



Updated January 4, 2019

Turkey-U.S. Relations: Timeline and Brief Historical Context

This timeline tracks major developments from the beginning of close U.S.-Turkey ties after World War II to the present. The information provides context for lawmakers assessing the tenor and trajectory of current bilateral relations on issues ranging from general strategic cooperation to timely regional concerns (Syria and Iraq, Kurds, Islamic State) and domestic Turkish politics.

Early Cold War Partners (1945-1962)

Soviet pressure on the Turkish government to allow free passage through the Turkish straits (the Bosphorus and Dardanelles) and its territorial claims in eastern Anatolia threatened to precipitate hostilities between the two states, whose predecessors (the Russian and Ottoman Empires) had fought 12 wars over the preceding four centuries. Turkey turned to the United States for support. Mutual opposition to Soviet expansion would underpin Turkey-U.S. ties in the coming decades.

- 1945 Turkey declares war on Germany and Japan in February; becomes founding member of the United Nations
- 1946 In response to Soviet demands on Turkey for shared administration of the straits, the United States counters Soviet pressure by sending ships to Turkish waters
- 1947 Congress designates Turkey (along with Greece) a special recipient of anti-Soviet aid under the **Truman Doctrine**
- 1950 Turkish troops join U.S.-U.N. forces in the Korean War
- 1952 Turkey becomes a member of **NATO**
- 1954 U.S. and Turkey agree to joint use of what becomes **Incirlik air base**; U.S. and Turkey sign first status of forces agreement
- 1955 Turkey helps form Baghdad Pact to resist Soviet aggression
- 1960 **First military coup** in Turkey; civilian rule returns with elections in 1961
- 1962 Resolution of **Cuban Missile Crisis** includes U.S. agreement to remove nuclear-armed Jupiter missiles (judged by the U.S. to be obsolete) from Turkey.

Allies amid Challenges (1963-1978)

U.S.-Turkey relations were particularly challenged by Turkey's frequent clashes with fellow NATO member Greece over the ethnically divided island of Cyprus. Anti-Americanism grew as Turks increasingly debated the benefits and drawbacks of the bilateral relationship.

- 1964 Letter from President Lyndon Johnson to Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu (known as the "Johnson Letter") communicates U.S. opposition to Turkish intervention in **Cyprus** after ethnic Greek-Turkish power sharing breaks down
- 1971 Turkey's **second military coup** occurs with the government's resignation amid increasing street violence; elections resume in 1973
- 1974 Turkey, using U.S.-supplied equipment, occupies the northern third of the island of Cyprus (an occupation that has continued to the present) on behalf of Turkish Cypriot minority, following a coup that installed a more pro-Greek government on the island
- 1975 Congress freezes aid and imposes **arms embargo** on Turkey for its actions in Cyprus
- Turkey abrogates U.S. status of forces agreement; takes control of U.S. installations; U.S. forces performing NATO functions remain
- 1978 After intense lobbying by multiple presidential administrations and several votes to partially lift the embargo, Congress fully repeals it

Renewed Military Cooperation (1980-1991)

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iranian revolution heightened the strategic importance of the Turkey-U.S. relationship for American interests in the broader Middle East.

- 1980 United States and Turkey sign Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement
- Turkey's **third coup** in response to social and political turmoil; elections resume in 1983
- 1984 Kurdistan Workers' Party (**PKK**) begins significant operations in its armed insurgency in southeastern Turkey
- 1991 Turkey allows the use of its airspace and bases for U.S. and coalition aircraft participating in Gulf War and for the postwar patrolling of northern Iraq

Reassessment (1991-2002)

Turkey's relative importance for U.S. policymakers declined in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but focus remained on a number of regional developments involving Turkey.

1991-1992	United States announces closure of 8 of its 12 military bases in Turkey; and major U.S. military grant aid to Turkey discontinued in post-Cold War environment
1992	PKK-led Kurdish insurgency intensifies in Turkey
1994	Congress enacts legislation withholding military loans to Turkey until the executive branch submits a report on alleged human rights violations related to Turkey-PKK violence
1996	Turkey-Israel military cooperation agreement
1997	Turkish military compels the replacement of a coalition government led by an Islamist prime minister U.S. designation of PKK as foreign terrorist organization
1999	Turkey captures PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan with reported U.S. assistance; PKK declares cease-fire
2001	Turkey joins the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, participating mostly in a training capacity

AKP and the Middle East (2003-2012)

After the 2002 election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (known in Turkish as the AKP), and Erdogan's election as prime minister in 2003, Turkey-U.S. relations were shaped by Turkey's growing economic and political clout in the Middle East.

2003	Turkish parliamentary votes do not allow U.S. invasion of Iraq from Turkey, but do allow U.S. use of Turkish bases for overflight of Iraq after U.S.-led occupation of Iraq "Hood incident" involving U.S. military detainment of Turkish special forces occurs in Iraq, fueling anti-American sentiment
2004	PKK resumes insurgency and attacks against Turkey from safe havens in northern Iraq
2007	U.S. begins close military and intelligence cooperation with Turkey against PKK in northern Iraq
2010	Turkey downgrades ties with Israel after an Israeli raid on the privately-owned ship <i>Mavi Marmara</i> (part of an activist-led flotilla seeking humanitarian relief for the Gaza Strip) leaves eight Turkish citizens dead
2010	Turkey and Brazil unsuccessfully oppose enhanced U.N. Security Council sanctions against Iran in relation to its nuclear program
2011	Turkey agrees to U.S./NATO deployment of missile defense radar on its territory and agrees to NATO operations in Libya

Cooperation and Contention (2013-Present)

A U.S.-led coalition has staged anti-Islamic State operations from Turkish bases, and NATO helps to reinforce security at Turkey's southern border. However, U.S. and Turkish priorities differ in Syria and elsewhere. Domestic contention in Turkey, including the July 2016 coup attempt and Erdogan's increased consolidation of political control, and closer Turkish relations with Russia have further complicated bilateral relations.

2013	Nationwide protests and corruption allegations increase domestic and Western criticism of Erdogan and his government PKK declares cease-fire as Ocalan negotiates with Turkey
2014	U.S.-Turkey differences deepen in Syria over jihadists' alleged use of Turkish territory , U.S. support for Syrian Kurds aligned with the PKK, and other issues.
2015	After some Islamic State-linked terror attacks in Turkey, Turkey permits coalition airstrikes in Syria and Iraq; Turkey-PKK violence resumes
2016	After July coup attempt, Turkey requests that the U.S. extradite influential Turkish figure Fethullah Gulen , and begins direct military operations in Syria to counter the Islamic State and Kurdish-led forces Turkey enters diplomatic process for Syria with Russia and Iran
2017	U.S. begins directly arming Kurdish forces against Turkish wishes Constitutional changes expanding presidential powers approved by popular referendum Turkey detains several U.S. citizens and Turkish employees of U.S. diplomatic facilities Turkey preliminarily agrees to purchase S-400 missile defense system from Russia
2018	President Erdogan wins reelection as Turkey transitions to its new presidential system of governance amid economic turbulence Trump Administration and Congress warn that a Turkish S-400 purchase could halt the transfer of F-35 aircraft to Turkey; the Administration seeks to sell Patriot systems to Turkey as an alternative to the S-400. Turkey intervenes directly against Syrian Kurdish forces in Afrin province and threatens additional action in Syria as U.S. announces plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria.

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