.1%, female 94.4%) (2019)</p>
Economy	<p>GDP Per Capita (at purchasing power parity): \$37,488</p> <p>Real GDP Growth: 2.7%</p> <p>Inflation: 60.5%</p> <p>Unemployment: 11.3%</p> <p>Budget Deficit as % of GDP: 4.8%</p> <p>Public Debt as % of GDP: 43.3%</p> <p>Current Account Deficit as % of GDP: 5.7%</p>

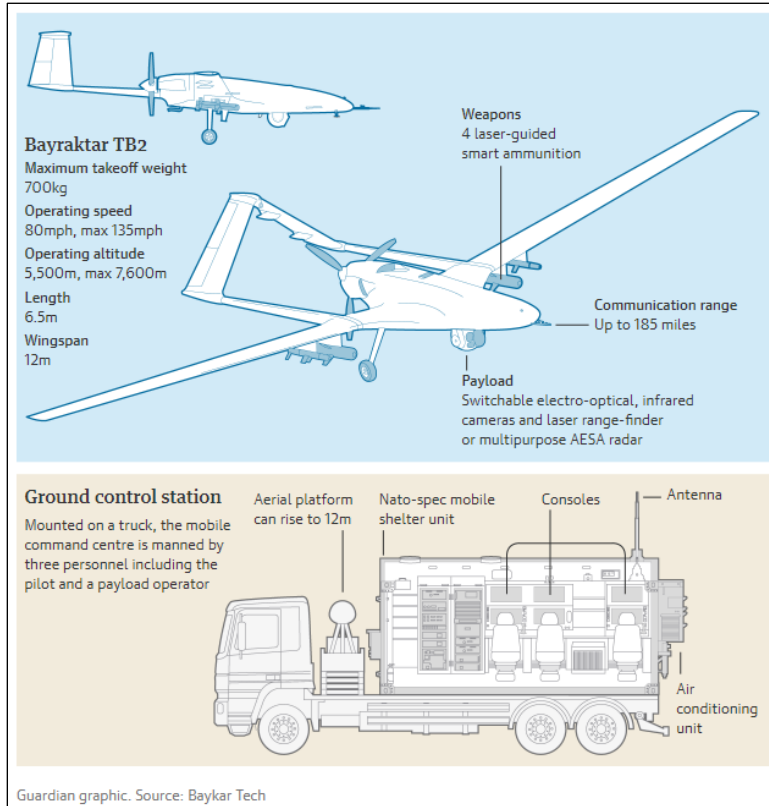
Sources: Graphic created by CRS. Map boundaries and information generated by Hannah Fischer using Department of State Boundaries (2011); Esri (2014); ArcWorld (2014); DeLorme (2014). Fact information (2022 estimates or forecasts unless otherwise specified) from International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database; Economist Intelligence Unit; and Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*.

Figure A-2. Turkey: Annual Inflation Rate



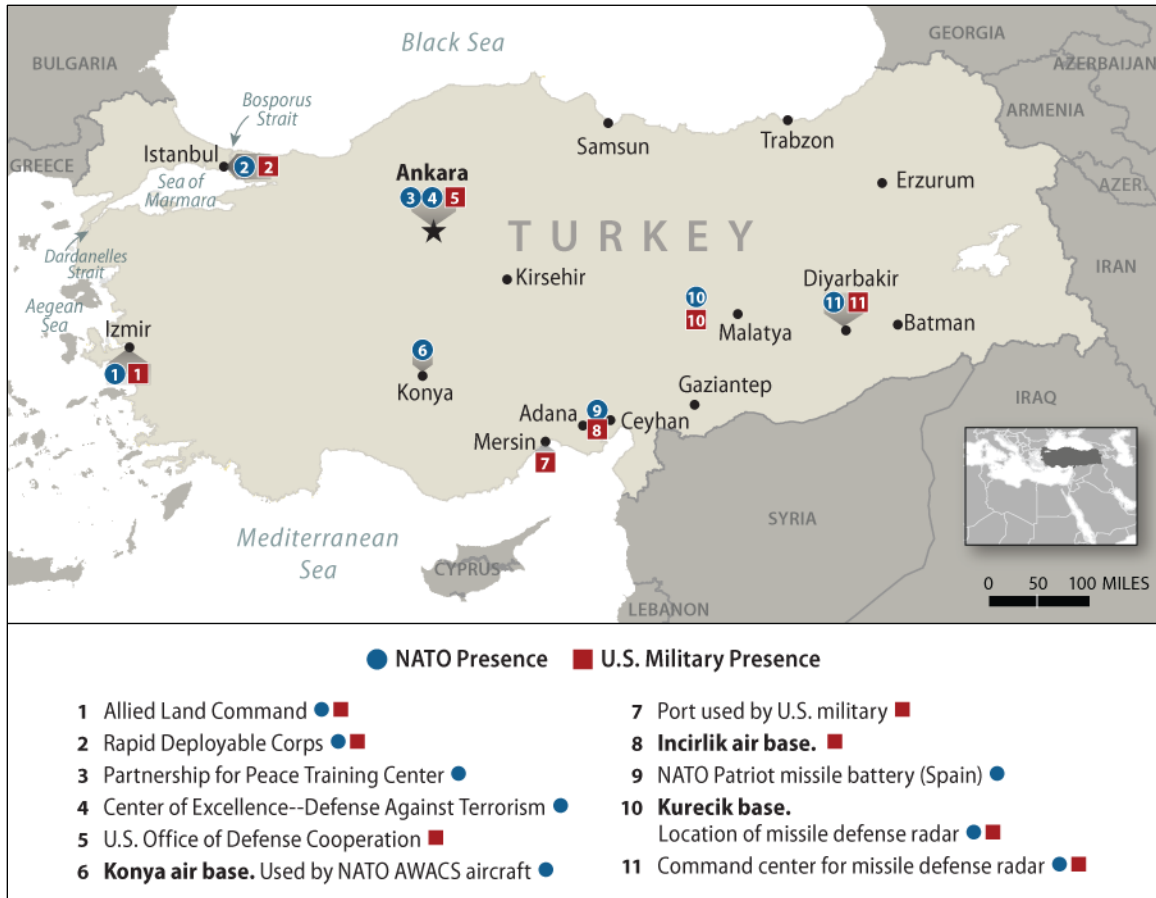
Sources: Reuters (May 2022) using data from the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey and Turkish Statistical Institute.

Figure A-3. Bayraktar TB2 Drone



Guardian graphic. Source: Baykar Tech

Figure A-4. Map of U.S. and NATO Military Presence in Turkey



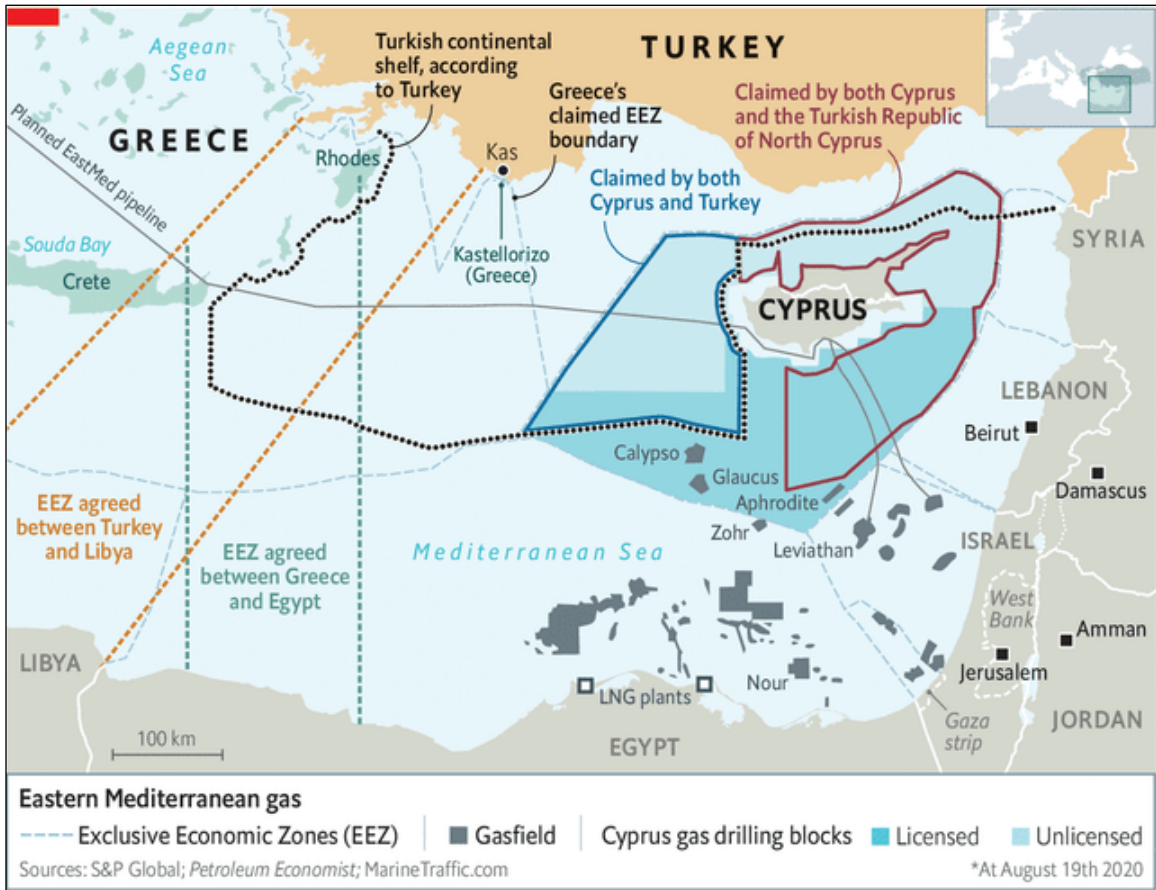
Sources: Created by CRS using data gathered from the Department of Defense, NATO, and various media outlets since 2011.

Note: All locations are approximate.

Figure A-5. Map of Black Sea Region and Turkish Straits

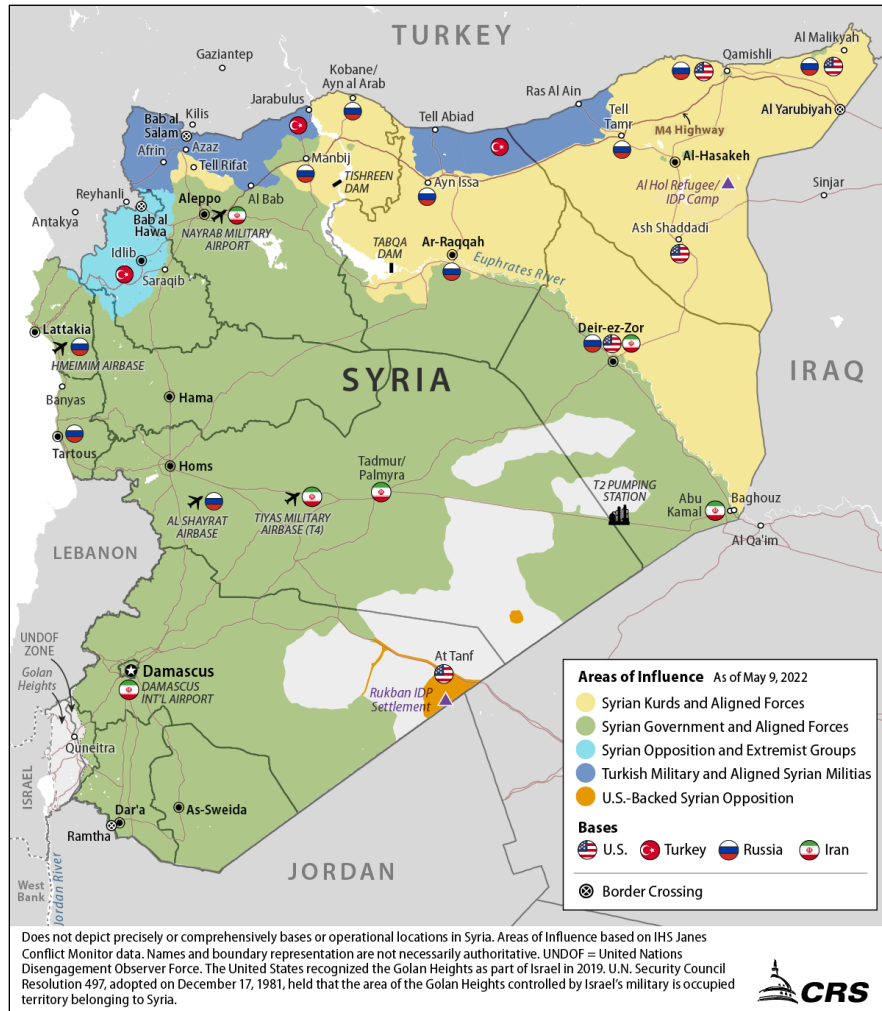


Figure A-6. Competing Claims in the Eastern Mediterranean



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

Figure A-7. Syria Conflict Map



Appendix B. Relations with Israel and Arab States

Since the 2010s, Turkey's relations with Israel and with Sunni Arab governments that support traditional authoritarian governance models in the region—notably Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt—have been fraught with tension. Under President Erdogan, Turkey and Israel have clashed politically over Israel's handling of Palestinian issues and Turkey's support for the Sunni Islamist group Hamas (a U.S.-designated terrorist organization), even though the countries have continued to expand trade ties.¹²⁹ The Sunni Arab governments have regarded Turkey with suspicion largely because of the Turkish government's sympathies for Islamist political groups and its close relationship with Qatar.¹³⁰

Developments in Libya increased the overlap between Turkey's disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean and its rivalries with the Sunni Arab governments because they supported opposing sides in Libya's civil war. In late 2019, Turkey signed an agreement with Libya's then-Government of National Accord (GNA) on maritime boundaries, complicating the legal and economic picture in the Eastern Mediterranean. Tensions spiked further after Greece and Egypt reached a maritime boundary agreement in August 2020 that ignores the 2019 Turkey-Libya deal.

In the past year, however, Turkey has sought rapprochement with some of its regional rivals. The potential economic benefits could help alleviate Turkey's financial crisis ahead of closely contested presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023. For example, Erdogan and UAE President Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid al Nuhayyan have visited each other in recent months, and the two countries have signed a currency swap deal along with many other agreements on economic cooperation and investment.¹³¹ Additionally, figures indicate that Turkish trade with Saudi Arabia increased year-on-year by 25% in the first quarter of 2022.¹³² In April 2022, Erdogan visited Saudi Arabia after Turkey transferred jurisdiction to the Saudis over the trial Turkey had previously convened for Jamal Khashoggi's murder. One media report anticipates UAE investment in Turkey's defense industry and Turkish defense exports to the Gulf—potentially including drones, air defense systems, and various air, sea, and land platforms.¹³³

Moreover, Israel and Turkey have shown signs of improving ties over the past year. The two countries maintain diplomatic relations but have not had ambassadors stationed in each other's country since 2018.

Israeli openness to rapprochement with Turkey may stem from a confluence of factors, including

- Potentially greater Turkish willingness to reduce its support for Hamas in hopes of better political and economic relations with Israel and other key U.S. partners in the region (Sunni Arab governments such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia)—partly to improve Turkey's image in Washington. Some reports from early 2022

¹²⁹ Kemal Kirisci and Dan Arbell, "President Herzog's visit to Ankara: A first step in normalizing Turkey-Israel relations?" Brookings Institution, March 7, 2022.

¹³⁰ Flanagan et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course*; Andrew England, et al., "UAE vs Turkey: the regional rivalries pitting MBZ against Erdogan," *Financial Times*, October 26, 2020.

¹³¹ "UAE and Turkey central banks seek further co-operation after currency swap deal," *The National*, February 17, 2022.

¹³² Sinem Cengiz, "Echoes from President Erdoğan's Saudi Arabia Visit: A Fresh Start?" *Politics Today*, May 5, 2022.

¹³³ Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey's policy changes could see defense biz grow with Gulf rivals," *Defense News*, March 1, 2022.

- hinted at Turkey’s willingness to expel Hamas members allegedly involved in militant operations from its territory.¹³⁴
- Increasing Israeli focus on how relations with Turkey and other regional countries might help counter Iran.
- The 2021 leadership change from the Netanyahu government to the Bennett-Lapid power-sharing government.

In March 2022, Israeli President Isaac Herzog visited Turkey. In May, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu visited Israel (and the West Bank), and the two countries anticipate future bilateral meetings and steps to improve political and economic relations. President Erdogan and other top Turkish officials have made public statements expressing interest in energy cooperation with Israel. However, Israeli officials reportedly remain skeptical about prospects for a subsea Israel-Turkey natural gas pipeline.¹³⁵ While Israel has pursued greater high-level interaction with Turkey, it may be cautious about significant near-term improvements in bilateral relations, and appears to remain committed to close strategic ties with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus.¹³⁶

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¹³⁴ Ariel Kahana, “Report: Israel, Turkey working to deport Hamas officials from Ankara,” *Israel Hayom*, February 15, 2022; Ofer Bengio, “Turkey Finds Israel Useful Again,” *Tablet*, March 13, 2022.

¹³⁵ Lazar Berman, “FM’s visit shows Turkey eager to accelerate reconciliation, but Israel more cautious,” *Times of Israel*, May 24, 2022. While such a pipeline may be the most feasible pipeline option for transporting Eastern Mediterranean natural gas to Europe, political and economic obstacles may make liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports from liquefaction terminals in Egypt a more practical option. “Turkey best option for East Med gas transit to Europe: Experts,” *Daily Sabah*, March 10, 2022; Sean Mathews, “Russia-Ukraine war: Conflict boosts hopes for East Mediterranean energy, experts say,” *Middle East Eye*, April 5, 2022.

¹³⁶ “Summit in Ankara: Turkey is wooing a reluctant Israel,” *Americans for Peace Now*, March 14, 2022.