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TURKEY AND THE UNITED STATES ON THE BRINK: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO AND THE US-TURKISH STRATEGIC AND MILITARY PARTNERSHIP

Kamal A. Beyoghlou



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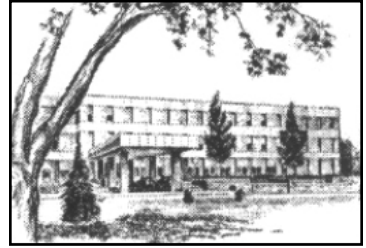


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INTRODUCTION

If we lose our identity, character and individuality, we will get lost among the masses. That's why we say, 'One nation, one flag, one country, one state.' These principles are the safety locks of our independence and future.

—Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of Turkey, excerpt from speech delivered on March 3, 2017.

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.

—Excerpt from *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee.

The US-Turkish strategic partnership established at the end of World War II reached its climax in the late eighties, and is at a dangerous crossroad. Such an outcome has had a devastating effect on Turkey's relationship with other Western partners, especially NATO, which has been the backbone of America's defense alliance since the start of the Cold War. This situation, if it continues, is likely to force the unraveling of NATO as a cohesive organization at a time when it is facing a myriad of collective global security challenges, particularly in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan—far beyond its traditional defensive posture on the European continent. All is not lost, however, and with more diligent diplomatic and military-to-military dialogue and compromises, US-Turkish relations can be salvaged.

States with long and deep commitments to one another seldom experience the kind of political and military distrust and uncertainties characterizing the current state of affairs between Turkey and its traditional Western allies, including the United States. Much of the ongoing tensions can be traced to the American-led interventions in Iraq and Syria, as well as to other fundamental strategic disagreements over how best to shape the future of the Greater Middle East and North Africa. Although some agencies within the US government have had differences with Turkey over the latter's increasingly authoritarian bent, not all elements within the US government are in agreement with the reasons or path forward. No one factor can be attributed to the new authoritarian trend in Turkey. After all, the majority of the Turkish public, through elections and referendums, has given President Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) the mandate they need to rule and change the political rules of the game in Turkey. Moreover, Turkey's deeply fragmented political system and its weak political parties have played a role in the changes in the nature and the character of Turkey's political system from a military authoritarian one to a civilian authoritarian one.

From Turkey's perspective, the United States and NATO have turned upside down the game plans of others in the region, chief among them Turkey's ruling AKP and its leader, President Erdogan. Using some imagination, one can foresee the adverse impacts American operational and tactical moves have had on Turkey since the invasion of Iraq in 2003; and more recently, since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. America's sponsorship, training, and military support of the Kurd-dominated Arab democratic

force in Syria—a compilation of predominantly Kurdish fighters and supporters affiliated with the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD); its military wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG); and the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), fighters which Turkey considers its most dangerous political and military nemeses—have strained US-Turkish relations and impacted Turkish public opinion of the United States in a negative way. Turkey views Western military and logistical support for Kurds in Syria and Iraq as inimical to its broader regional interest of containing Kurdish nationalism in Turkey and beyond and preventing the emergence of Syrian Kurdish enclaves close to its southeast borders, where the bulk of Turkish Kurds reside. Turkey’s long-term position on any autonomous or federated Kurdish enclaves in surrounding regional states could invite calls by Turkish Kurds for similar calls and encourage the PKK—a US-designated terror organization—to continue carrying out cross-border attacks on Turkish institutions and territory.

Although there has been no indication so far that rules of engagement involving US military trainees and special forces units have changed as far as Turkey’s security along its southeastern frontier is concerned, the potential for serious clashes between the Turkish military and the Syrian Kurds has been growing following the fall of Raqqa, the seat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s (ISIS’s) caliphate in Syria and Iraq. Since the summer of 2012, the Turkish media has frequently reported incidents of Turkish fighter jets and ground forces taking off from their bases to chase off Syrian Kurdish units operating too close

to Turkey's border.¹ Ankara-backed Syrian groups fighting Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime have emerged as the main beneficiary of these rules of engagement, which have effectively served as a Turkish cover for the country's military and logistical operations in border regions, especially since the fall of the Syrian town of Afrin and the expulsion of Kurdish fighters from there by Turkish troops and their Muslim Syrian Sunni fighter allies, including the Free Syrian Army, on March 18, 2018.

Anti-Americanism in Turkey appears to be increasing as the war in Syria continues unabated. These attitudes, if they persist, are likely to adversely affect the resiliency of the traditional partnership among the United States, Turkey, and NATO—especially the military-to-military relationship—including basing rights and other defense commitments enshrined in NATO's declaration of principles. Turkey is already moving toward an uneasy strategic alliance with Russia and Iran to address the future of Syria and to diversify its logistical and military weapon purchases and ultimate dependency beyond NATO. The proposed Turkish purchase of the S-400 air defense system from Russia to compensate for Turkey's gap in air defense capability and the consummation of a long-standing nuclear power deal following years of delicate negotiations between Russia and Turkey will most certainly have profound security implications for the United States, NATO, and the Middle Eastern and North African states. The S-400 acquisition by Turkey poses two problems for NATO: (1) a lack of interoperability with existing NATO platforms and (2) fear

1. Gunay Yildiz, "Turkey's War with PKK Reaches New Peak," *BBC News*, September 21, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19650034>.

that increased military cooperation between Russia and Turkey could expose NATO platforms to Russian espionage activities, ultimately undermine Turkey's resolve and commitment to NATO, and weaken the organization. Russian President Vladimir Putin has long sought to weaken NATO, which he considers an existential threat to his state.

FROM PARTNERS TO UNSETTLED RELATIONS

US-Turkey strategic relations are complicated because of differing cultural and political values and competing priorities, but they were not always as problematic as they are today. With the end of the Second World War, Turkey shifted away from its interwar-period stance of neutrality toward a more robust alliance with NATO and the United States. Though Turkey received many benefits when it entered into the Western orbit, the country also acquired structural problems that persist to this day. At the international level, Turkey benefited from the Marshall Plan by bursting out from its self-imposed isolation of the interwar period into the global arena. Turkish reconstruction workers were admitted liberally to Germany and other Western European countries without visa restrictions as guest workers, and the new international trade and monetary system created at Bretton Woods helped Turkey's sluggish economy get a jumpstart as the country moved from a one-party to a multiparty political system in the 1950s. The United States also established close bilateral relations with Turkey, supporting its military and security services—a trademark of the new Turkish republic under its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—while urging Western-style democratization and protection of human and civil

rights. For the next 50 years, Turkish-US relations were based on this military-to-military foundation as a result of the Cold War and fear of the communist domino effect in the Greater Middle East, including Iran, Greece, and Turkey. As a result, Turkey joined NATO, sent troops to augment the UN-led forces on the Korean Peninsula during the Korean War, and integrated its weapon- and intelligence-gathering platforms with those of NATO and the United States. Turkey was the first state in the Muslim-majority Middle East to recognize the state of Israel in 1949. Despite Turkish public opposition, the move was supported by the pro-Western Turkish General Staff. Turkey, along with Israel, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, would become the first line of defense against communist penetration in the region.²

There were, however, differences between the United States and Turkey over the status of Cypriot Turkish minorities in the 1960s and 1970s. The Johnson administration warned Turkey's military-led government against sending troops to Cyprus in support of the newly established Turkish enclaves in the 1960s, which Turkey accepted reluctantly. But no sooner than the Vietnam War was winding down, Turkey once again raised the specter of protecting Turkish Muslim Cypriot minorities following the takeover of the entire island by a military junta closely aligned with its counterpart in Athens in 1974.³ Turkey invaded Cyprus on

2. George Lenczowski, "Doctrinal Foundations," in *Soviet Advances in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1972), 5-22; and George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 57-165.

3. Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003), 117-124; Michael A. Reynolds, *Echoes of Empire: Turkey's Crisis of*

July 20, 1974, and immediately occupied one-third of the island. To this day, Turkey still maintains over 45,000 troops there, complicating its relationship with Greece—a fellow NATO member—and contributing to occasional political tensions as a result of historical animosities and border disputes along Turkey’s Aegean coast. More recently, Turkey and Greece have been locked into a new dispute over the defection of Turkish officers to Greece following the July 2016 failed coup in Turkey. Turkey has accused the officers of complicity in the coup, but Greece refuses to extradite them back to Turkey, citing EU human- and civil-rights protocols and the rule of law against potential Turkish mistreatment and torture and its unfair trial system.⁴

Kemalism and the Search for an Alternative Foreign Policy (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2012), iii–33; and Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey* (New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2004), 109–125. A comprehensive approach on the Cyprus problem can be found in Ahmet Sozen, *Reflections on the Cyprus Problem: A Compilation of Recent Academic Contributions* (Northern Cyprus: Eastern Mediterranean University Press, 2007). Also see Joseph S. Joseph, “Cyprus: Domestic Ethnopolitical Conflict and International Relations,” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 15, no. 1 (December 2009): 376–397.

4. Michele Kambas, “Greece on Turkey Asylum Row: Democracies Cannot Threaten or Be Threatened,” *Reuters*, December 31, 2017; “Turkey, Greece Trade Barbs Over Arrestees,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 3, 2018; and “Turkey Arrests 2 Greek Soldiers Who Strayed into Country,” *Associated Press*, March 2, 2018. Turkey wants to exchange the two with the Turkish military defectors and asylum seekers in Greece. Earlier, President Erdogan had suggested changes to the Lausanne Treaty that ended Turkey’s War of Liberation against Greece after the Great War. Greece has refused to concede on all of these issues, including the Lausanne Treaty that settled the border issue between Turkey and Greece, except for a few Aegean islands still in dispute today; “Lausanne Treaty Needs to Be Revised for Turks in Greece, Erdogan Says on Athens Visit,” *Daily Sabah*, December 7, 2017. Turkish press

Despite these bumps in the road, Turkey's military and security cooperation with its US and NATO partners and with Israel remained strong throughout the Cold War because of the Soviet threat. Turkey continued to benefit from these associations as it continued to strengthen its formidable military institution, long considered by the general Turkish public as highly professional and uncorrupted by the political bickering that had plagued Turkish political parties since the early 1950s. The military was seen as bringing stability and security to the state through accepted coups as corrective measures, as long as the military eventually relinquished power to civilian control. Usually, such coups followed periods of lawlessness, leading to party-inspired, if not party-directed, violence; political and economic stagnation; and domestic, political instability. Whereas the United States supported these corrective measures by the Turkish military for the sake of safeguarding Turkey's domestic tranquility and commitments to NATO and US strategic interests, the United States, along with its Western European partners, continued to press Turkey's military toward a more transparent political system and the protection of human and civil rights the military had violated repeatedly since 1960, especially following the 1980 coup.⁵

reports on August 14, 2018, said the two Greek soldiers had been released and sent back to Greece in an effort by the Erdogan government to reduce tensions with Turkey's neighbor, Greece.

5. Pope and Pope, *Turkey Unveiled*, 141-157. These irritants in Turkey's relations with its Western allies, including the United States—especially the development of nondemocratic, military-sponsored, and unsponsored, authoritarian regimes—continue to this day to scuttle progress toward better relations between Turkey and its allies on many fronts. With the advent of AKP's power in 2002 and the rise of the current President of

These irritants in Turkey's relations with its Western allies, including the United States, continue to scuttle progress toward better relations between Turkey and its allies on many fronts. With the rise of the AKP to power in 2002 and the rise of President Erdogan, Turkey's authoritarian tendencies have been transformed from being military in nature to becoming a civilian trademark.

From 2002 to 2010, the AKP under then-Prime Minister Erdogan achieved two major accomplishments – namely, the transformation of its military and unprecedented economic growth.⁶ As a result of failed attempts to seize power in July 2016, as it did successfully in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997, the Turkish military today has been purged, and most of its high-ranking officers have either retired, been imprisoned pending trials, or are serving long jail sentences. Although Erdogan has used the attempted coup to increase his political fortunes, there is no doubt he survived an assassination attempt on July 15, 2016, while vacationing in Marmaris.

Erdogan is the commander-in-chief of a very different armed forces today than the one that existed prior to 2002. He, along with his former loyalist Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim, who is currently speaker of the Parliament, influences military appointments and deployment decisions, dismissing at will officers suspected of being disloyal to the AKP regime or who have the potential to overthrow the government by

Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's authoritarian tendencies has been transformed from being military in nature to becoming a civilian trademark, much to the displeasure of Turkey's allies.

6. "Turkey – Sustained and Equitable Growth for Continued Economic Success," World Bank, April 20, 2012, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2012/04/20/turkey-sustained-and-equitable-growth-for-continued-economic-success>.

force. As a result, Turkey's armed forces have suffered recently from readiness issues associated with personnel instability, logistics, and military equipment. Even the Turkish General Staff, which used to be an independent body, has been brought under the Ministry of Defense to better control its officer corps.⁷

Turkey's relations with the Western alliance, and especially the United States, also experienced a downturn following the Arab popular uprisings in 2011. Unlike its NATO partners, Turkey objected to the overthrow of Libya's Muammar Gadhafi because Turkish companies stood to lose lucrative construction contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars. It only reluctantly changed its position to avoid being left out of any pending Libyan political arrangements following Gadhafi's overthrow.

DISAGREEMENT OVER SYRIA

Turkey's original approach to the Syrian uprising against President Assad differed markedly in the beginning from that of the United States. Prior to the Arab popular uprisings in 2011 and in Syria, in particular, Turkey sought to develop an independent political and diplomatic strategy vis-à-vis the Syrian regime of President Assad. This strategy was based

7. Lars Haugom, *An Uncertain Future for the Turkish Armed Forces* (Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies, September 2017). In a scathing article against President Erdogan's control over the Turkish military—ironically a Western democratic imperative of civilian control over the military—a noted Turkey scholar, Steven Cook, argues that Erdogan's recent actions vis-à-vis his military are increasingly leading to the politicization of the military, thus resulting in decline in general morale, preparedness, and readiness. Steven A. Cook, "General Erdogan's First War," *Foreign Policy*, February 7, 2018, www.foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/07/general-erdogans-first-war/.

on Prime Minister Davutoglu's dictum of "zero problem with neighbors" and "strategic depth" – the idea that Turkey's national heritage rests on deep historical and cultural ties to its past and to its regional Muslim-state neighbors to the east. Davutoglu made over 60 cordial visits to Damascus to woo Assad away from his close ties to Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon at the regional level and from Russia at the international level. In return, Turkey offered to help Syria in its bid to recover the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since the Six Day War in 1967 and a key sticking point in previous negotiations between Israel and Syria.⁸ Turkey attempted similar peace overtures between Israel and the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, and also the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. Prime Minister Erdogan and his family established a close familial relationship with Assad, and Turkish firms flourished in the Aleppo region of Syria under several joint-venture arrangements made between 2002 and 2011. As the situation inside Syria began to deteriorate in 2011, Turkey advised Assad to bring about much-needed economic and political reforms to no avail. Assad simply refused, equating such pleas with Turkish desires to weaken his grip on power, which he had inherited from his father, Hafez, in June 2000 as a family-run authoritarian enterprise. By 2012, Turkish strategy toward Syria and the Arab World began to shift in the direction of regime change and support for moderate Sunni Muslim uprisings against Arab regimes, including Assad's. Turkey felt it could

8. "Turkey's Davutoglu Gives Arab Spring Lecture in US," *Hurriyet Daily News*, February 11, 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-davutoglu-gives-arab-spring-lecture-in-us-13532>.

transform the region to serve its strategic interests and growing influence.⁹

The United States welcomed the new support from Turkey for regime change in Damascus, and the two allies' interests temporarily converged. As the civil war in Syria dragged on, however, and a clear outcome became increasingly elusive, fissures in the Turkish-American alliance began to surface. This development was exacerbated by the huge influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey, estimated in late 2017 to be about three million, which created a major humanitarian and financial burden. By 2013, Turkey started calling for a no-fly zone inside Syria to create a secure and militarily enforced safe haven that would hasten the return of Syrian refugees back to their homeland. The United States was cool to the safe-haven idea for three reasons: (1) opposition by some policy circles within the Obama administration to the Syrian safe-haven idea; (2) reluctance on the part of the Obama administration to be directly involved in yet another war following the high cost of America's involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; and (3) opposition by Russia—a key Syrian ally—to any direct American military intervention to topple Assad, much as the US and NATO had done in Libya.¹⁰

9. Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Leadership in the Middle East* (New York: Bozorg Press, 2014), 309–11.

10. Mathew Jaffe, "Obama Advisor Explains Why Clinton's Syria Plan Won't Work," CNN, April 18, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/18/politics/axelrod-axe-files-ben-rhodes-syria/index.html>; Jeffrey Mankoff, "Why Moscow Fears Arab Unrest," *Current History* 111, issue 74 (October 2012), 258–63; Samuel Charap, "Russia, Syria, and the Doctrine of Intervention," *Survival* 55, no. 1 (February-March 2013), 35–41; Dan Treisman, "Why Russia Supports Syria's Assad," UCLA TODAY, January 14, 2014; Neil MacFarquhar, "Russia Plotting for Ukrainian Influence, Not Invasion, Analysts Say," *New York Times*, April 9, 2014, <https://www.nytimes>

The United States has fewer national security interests in Syria compared to Turkey. The US strategic objectives there included safeguarding Israel's borders, containing Iran and its Hezbollah proxy in the Eastern Mediterranean, and degrading and ultimately ending ISIS and al-Qaeda terror activities in the region. In contrast, Syria is a potentially existential threat to Turkey because of the Kurdish factor. Like the United States, Turkey worries about the potential escalation and violent spillover into its territory as well as the long-term, adverse, economic consequences of the Syrian refugee crisis and the free movement of Turkish goods and services to surrounding Arab and other regional markets, including Iran.

At the regional level for the United States, the unrest in Syria touched on key issues surrounding America's closest allies in the Middle East, including Israel and many gulf Arab states. Israeli policymakers have been increasingly wary of the spillover effects from the Syrian Civil War on Israel since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011 because of the ensuing chaos and anarchy there as well as the growing power and influence of Iran and Hezbollah with the help of Russia in both Syria and Lebanon. Some of the Arab gulf states—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain in particular—oppose Iran's adventurism in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and worry about the increasing influence of Tehran on the restless Shia minorities within their states and

.com/2014/04/10/world/europe/russia-plotting-for-ukrainian-influence-not-invasion-analysts-say.html; and Anne Barnard and Rick Gladstone, "Russia Seeks to Exert More Influence Over Syria Conflict," *New York Times*, April 4, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/05/world/middleeast/russia-accuses-group-of-undermining-peace-plan-in-syria.html>.

affiliated Shia communities in neighboring states, such as Yemen and Kuwait.

While the United States and Turkey agreed in the initial stages of the Syrian Civil War that President Assad must go, neither side had figured out who would replace him, given the fluidity and shifting alliances among Syria's warring factions. At one level stands the secular Free Syrian Army, comprised of defectors and rebels from within Syria's armed forces. At another level are pro-al-Qaeda Nusra Front/Jabhat Fath al-Sham Syrian militias and ISIS fighters. At a third level are Syrian Kurdish militias, some of whom were aligned with Turkey's old nemesis, the PKK, which the United States and Turkey consider a terrorist organization. Others, such as the Syrian Kurdish PYD militia, are tactically aligned with the PKK, but a small minority of them are strategically sympathetic to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Masoud Barzani clan in northern Iraq. The PYD was given a free hand by Assad, who allowed it to operate unchallenged as retaliation for Turkish and US support for the Syrian political and military Sunni factions. The PYD has been seeking autonomy in Syrian towns and villages such as Qamishli, Kobani, and Afrin, which formed a strategic, Kurdish, liberated belt from ISIS and other Syrian militias beginning in October 2014—ironically with US air support, which Turkey resented. Although the PYD has not directly challenged the Assad regime, the latter's overall strategy for Syria in the long term is to reestablish the total control over Syrian territory it enjoyed on the eve of the start of the civil war in 2011. Turkey sought to set up Sunni rival areas inside Syria, especially around Aleppo, to counter the Kurdish move because the presence of active pro-PKK Kurdish militias so close to the

Turkish border was unacceptable. Turkey does not want the insurgent anti-Turkish Kurds to have a free hand inside Syria because it fears that such a presence could ultimately lead to more tangible demands for cultural and ethnic rights for the Kurds inside Turkey. The Turkish government since the time of Ataturk had objected categorically to the emergence of a Kurdish entity in the region, especially inside Turkey's southeastern provinces.¹¹

The Kurdish problem in Turkey goes to the heart of national identity and Turkish nationalism. The Kurds fared rather well under the Ottoman Empire by being left alone to practice their religious and cultural beliefs. Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, set out in 1923 to build a new national identity based solely on the idea of Turkishness. This concept simply replaced the more culturally tolerant, multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious aspects of the Ottoman Empire. The concept rejected minority rights for Greeks, Armenians, Alawis, and Kurds by establishing one national identity based on a state-driven secularism, unity of purpose, modern-day Turkish patriotism, and nationalism based on ethnic and national ties to old Central Asian tribes who invaded Asia Minor and ultimately succeeded in establishing the Ottoman dynasty in the fourteenth century AD.

Unlike the United States, Turkey's primary driver of its foreign policy toward Syria is the Kurdish problem. Turkey will not tolerate the rise of a competing Kurdish national entity in Syria and Iraq so close to its predominantly Kurdish southeastern provinces

11. Robert Olson, "Denied a State, Winning a Region: Comparing Kurdish Nationalism After 1918 and 2003," in *The Kurdish Policy Imperative*, ed. Robert Lowe and Gareth Stanfield (London, UK: Chatham House, 2010), 27-50.

for fear this might lead to calls for Kurdish autonomy and, ultimately, secession. Turkey fears dismemberment first and foremost when it comes to Greek and Kurdish demands for the return of lost rights and territories. This is the crux of the Armenian problem for Turkey. Unlike successive presidential administrations in Washington, Congress has been more sympathetic toward minority rights in Turkey, including for the Armenian, Kurdish, and Greek communities; this has been a source of continuing tension between the two NATO allies and continues to contribute to the misunderstanding of each side's intentions and positions.

The ongoing Turkish-US-NATO tension and US and EU support for the PYD, the YPG, and the PKK in the quest to hold on to vast swaths of territory taken back from ISIS in 2017 in Syria and Iraq is part of two broader strategic trends inimical to Turkish interests. The first is US attempts to totally defeat ISIS by using Kurdish paramilitary units, avoiding full-scale US military troop deployment. Such a trend provokes an escalation of the PKK/PYD/YPG conflict with Turkish forces, aimed at getting the PYD to consolidate its presence in these territories, especially those along the Turkish borders west of the Euphrates River—areas contiguous to Kurdish border towns and villages inside Turkey. The second has to do with the mismatch between the standing US policy to focus and advance the anti-ISIS fight and the originally floated idea of elements within the US military advisor units in Syria to establish a Kurd-led security stabilization force of 30,000 fighters, thereby enabling de facto Kurdish autonomous enclaves inside Syria in Manbij, Kobani, and Raqqa, close to Turkey's border areas

with Syria.¹² The scale of US support and military presence in Syria has guaranteed the Kurdish forces' loyalty to the United States and is raising Syrian Kurdish expectations and calls for secession from Syria.

Turkey's strategic interests in Syria have caused major tensions with the United States that, if not managed properly, are likely to continue and cause more permanent fissures. At the same time, Ankara and Washington have discussed the idea of setting up a predominantly Arab-led stabilization force in Syria as a hedge against any potential ISIS resurgence. Such plans are currently on hold because of the political tensions between the two nations.¹³

Turkey's future military rules of engagement will most certainly favor containing Kurdish forces and associated militias, ending the de facto cover for the Kurdish rebels by the United States and its NATO partners. This scenario, however, could jeopardize the long-term fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups and could likely endanger the resilience of the current coalition against violent extremism in Syria and Iraq, where the United States retains a significant presence. But it would also have an adverse effect on the inner workings of NATO, a goal most satisfactory to America's other adversaries, Russia and Iran. Similarly,

12. Joanne Stocker, "Coalition Retraining 15,000 Veteran SDF Fighters to Serve as Syrian Border Force," *Defense Post*, January 13, 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/01/13/syria-border-security-force-sdf-coalition/>. This article also points out that the 30,000-strong force will be partly composed of veteran fighters and operate under the leadership of the Syrian Democratic Forces, according to the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve.

13. Ranking officers at the US Department of State (DoS), interview by the author, March 14, 2018; and ranking officers at the US Department of Defense (DoD), interview by the author, March 23, 2018.

Ankara's intention to create a safe zone along the border stretching from Jarablus to Azaz inside Syria has become completely meaningless since the United States began backing the Kurd-dominated Arab democratic force. Preventing Syrian Kurds from controlling Syrian territory, which could in turn be used by more radical Kurdish elements against Turkish border towns and beyond, is the first priority for such a zone. Turkey believes this requires its continuous vigilance and the use of force against America's Arab democratic force allies. Thus, the Turkish deployment of interceptor fighter jets in Syria can be explained only with one objective in mind – namely, to stop the United States from supporting the Arab democratic force and affiliated Kurdish militias. No other explanation is realistic, given that Turkish-sponsored, anti-Assad, Sunni militias, such as the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front/Jabhat Fath al-Sham, the Free Syrian Army, and the Ahrar al-Sham, would not have had the wherewithal to carry on the fight without direct Turkish military backing. The eventual withdrawal of US military personnel from Syria, which would end direct support for the Syrian Kurdish militias, would also reduce tensions between Turkey and its NATO allies, including the United States. At the same time, however, Turkey must still contend with Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah in Syria, all of which are adamant about restoring President Assad's full control over all Syrian territory. Turkey may end up having to swallow a bitter pill, but at least it would have some say about the illogic of having a Syrian Kurdish enclave close to its border.

Turkey's current problems with the United States stem from different priorities, which are in turn different from those of the US-led coalition against ISIS. Turkey may have opened its air bases to make coalition

airstrikes on ISIS more efficient and less costly, but this does not mean that fighting ISIS has become a top priority for Erdogan and Turkey. Defeating ISIS is not and has never been a priority for Erdogan or his ruling AKP. President Erdogan, for instance, waited until September 25, 2014, to finally brand ISIS a terrorist group. In short, Erdogan is unhappy with US policies in Syria, which he sees as having in part led to a clear and present security breach on his southern border, interfered in his ability to defend his country, and inundated Turkey with over 3.5 million refugees, twice the number of refugees who flooded Europe in the last three years.

Deep strategic differences exist between the United States and Turkey over the future of the Assad regime. Turkey sees the current fight against ISIS as secondary to its long-term strategy of shaping the future of the greater Middle East and North Africa. On the surface, the end state for Turkey is a stable, secure, and friendly Syrian neighbor, but below is a carefully orchestrated plan to continue influencing domestic and regional Syrian and Arab dynamics. To do this right, Turkey will have to play a balance-of-power game based on placating Russia and Iran while keeping the United States at bay, as evidenced by its current involvement in the multiple cease-fire arrangements engineered by Russia and Iran in Astana, Kazakhstan; Sochi, Russia; and more recently, Ankara, Turkey.

THE GULEN AFFAIR

Turkey and its Western NATO allies, including the United States, at first touted Turkey's miracle economic growth under the conservative Islamic AKP regime as a model to be emulated by other Islamic

regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. President Obama made his first trip overseas as president when he arrived in Turkey on April 15, 2009. He gave a major speech there praising Turkey's moderate form of Islam and stressed the United States was not at war with Muslims around the world. Eventually, Erdogan's authoritarian overreaching tendencies in the form of continued violations of human and civil rights and suppression of freedom of speech and press in Turkey raised serious questions in the United States and in Western European circles about the negative direction of Turkish democracy.

The reaction of the AKP and its supporters to the July 2016 coup was swift and hard. Thousands of military officers were rounded up and then either dismissed, jailed, or put on trial. Secular Kemalist civilian government sympathizers, including liberal anti-AKP journalists, also met the same fate. More importantly, Erdogan accused his old partner, Fetullah Gulen—a reclusive, progressive, Turkish Muslim philosopher and theorist with vast followings in Turkey and around the world, and currently in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania—with instigating the July 2016 coup. The two parted ways in 2010 after years of collaborating against the Turkish military. Gulen has denied any involvement and has surrounded himself with a strong defense of American lawyers and lobbyists in response. Gulen and his supporters were part of the AKP-led economic miracle between 2002 and 2010—a marriage of convenience in the form of the so-called Anatolian Tigers. The Tigers established successful business models in finance, banking, industry, agriculture, private charter schools, and universities throughout the world—especially in the United States under the Turkish-American Federation and its successor,

the Turkic American Alliance, including the Rumi organization, with headquarters in Washington, DC, and chapters throughout the United States.¹⁴

The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists, the association of Turkic business and trade professionals, is a worldwide organization with a strong presence in Central Asia whose many members share an ethnic, religious, and cultural affinity to Turkey. But this success story extends to other continents, including Africa, the Middle East, South America, Europe, and North America.

The federation was a Gulen-affiliated, highly successful, Anatolian Tiger, manufacturing and agricultural model of development under the AKP that in turn fueled Turkey's high economic rise between 2002 and 2010. Members represented a new cadre of conservative and devout Muslim businessmen and businesswomen who were closely linked to Turkey's banking, finance, and investment institutions worldwide—hence, the federation's growing prestige and influence under the AKP's umbrella. The federation had a US headquarters office close to the White House in Washington and hosted some of the most prestigious conferences, where many members of both houses of Congress and other US government officials and associated stakeholders visited regularly. Gulen, a disciple of an Anatolian religious scholar, believed that Islam is compatible with and can coexist with the Western values of modernity and progress through rationalism, science, Western-style education, and interfaith

14. The Turkic American Alliance web page lists dozens of such active chapters and associated chapters throughout the United States alone.

dialogue.¹⁵ A noted Turkish scholar, Omer Taspinar, argues Gulen and his supporters, unlike Erdogan's AKP, did not seek an Islamist state in Turkey; rather, they sought to gradually transform the state in their image as a secular but conservative interfaith dialogue movement. He stressed that when Erdogan tried to rein in Gulen and his movement, they resisted and turned against him. Erdogan retaliated by closing their schools and nationalizing their lucrative and thriving businesses. In turn, Gulen and his followers responded by allegedly fueling a corruption scandal around Erdogan and his family starting in December 2013.¹⁶

The increasing clout of Gulen and his followers in Turkey and elsewhere did not sit well with Erdogan since the former was viewed as a power rival. It was only a matter of time before the two would part ways, starting in 2010, but not materializing fully until after the attempted coup. Erdogan immediately demanded that the United States hand Gulen over to Turkey to stand trial for instigating and ordering the coup, a charge which Gulen fully denies. The US Department of Justice requested Turkey send concrete evidence of Gulen's involvement in the coup, but the Turkish legal documents sent were either incomplete or inadequate for making a decision. Turkey has also accused the Gulen movement of being behind the assassination in Ankara of Andrei Karlov, the Russian ambassador, and has added this complaint to its US extradition request.¹⁷ Erdogan's government unsuccessfully

15. Omer Taspinar, "Panel Comments" (speech, The Policy-Forum of the Washington Near East Institute, Washington, DC, July 13, 2017).

16. Taspinar, "Panel Comments."

17. "US 'Awaiting Evidence' From Turkey over Gulen's Links to Murder of Russian Envoy Karlov," *Hurriyet Daily News*,

urged both President Obama and President Trump to circumvent the US judicial process and expedite Gulen's extradition. Obama and Trump both held firmly against any deal on Gulen, citing internal judicial procedures that must first be met by Turkey.

Erdogan has reacted negatively to the United States over the Gulen affair, arguing that the United States is being pressured by anti-Turkish Gulen supporters in Congress and elsewhere not to give in to Turkey's demand by exaggerating Erdogan's authoritarianism and his constant violation of human and civil rights and attacks on free press and speech.¹⁸

April 3, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-to-consider-extraditing-gulen-over-murder-of-russian-envoy-karlov-justice-department-spokesperson-129689>.

18. Relations between Gulen and Erdogan began to rupture before July 2016, as outlined in the text over the growing political influence and power of Gulen over the Turkish political, economic, social, and security system. They actually started to unravel on May 31, 2010, following Gulen's lukewarm reaction to the ill-fated attempt by a group of AKP humanitarian civilian sympathizers to ramp through an Israeli naval blockade off the Gaza Strip in an attempt to deliver medicine and other humanitarian supplies to the besieged strip. Gulen's reaction to the MV Mavi Marmara flotilla incident was lukewarm in light of Erdogan's strong public condemnation of Israel for the killing of 10 Turkish citizens on the boat (9 Israeli soldiers were injured in the confrontation, which took place in international waters just outside the Gaza Strip between the Turkish civilians on board and Israeli commandos who stormed the flotilla in an attempt to prevent it from crossing into Israeli waters). Erdogan demanded monetary compensation for the Turkish families affected by the Israeli attack, an apology from the Israeli government for the incident, and free movement of goods for humanitarian purposes through Israeli land checkpoints. Israel agreed to all of these demands after many years of secret negotiations. Joe Lauria, "Reclusive Turkish Imam Criticizes Gaza Flotilla," *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2010, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704025304575284721280274694>; and Nimrod Goren, "An Unfulfilled Opportunity for

Erdogan reacted to the American rebuff by embarking on a series of extrajudicial actions of his own against alleged Gulen supporters, using his state-of-emergency powers granted to him by the Turkish Parliament and the public. As a result, Erdogan and his government set out to hunt down and arrest more alleged coup plotters and Gulen sympathizers, including US and Western European citizens.¹⁹

Turkey arrested a Turkish foreign service national working for the US consulate, Metin Topuz, in Istanbul in October 2017 for his alleged affiliation with Gulen. This prompted the United States to temporarily halt the issuance of travel visas to Turkish citizens in retaliation, although the visa issue was later resolved through diplomatic channels. Another Turkish citizen working at the US consular office in Adana, Turkey, was also imprisoned for alleged connections to Gulen.

Most notably, shortly after the attempted coup, Turkey detained an American pastor, Andrew Brunson, who had lived in Turkey for 23 years, and accused him of complicity with Gulen's network to stir up Kurdish rebellions in Turkey in a quest to destabilize

Reconciliation: Israel and Turkey during the Arab Spring," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (January 2012), 121-35. Although Israel and Turkey have now settled the issue over the MV Mavi Marmara flotilla incident and returned their respective ambassadors to each other's countries, signaling a return to normalcy, the honeymoon that existed between them before 2002 is all but over because of continued tensions over Gaza and alleged Israeli support for Kurdish nationalist aspirations in the region.

19. Erin Cunningham, "Turkey Says Its Global Dragnet Has Seized Dozens of Its Citizens in 18 Countries," *Washington Post*, April 4, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-says-its-global-drag-net-has-seized-dozens-of-its-citizens-in-18-countries/2018/04/05/3e4c144a-38d1-11e8-af3c-2123715f78df_story.html.

the country. Erdogan has even suggested exchanging Brunson for Gulen.²⁰

Brunson went on trial near Izmir on Monday, April 16, 2018, and fully denied allegations that he was involved in terrorist acts in Turkey or had tried to convert Sunni Muslim Kurds to Christianity. The *Washington Post* ran a short digest on the pending trial in its morning edition on the day the trial started and pointed out the legal defense fees for Brunson's trial were funded by Pat Robertson's Christian organization, the American Center for Law and Justice, a conservative Christian group in the United States. The organization, which called Brunson a "hostage of the Turkish government," collected more than half a million signatures on a petition, claiming the case was putting Christianity on trial and thus provoking Turkey with perceived religious divisions. Press reports from Turkey said the Turkish judge presiding over the Brunson trial denied bail after the hearing, citing the potential of his flight from Turkey. The Brunson case has moved US-Turkish relations to newly heightened tensions after he was ordered to be transferred from jail to house arrest by an Istanbul court on July 25, 2018. The reason tensions continued between the two sides after the release of Brunson from jail and his transfer to house arrest is because the US government expected him to be released and remanded to the United States, not held in a house arrest status.

The United States has since insisted on his release and return to his home country, but Turkey has

20. "America and Turkey Stop Issuing Visas," *Al-Hayat*, October 8, 2017, 1; and Barbara G. Baker, "Turkey: Date Set for Trial of US Pastor Andrew Brunson," *World Watch Monitor*, March 21, 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/03/turkey-date-set-trial-us-pastor-andrew-brunson/>.

refused, citing similar judicial constraints surrounding its request for Gulen's extradition to Turkey. As a result, the United States levied sanctions against two Turkish government ministers. Turkey followed suit and threatened to freeze assets in Turkey allegedly belonging to two unidentified US cabinet secretaries.²¹

The question remains whether relations between Turkey and the United States—who signed a memorandum of understanding in June 2018 that met a persistent Turkish demand to redeploy of YPG Kurdish militia from Manbij—and the start of joint military US-Turkish security patrols are now in jeopardy as a result of the Brunson standoff. All indications are the Brunson case is on hold pending further diplomatic exchanges. The standoff may ultimately include an exchange of prisoners held or convicted by both sides. It is unlikely, however, any such deal would result in the extradition of Gulen.²²

21. Adam Goldman and Gardiner Harris, "US Imposes Sanctions on Turkish Officials over Detention of American Detained Pastor," *New York Times*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/01/world/europe/us-sanctions-turkey-pastor.html>.

22. "Imprisoned American Pastor Andrew Brunson Rejects Terror Charges in Turkey Trial," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 16, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/imprisoned-american-pastor-andrew-brunson-rejects-terror-charges-in-turkey-trial-130365>; "Andrew Brunson, US Pastor, Moved to House Arrest in Turkey," *New York Times*, July 25, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/07/25/world/middleeast/andrew-brunson-turkey.html; "Turkey Ministers Shrug Off US Sanctions Targeting Them," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 2, 2018, 1; Carol Morello and Shibani Mahtani, "Pompeo Warns Turkey Clock Has Run Out to Release Jailed US Pastor," *Washington Post*, August 3, 2018, A-8; "Turkey to Freeze Assets of Two US Cabinet Secretaries As Retaliation to Sanctions: Erdogan," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 4, 2018, 1; "Kurdish Forces to Withdraw from Syria's Manbij under US-Turkey Deal," *France 24*, June 6, 2018, www.france24.com/en/20180606-manbij-militia-kurdish-ypg-syria-turkey-usa-assad; Karen De Young, "Senior US,

The US Department of State (DoS) has asked Turkey to stop playing “hostage politics” with Brunson and other Western nationals. “We have seen no credible evidence that Mr. Brunson is guilty of a crime and are convinced that he is innocent,” said State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert on April 16, 2018.²³ This phrase has been echoed by Brunson’s supporters and the Trump administration, including Vice President Pence, who has taken a special interest in the Brunson case given his evangelical leanings.²⁴

ERDOGAN AND THE POWER REFERENDUM

Another irritant in US-Turkish-NATO relations is the Turkish state of emergency still in place since the failed coup attempt in July 2016. According to US officials, Erdogan is structurally altering the traditionally secular and pro-Western-leaning political dynamics of Turkey’s political system to bolster his presidential power under the pretext of national security and threats to Turkey from outside the country. His effort to codify these powers in a national referendum gained more traction following its narrow 51 percent passage on April 16, 2017.²⁵ The outcome gave

Turkish Officials to Meet over Dispute about Minister’s Detention,” *Washington Post*, August 7, 2018, A-2; and Zeynep Bilginsoy and Mehmet Guzel, “US Pastor Faces Terror Charges in Fraught Trial in Turkey,” *Associated Press*, April 15, 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/67d9fb2227d9444f9b0fc92e52362625>.

23. Heather Nauert, “Department Press Briefing” (speech, DoS, Washington, DC, July 18, 2018); ranking officers at the DoS; and Heather Nauert, “Department Press Briefing” (speech, DoS, Washington, DC, April 16, 2018).

24. Ranking officers at the DoS.

25. Alexandra Topping, “Turkey Referendum: Erdogan Wins Vote Amid Dispute Over Ballots—As It Happened,” *Guardian*,

Erdogan additional powers over the Turkish armed forces, the cabinet, judges, and prosecutors, whom Erdogan has accused of siding with Gulen in the past.

Support for the referendum was not strong, even among Erdogan's supporters. Major urban centers in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, traditionally AKP strongholds, all voted against the referendum. With only 51 percent in favor, the results indicated (1) a surprising dissension within the AKP's rank-and-file supporters; (2) continuing fragmentation and divisions within Turkey's political parties; (3) a continuing public perception that the AKP actually lost the popular vote on the referendum; and (4) Turkey was moving farther away from the democratic EU, so its chances of joining the EU may be lost, even if they were unlikely anyway. Erdogan believes the presidential and parliamentary elections that took place on June 24, 2018, gave him the full mandate he sought to consolidate his grip on power and achieve his overall political dream of keeping his domestic and foreign political enemies weak and disorganized. This guarantees him the opportunity to remain in power at least until 2023, the important anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish republic, successor to the Ottoman Empire. He won 52.5 percent of the popular vote, and his AKP won 53.6 percent, the highest percentages since 2002. In sum, the June 24, 2018, elections and national referendum went Erdogan's way. As a result, the AKP and Erdogan today feel vindicated, empowered, and willing to take more political risks, as he is currently doing with the standoff with the United States.

In the meantime, the United States continues to view Turkey as moving closer each day toward

April 16, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2017/apr/16/turkey-referendum-recep-tayyip-erdogan-votes-presidential-powers>.

dictatorship through public referendums and violations of democratic norms. Officials within the US interagency system have stressed Erdogan is successfully creating a structural problem domestically by eliminating any semblance of accountability and oversight. There are no checks on the president's power any longer—a sure sign democracy in Turkey is on the wane. Erdogan responds by using scare tactics to mobilize the vast majority of his supporters against the United States.

His ardent AKP supporters point out that Erdogan was responsible for the 8–9 percent annual economic growth between 2002 and 2011, which brought Turkey unprecedented prosperity and global influence. Turkey, they argue, has continued to be a target of conspiracies and territorial dismemberment by great powers ever since it lost the Great War because of its ill-fated alliance with Germany in 1914.

Erdogan is simply continuing the legacy of Ataturk, who was favored by many Western powers, including the United States, for his neutrality in World War II and for laying the foundation of secularism that has since become the hallmark of Turkey's political system. Erdogan—like Ataturk—invokes Turkish nationalism and Ottoman-style revivalism along with a strong centralized leadership to protect Turkey's territorial integrity and sovereignty against outsiders, allies, and foes alike. The difference between Ataturk and Erdogan is the latter rose to power with the help of conservative, Muslim, grassroots, Anatolian-based farmers and lower- and lower-middle-class city dwellers. These groups had long been disenfranchised and politically alienated from the political and economic Kemalist military and the economic elite Ataturk created to safeguard his newly founded secular republic.

Turkish Islamic identity helped Ataturk establish his liberal system of governance because his society followed the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, the most liberal of all four orthodox Sunni schools. This may be one of the reasons why Turkey – unlike Iran – can never become a theocracy. It is worth noting Turkish secularism did not mean the end of religion as a fact of life in Turkish society; rather, it was an effort by the Kemalists to bring Islam under direct and total control of the state.

Erdogan wants to fuse Kemalist, secular, nationalist ideas with Islamic and Ottoman ones, drawing heavily on Ottoman history and culture, unlike Ataturk. Erdogan understands Kemalist secular ideas remain a potent force among at least half of Turkey's voting society, and he uses his co-optation skills to bolster his legitimacy as the true embodiment of Ataturk's nationalist legacy. This style of leadership is authoritarian and autocratic. It embodies strength and decisiveness and plays to specific segments of the Turkish public. In the case of Kemal, it was directed in favor of secular, nonreligious, minority elements. In the case of Erdogan, it favors a conservative Islamic constituency that has managed to keep Erdogan's political party in power since 2002 through the ballot box.

Erdogan is also careful not to challenge Ataturk's style of leadership in public for that reason. Ironically, Erdogan often denies he is building a new authoritarian Islamic system in Turkey, saying that Turkish voters can at any time deny him and his political party power by voting against them in periodic and snap local and national elections.

Erdogan often uses other forms of scare tactics and conspiracy theories to keep his most ardent supporters in line and to reinforce his hold on power. He gave

a major policy speech on November 8, 2017, in which he warned his countrymen that Turkey is going through the most sensitive phase of its existence since independence in 1923. He said the events over the last five years indicate Turkey faced domestic- and foreign-hatched conspiracies using terror organizations and threats to strike at the heart of the Turkish state and pride. His attacks on the Turkish press have also been severe, all in the name of protecting national security and territorial integrity.²⁶

THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

A major current irritant in US-Turkish-NATO relations is Turkey's rapprochement with Russia, which has evolved since the Syrian Civil War. Historically, Russia and Turkey have had a contentious relationship, as the Muslim Ottoman Empire bordered Russia in the predominantly Muslim Caucasus region and challenged Russia's

26. "Recep Tayyip Erdogan: Turkey's Pugnacious President," *BBC News*, June 24, 2017; Mark Lowen, "Erdogan's Turkey," *BBC News*, April 13, 2017; "Erdogan Considers Turkey Going Through Its Most Sensitive Phases since Independence," *Al-Hayat*, November 8, 2017; Aley Cinar, "The Justice and Development Party: Turkey's Experience with Islam, Democracy, Liberalism, and Secularism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 3 (August 2011): 529-41; and "Attacks on the Record: The State of Global Press Freedom, 2017-2018," Freedom House, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/attacks-record-state-global-press-freedom-2017-2018>. This study points out that Turkey "remained the world's worst jailer of journalists, with 73 behind bars as of December, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The government permanently blocked Wikipedia in late April 2017, and 17 journalists from an opposition newspaper were tried on charges of aiding a terrorist organization. Following the June 24, 2018, successful AKP-sponsored referendum on changing the Turkish Constitution to a presidential system, President Erdogan ordered the dismissal of over 8,000 public officials, academics, journalists, and police and military officers. Associated Press, "Turkey Fires Thousands of State Employees in Anti-Terror Purges," *Guardian*, July 8, 2018, 1.

hegemony in the Balkans and elsewhere. As Turkey realized the Assad regime could not be toppled because of Russia's military support and as a result of the US shift in strategy toward defeating ISIS, a tactical realignment between Russia and Turkey became more attractive. The catalyst was the November 28, 2015, downing of a Russian all-weather SU-24 aircraft close to Turkey's border by a Turkish F-16 warplane using American-made air-to-air missiles. Russian President Vladimir Putin condemned Turkey's action and denied the Russian aircraft had penetrated Turkish airspace. He subsequently demanded an apology and immediately ordered a boycott of Turkish goods and services, including trade and tourism, a major source of national income for Turkey.²⁷

The downed Russian jet had just completed a bombing sortie against pro-Turkish Syrian rebels. The Russian plane crashed in the mountainous Jabal Turkmen area of the Syrian province of Latakia, which is contested by the Syrian government and Syrian rebel militia. Erdogan stressed that shooting down the Russian jet was fully in-line with Turkey's rules of engagement and defense posture, which were put in place after Syria shot down a Turkish jet in 2012. These rules state all unauthorized flying "elements" approaching from Syria are considered hostile aircraft.

The Russian boycott of Turkey was gradually lifted, but not before it took a major toll on the Turkish economy, which has been heavily dependent on Russia since at least 2005. Russian sanctions affected Turkish tourism, construction firms, and food exports after Russia banned the import of Turkish fruit,

27. "Turkey Shoots Down Russian Warplane on Syrian Border," *BBC News*, November 24, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34907983>.

vegetables, poultry, and salt, the sale of Turkish charter holidays to Russians, and construction projects with Turkish firms in Russia unless a special exemption was granted. More importantly, Russia halted talks about building nuclear power plants in Turkey originally designed to improve Turkish energy capacity, which was heavily dependent on outside sources.

Russia suspended work on TurkStream, a new Black Sea pipeline that was to bolster Russian gas imports to Turkey at a time when Turkey imported about 53–55 percent of its gas from Russia. Russia also imposed restrictions on Turkish citizens working for companies registered in Russia and on exchange students studying in both countries. The Russian boycott risked Turkey losing \$3.5 billion annually in income from Russian tourists, \$4.5 billion annually through the cancellation of construction projects, and 20 percent of trade. Moreover, the declining value of the Russian ruble caused Turkish businessmen another 60 percent loss in revenues because Turkish goods became more expensive in Russia. Turkey was forced to look for new markets to make up these huge losses, so it turned to Iran and African countries, where competition with China was fierce. It was only a matter of time before Turkey was forced to use its traditional political economy and soft-power approach to resolve its standoff with Russia.²⁸

Today, Russia's relations with Turkey have dramatically improved, as evidenced by the record 4.7 million Russian tourists who visited Turkey in 2017

28. Selin Girit, "Turkey Faces Big Losses as Russia Sanctions Bite," *BBC News*, January 2, 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35209987; and Gulmira Rzayeva, *Gas Supply Changes in Turkey* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Institute For Energy Studies, 2018), 1–19.

and the April 3, 2018, symbolic inauguration of a groundbreaking ceremony for Turkey's first nuclear power plant on the Mediterranean coast at Akkuyu despite some remaining technical glitches. The deal is the result of a joint-venture economic and energy partnership with Russia's atomic energy conglomerate, Rosatom, which holds 51 percent to Turkey's 49 percent stake in the joint venture. Turkey also has the option of building nine more nuclear power plants with Russia. Akkuyu is slated to provide 10 percent of Turkey's electricity needs when in full operation.²⁹

Turkey, Iran, and Russia have also been moving closer together on a peace plan for Syria as part of the so-called Astana process between the Assad regime and his disparate Syrian rebel rivals, which runs counter to the US-, NATO-, and UN-supported peace talks in Geneva, Switzerland. The Geneva talks have stalled because of deep divisions among all players. Turkey insists on fully excluding the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces and their Kurdish YPG and PKK affiliates, preventing them from gaining legitimacy for their causes at the peace table in Geneva. The Russian-sponsored Astana process aims to satisfy Turkey's veto against Kurdish participation in any peace talks while the Geneva Peace Talks keep the door open for a Kurdish role in the final outcome of Syria's Civil War. The Kurds hold large swaths of Syrian territory won from ISIS in 2017 with help from the US-led NATO military coalition. Both the Astana

29. "Russia Starts Building Turkey's First Nuclear Power Plant," *World Nuclear News*, April 3, 2018, <http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NN-Russia-starts-building-Turkeys-first-nuclear-power-plant-03041801.html>.

process and the Geneva Peace Talks have been ongoing since 2012.³⁰

Russia insists that Astana is not a substitute to the Geneva talks, but something that could help move them both forward, especially because the Geneva track has stalled. A high-level summit between Presidents Rouhani of Iran, Putin, and Erdogan on April 4, 2018, in Ankara to discuss Syria was designed to convey unity of purpose, but, in reality, was a photo op that achieved little progress. Turkey's relations with Russia and Iran, although driven by energy and economic factors, are justified by Ankara on the basis Turkey must engage with all of its neighbors to keep an eye on their regional intentions and capabilities, especially in regard to national security issues affecting Turkey and for economic reasons that directly impact its survival. Turkey simply wants to maintain its open-door policy to bolster its vital and growing trade relations with Tehran and Moscow and to elicit their help in resolving frozen and protracted conflicts in Turkey's region, especially in Armenia, Azerbaijan,

30. "Russia's Lavrov, FM Cavusoglu to Discuss Planned Four-Way Syria Summit," *Daily Sabah*, August 13, 2018, 2. Though it is contrary to US strategic goals, Turkey's desired outcome from the Astana process is an uncertain and precarious alliance among Russia, Iran, and Turkey. Turkey's strategy in this alliance is to leverage as much political concessions and influence as possible should a political settlement on Syria emerge in the future. The United States has been attempting to achieve similar objectives through the Geneva Peace Talks, but with a strategic outcome more favorable to the Western nation. The peace talks have been stalemated over the Syrian regime's refusal to recognize the political rights and grievances of the Turkish-backed Syrian rebel delegation, which the Damascus regime continues to label as a terrorist group. The Syrian regime's bellicose reaction, which has been ongoing since the uprising began in 2011, is designed to render the rebel political cause illegitimate.

and Georgia. Turkey's strategic perspective toward Russia and Iran revolves around remaining relevant and keeping an eye on what they are doing in the region. Turkey does not want to be drawn into an Arab-Iranian, sectarian, Sunni-Shia, religious conflict. Turkey is concerned about Iran but does not want to confront it given current peaceful coexistence and extensive bilateral trade ties since at least the beginning of the twentieth century.

Turkey, Russia, and Iran continue to exhibit divergent, strategic objectives in Syria on the final status of President Assad of Syria as well as on the NATO and US retaliation against Syrian chemical facilities on April 14, 2018. Iran and Russia condemned the air attacks, but Turkey did not, saying more is needed to punish Assad for his use of chemical weapons against his civilian population in Douma, near Damascus.³¹ Russia went as far as denying any culpability in the chemical attack on Douma or the use of chemical agents prior to the NATO-US retaliatory air strikes.

The new Russian ambassador in Ankara repeated the denial chemical agents were used and said the accusations were nothing more than a propaganda campaign against Russia. The ambassador also denied Russia's culpability in the nerve-gas attack on a retired KGB agent and his daughter living in Salisbury,

31. "Turkey Welcomes US-Led Strikes Targeting Assad Regime in Syria," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 15, 2018, 1. According to this article, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying, "The Syrian regime, which has been tyrannizing its own people for more than seven years, be it with conventional or chemical weapons, has a proven track record of crimes against humanity and [other] war crimes." This statement came only a week after the much-publicized presidential Ankara summit between Erdogan, Rouhani, and Putin.

England.³² The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons issued an interim fact-finding mission report on July 6, 2016, saying it did not find evidence of chemical use in Douma on April 7, 2018, or in Al-Hamdaniya or Karam al-Tarrab on October 30, 2016, and November 13, 2016, respectively. In an earlier report, the organization confirmed the use of a chemical agent in the Salisbury attack but could not pinpoint its source.³³

One of the most controversial problems facing Turkey-US-NATO relations, however, centers on the proposed sale and transfer of the Russian S-400 missile to Turkey. Turkey signed an accord with Russia in December 2017 to supply it with the S-400 surface-to-air missile batteries, hoping this was a first step toward an eventual joint venture to produce the missile in Turkey. The S-400 Triumph is based on an earlier Russian S-300 version, but reportedly

32. Ali Unal, "Interview with New Russian Ambassador to Turkey, Aleksey Yerhov: Bilateral Relations Based on Win-Win Principle," *Daily Sabah*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/04/16/russian-ambassador-to-ankara-aleksey-yerhov-turkey-russia-bilateral-relations-based-on-win-win-principle>; and Malik Kaylan, "The Summit Meeting in Ankara Between Russia, Turkey, and Iran: What It Means For The Region," *Forbes*, April 6, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melikkaylan/2018/04/06/the-summit-meeting-in-ankara-between-russia-turkey-iran-what-it-means-for-the-region/#50d20a2515eb>.

33. "OPC Issues Fact Finding Mission Report on Chemical Weapons Use Allegations in Douma, Syria in 2018 and in Al-Hamadaniya and Karm Al Tarrab in 2016," Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, July 6, 2018, <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2018/07/opcw-issues-fact-finding-mission-reports-chemical-weapons-use-allegations>; and "Chemical Watchdog Confirms UK Findings on Salisbury Nerve Agent," *UN News*, April 18, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1007642>.

has more sophisticated electronic gear capabilities.³⁴ Both NATO and the United States oppose this sale to Turkey on political and technical grounds. On the surface and politically, the Turkey-Russia deal sends a message that Turkey is abandoning its commitment to stay within NATO—a major complaint in the US Congress—but technically, it raises many important issues concerning interoperability and weapon and doctrine integration within existing and future NATO military platforms as well as trust issues regarding whether NATO’s secret weapon systems and platforms would be compromised due to Turkey’s bend toward Russia.³⁵ Moreover, Turkey is using the S-400 issue to press the United States and NATO to support its evolving anti-Kurdish strategy in the region as a whole. In a major policy speech on March 27, 2018, Turkey’s Defense Minister, Nurettin Canikli, tried to deflect Western and US criticisms over Turkey’s quest to purchase the S-400 system, pointing out the Russian missile deal does not compete with other US and NATO platforms, including the proposed sale of the American F-35 fighter jet to Turkey. Ironically, the US Senate voted on July 24, 2018, to delay delivery of the coveted F-35 jets to Turkey by a vote of 87 to 10, perhaps in retaliation for Turkey’s perceived departure

34. David Brennan, “What Is the S-400? The Russian Anti-Aircraft Weapon Dividing NATO,” *Newsweek*, March 12, 2018, www.newsweek.com/what-s400-russian-anti-aircraft-weapon-nato-840046.

35. “Russia behind US-Turkey Tensions, US General Claims,” *Sabah Daily*, March 14, 2018. A commander of the Kurdish YPG, the leading Kurdish militia within the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, stated that “Russia betrayed the Kurds.” Russia’s relationship with the Kurds has never been based on long-term, strategic cooperation. On the contrary, throughout its history, Moscow has used the Kurdish card only when it needed to reach a compromise with the countries in the Middle East.

from its traditional Western and US strategic and operational commitments.³⁶

On the surface, the issue of the S-400 sale to Turkey appears straightforward as far as Turkey is concerned, but it is not. According to interviews with officials from the Departments of State and Defense in March 2018, Turkey has tried to convince the United States and its NATO allies to allow it full control and joint production of the equivalent Patriot missile system. This would require transferring highly guarded technical secrets and special codes associated with manufacturing the American Patriot missile platform system to Turkey.

Turkey hopes a joint US-Turkish-NATO venture to manufacture the Patriot in Turkey would add to its growing arms sales industry as well as its regional and global prestige and influence. NATO and the United States have rejected the Turkish demand but seem to be seeking other ways to satisfy Turkey's quest to enhance its technical arms superiority while keeping it within NATO's collective defense and security frameworks. In the meantime, Russia and Turkey are still negotiating the S-400 terms, and it is not clear whether Russia will follow suit in refusing to share highly guarded technical data for the S-400 system with Turkey or any other state.

NATO, the United States, and Russia want to keep Turkey dependent on them for weapon platform purchases and as a means to manage their separate

36. "Purchase of Russian S-400 Does Not Affect Purchase of American F-35," *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 27, 2018, 1; Ranking officers at the DoS; Ranking officers at the DoD; "US Senate Approves Decision to Delay Delivery of the F-35 Jets to Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, August 2, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/defense/2018/08/02/us-senate-approves-decision-to-delay-delivery-of-f-35-jets-to-turkey>.

relations with Ankara. Russia in particular fears that Turkey may end up selling the S-400 weapon system to Russia's nemeses, Ukraine, Georgia, and Afghanistan, which it seems would upset the regional balance of power and upend frozen conflicts at Russia's expense.

Nevertheless, Russia has embarked on a major public relations charm campaign since December 2017, despite the conflict between Turkey and itself over the most important, remaining, divisive, political issue—namely, the long-term fate of President Assad. Turkey still wants Assad to be removed from office, but Russia insists on keeping him in place. Russia's charm offensive seems to be softening the country's relations with Turkey. A year after the 2016 assassination of the Russian ambassador in Ankara, Turkey-Russia relations have improved markedly.³⁷

Turkey's original, short-term aim to acquire the S-400 is linked to its quest to develop a reliable surface-to-air missile system because of its current combat-ready pilot shortages. This means the Russian missile would be deployed in place of its fighter aircraft as a temporary measure until perhaps new pilots were fully trained and ready for deployment in theater operations. The main challenge Turkey would face in deploying the S-400 is "interoperability with existing NATO integrated air and missile defense systems."³⁸

37. Ali Unal, "Interview with Russian Ambassador." In addition to thanking the Russian president for Russia's UN vote against the US resolution to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in December 2017, Erdogan made a similar gesture toward the Vatican. "Erdogan, Pope Francis Back Jerusalem's Status during Vatican Talks," *Daily Sabah*, February 5, 2018, 1.

38. For an excellent assessment of Turkey's multilevel challenges of integrating its S-400 system, see Can Kasapoglu,

TURKEY'S EVOLVING ARMED FORCES

As the United States and NATO reach a critical juncture in their relationship with Turkey, it is worth pointing out that Turkey, despite its NATO membership, has been the odd man out. Despite its sacrifices during the Cold War to serve transatlantic interests against communism in the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, Turkey never felt it got the appreciation or credit it deserved from its NATO partners. This can be attributed to three factors. The first is historical factors related to the former Muslim caliphate (the Ottoman Empire) and its troubled relationship with the West beginning in the early nineteenth century and ending with the loss of its empire following its defeat by Allied forces during the Great War. The Armenian Genocide, the War of Greek Independence, and the fate of Turkey's Greek minorities did not help improve Turkey's image despite efforts by the founder of the modern Turkish republic to mend fences with Europe through neutrality and friendship arrangements before and during the Second World War and its aftermath. Second, Turkey has cultural and religious differences with its NATO partners. The more Turkey tried to integrate within the European cultural theater, the more it was shunned. The United States tried as an honest broker to support Turkey's inclusion in Western Europe to safeguard NATO and preserve its collective security mission against Soviet, and later Russian, penetration and aggression. Finally, the nature of the Turkish

"Turkey's S-400 Dilemma," EDAM Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, July 1, 2017; and Nurlam Aliev, "Russia's Arms Sales: A Foreign Policy Tool in Relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15, no. 47 (March 20, 2018).

military under the new republic in 1923 and beyond sets Turkey apart. Until 2002, the secular Turkish military controlled the civilian democratic process and saw itself as the guardian of Kemalist ideas against mostly domestic enemies of the state – namely, unruly Turkish political parties bent on political violence to achieve domestic political ends as well as political Islam. It was not unusual, however, for the Turkish military to use Islam against extreme leftist ideologies during the Cold War to keep both sides off-balance.

Turkish secularism under its founder, Atatürk, resembled the French *laïcité* system (referred to as “*Liklik*” in Turkey) of preventing the influence of religion in political matters.³⁹ Due to domestic, public pressures after Atatürk’s death in 1938, however, the state coopted Islamic institutions and clerics through *Diyanat*, Turkey’s religious foundation, especially in rural areas where Islam remained entrenched. Religion thereby came under the direct control of the state, transforming the previous total separation between the state and society at large. Thus, starting in the 1950s, religion and Islam in particular were managed by the Kemalist military not as a theocracy, but as a vehicle for the political mobilization of secularized institutions under Western-oriented military rule and as a hedge against extreme political movements left

39. Ahmet Kuru and Alfred Stepan, *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 4–5, 102–111. This reference refers directly to the concept of *laïcité* and its application in Turkey. For additional discussion of secularism and Islam in Turkey following the establishment of the Turkish republic, see Pope and Pope, *Turkey Unveiled*, 65–69; Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 42–43; and Andrew Finkel, *Turkey: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

and right of center. Even today, the fine line between religion and state remains more or less unchanged. In short, *laïcité* in Turkey has been anything but rigidly practiced. Islam under the Turkish system, while a central part of the fabric of Turkish society, must always be controlled and managed by the state and its predominantly secular institutions.

The Turkish state controls the religious institutions and Muslim clerics in Turkey, including the Imam Hatip schools and associated foundations. This system started under Ataturk, but continues to this day. Under Kemalism, the government maintained full control over religious affairs through Diyanat as well as over all ethnic and religious minorities by the military-dominated National Security Council that oversaw the day-to-day ruling of the state through state-of-emergency proclamations, constitutional declarations, and military coups from 1960 until 2002.

This state of affairs did not sit well with Turkey's Western allies within NATO or the United States, who advocated more transparent and liberal democratic practices, including full civilian control over the military. But this was overlooked during most of the Cold War in favor of preserving Turkey's active support and membership within NATO against the Soviet Union.⁴⁰

The closest Turkey came to resolving these contentious issues was in 2002 with the rise of Erdogan and his AKP. For over 10 years under AKP leadership, Turkey enjoyed a honeymoon with Europe and the United States. The military, however, lost power to the civilians through the ballot box and was severely purged and weakened. As a result, the United States

40. Pope and Pope, *Turkey Unveiled*, 180-97; Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 213-28; and Finkel, *Turkey*, 68-105.

and NATO touted Turkey's moderate Islam as a model to be emulated by Muslims throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The honeymoon was precarious at best.

Turkey's differences with Western NATO allies intensified following the Arab popular uprisings of 2011 over strategic and operational issues. Strategically, Turkey wanted to avoid the economic and security fallout of regime change that NATO and the United States favored. Instead, it gravitated toward bringing about internal political reform through its support for domestic pressure groups and antiregime militia. Operationally, Turkey was worried about losing control of the fluid situations following military interventions by NATO and other outside players, citing the instability following the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, and the Gadhafi regime in Libya.

At the same time, Erdogan set out to weaken his domestic political opponents, but the increasingly authoritarian nature of his policies and his effort to idolize Islam as a great religion did not sit well in Western Europe and the United States, who were reeling from a spike in al-Qaeda- and ISIS-inspired terror attacks. Turkish officers within NATO were instructed to challenge their European counterparts on the use of the term "Islamic terrorism," which caused a great deal of tension between the traditionally professional, nonpoliticized NATO officers.⁴¹

41. This is based on the author's firsthand observation of the contentious debate between NATO officers detailed to the NATO Intelligence Center in the UK on the propriety of linking the word "Islam" with terrorist activities. Turkish officers were instructed by their government to challenge their Western European NATO allied officers' counterparts on this issue and to insist on developing a neutral definitional lexicon to be used in NATO

More importantly for NATO and the EU, Erdogan's neo-Ottoman nationalist synthesis couched in Turkish Islamic national slogans and agitation in Western European capitals did not fare well. Tensions have risen in many Western European capitals, including Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, since the spring of 2017 over the Turkish government's insistence on holding large rallies of its supporters in Europe against Gulen and the Kurdish PKK-led insurgency in Syria and Iraq. In response, EU officials refused to issue permits for the rallies and Turkish officials, including Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, were barred from traveling to deliver rally speeches.⁴²

The EU promised to restart coveted accession talks with Turkey for EU membership in 2005, only to

intelligence publications for the definition of "terrorism," free from any religious, Islamic connotation. The author was invited to lead a series of seminars to help bridge the cultural and linguistic differences between Western European and Turkish officers detailed to the center in the UK; Julian E. Barnes and David Gauthier-Villars, "NATO Apologizes for Offending Turkey," *Wall Street Journal*, November 17, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-apologizes-for-offending-turkey-1510941321>; "Looking at the map is enough to see Turkey's importance NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg Says," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 30, 2018; "Jihad Not Related to Terrorism, Turkish FM Davutoglu Says," *Hurriyet Daily News*, February 18, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/jihad-not-related-to-terrorism-turkish-fm-davutoglu-says-41322>; and "Turkey Slams EU's Top Diplomat over Afrin Remarks," *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 19, 2018.

42. Oren Dorell and John Bacon, "Turkey's President Says 'Nazism is Alive in the West,'" *USA Today*, March 13, 2017, 3-A; and Omer Taspinar, "The End of the Turkish Model," *Survival* 56, no. 2 (April-May 2014): 49-64. For a detailed analysis of the AKP model, see Natalie Tocci et al., *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy from a Transatlantic Perspective*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, October 31, 2011, 18-21.

declare once again that Turkey was no longer being considered for membership. Repeated US pressure on the EU to admit Turkey was met with resistance from its transatlantic member partners. American support for Turkey's inclusion in the EU is based on its consistent goal of preserving NATO's cohesion in the face of increasing threats and vulnerabilities from Russian and Iranian influence as well as terrorist organizations.⁴³

Today, Turkey's military structure continues to evolve into a unilateral entity farther away from NATO's original doctrine of collective defense, collective security, and joint integrated weapon platforms. The Turkish Defense Ministry announced on March 25, 2018, that the long-awaited debut of Turkey's light aircraft carrier was approaching. The vessel, the construction of which began in 2016, is intended to meet "various needs of the Turkish armed forces such as sustaining long-endurance, long distance military combat or humanitarian operations."⁴⁴

The ongoing transformation of the Turkish armed forces will affect NATO and the United States in more ways than one. The secular, Western-oriented identity that prevailed from 1923 to 2002 is being dismantled, which could further "exacerbate ideological and political factionalism within the officers' corps according

43. The EU acknowledges Turkey was one of the first states that applied to join the union in 1959 beyond the original founder states, but argues today Turkey still is not a liberal democracy and President Erdogan is subverting the rule of law and accountability by continuing to invoke the state of emergency and rule by decree following the failed coup in July 2016, which runs contrary to the EU's basic democratic standards.

44. Robert Farley, "Will Turkey Really Get an Aircraft Carrier Armed with F35s?," *National Interest*, February 21, 2019.

to a new study.”⁴⁵ The study states Erdogan is consolidating his grip on the armed forces and bringing them under his direct command. His quest to weed out Gulen and other old, secular, Kemalist tendencies is ongoing and appears to have been successful so far, especially since the failed 2016 coup. Erdogan is using the attempted coup of July 2016 to purge the Turkish armed forces and to bring them under his total control. He is cognizant of the history of the armed forces coups and argues the armed forces prior to the July attempted coup were infiltrated by Gulen supporters and Gulen himself was responsible for instigating the failed coup—hence, his repeated requests to the United States to extradite Gulen back to Turkey to stand trial for his role in the coup.

The study also highlights the significant challenges Turkey is likely to face in the near future as a result of this coerced transformation: (1) shortages of qualified pilots; (2) shortages in fully trained and equipped man power; (3) new officers being indoctrinated more in conservative nationalist and religious doctrines than their predecessors were; (4) an officer corps that is more representative of the Turkish society as a whole; and (5) more civilian control over the military, as is the norm in Western democracies, including the United States.⁴⁶

45. For an excellent assessment of the current transformation of the Turkish Armed Forces, see Lars Haugom, *An Uncertain Future*. Also see Lars Haugom, “The Turkish Armed Forces and Civil-Military Relations in Turkey after the 15 July 2016 Coup Attempt,” *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 15, 2019): 1–8.

46. For an excellent assessment of the current transformation of the Turkish Armed Forces, see Lars Haugom, *An Uncertain Future*.

TURKEY AND AMERICA'S GULF ALLIES' COMPETING EXPECTATIONS

Like all other regional and international players in the Syrian Civil War, the strategic objectives of the gulf states evolved as the war continued. In the early stages of the civil war, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE were in sync with the United States and Turkey on the need for regime change and the removal of President Assad from power. Saudi Arabia had been unhappy with Syrian culpability in the assassination of its Muslim Sunni Lebanese client, Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, by Syrian agents in Lebanon on February 14, 2005. But the kingdom was more concerned with continued Syrian interference and influence in the political dynamics of Lebanon, and more importantly, its cozying up with predominantly Shia Iran and its sponsorship of the politically powerful Lebanese Shia Hezbollah movement, which was vehemently anti-Israel and anti-Sunni Arab gulf states. In short, Saudi Arabia was a regional rival of Iran in Lebanon and viewed Assad's departure as an important means to reducing Iranian influence in Lebanon since Iran was the main source and benefactor of Hezbollah's rising influence in that state. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain also worried about the expanding Iranian influence among their ethnic Shia population, whom they considered to be subversive elements and regime dissidents.

Syria under Assad received Iranian financial aid and discounted oil and gas in return for supporting the Iranian clerical regime in Tehran and Qom and for allowing shipments of Iranian arms and training personnel to freely transit Syria to Lebanon.⁴⁷ Qatar

47. Karim Sajadpour, "Iran's Real Enemy in Syria," *Atlantic*, April 16, 2018.

was also viewed as a rival to Saudi Arabia in Lebanon following its successful effort to broker a cease-fire deal in its capital in May 2008, after fierce clashes in Beirut between Sunni militia associated with Hariri and Saudi Arabia on one hand, and Hezbollah and its patron, Iran, on the other.⁴⁸ Saudi Arabia viewed the Qatar-sponsored cease-fire in Lebanon in 2008 as an interference in its affairs and has resented it since. Ironically, Saudi Arabia and Qatar share the same conservative Sunni Islamic beliefs. But Iran and Qatar share rich maritime gas fields within a few nautical miles of each other, necessitating at least a working relationship between the neighbors.

As the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) took control of Egyptian politics through the ballot in 2012 after the fall of President Mubarak, Saudi Arabia and the UAE embarked on a major campaign to confront the Brotherhood, fearing that its populist win would cascade into their backyard and ultimately lead to similar uprisings or demands for political change. As a result, Turkey and Qatar, who were sympathetic to the MB and other associated movements, united to form a front, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE countered by supporting the overthrow of the freely elected MB government by the Egyptian military on July 4, 2013. The lines had been drawn. Turkey and Qatar opposed the new military regime in Egypt, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE supported it.

The rise of ISIS and the success of its military campaigns in Iraq and Syria in June 2014 and Russia's military intervention in September 2015 prompted

48. Alistair Lyon, "Qatar Pulls off Mediation Coup in Lebanon Crisis," *Reuters*, May 22, 2008; Sultan Barakat, *Qatari Mediation: Between Ambition and Achievement*, Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper 12 (November 2014).

change in the realignment and strategic objectives of the players in the Syrian Civil War. While the United States focused on defeating ISIS in Syria and Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were busy realigning themselves to confront ISIS symbolically in Syria as well as in Shia Iran, its Lebanese Hezbollah client, the Shia of Iraq, and the MB in the Greater Middle East.⁴⁹ The last was seen as a revolutionary threat to the conservative monarchies and their tribal offshoots in the Persian Gulf, given its political success against Mubarak—a long-time ally of these Arab gulf regimes.

Besides the MB, the Shia-Sunni die was cast as an existential threat to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. For Qatar, gulf security and stability necessitated closer economic and political ties with Iran. For Turkey, the threat remained the Kurds. Neither Turkey nor Qatar want to embark on a sectarian conflict with Iran, regardless of the countries who support it.⁵⁰ These

49. Although relations among Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia are at a low ebb because of Turkey's perceived support for Hamas and President Morsi of Egypt, formerly of the MB, they have not reached the level of public hostility and suspicion that exists today between the UAE and Turkey. Whereas in March of 2013 UAE-Turkey trade relations reached Dh33.3 billion (approximately nine billion US dollars), in total value today they are at a trickle, and overall relations are at a stalemate. "Erdogan Says UAE's Slanders About Turks, Ottomans Stem from Its Own Dirty Business," *Daily Sabah*, December 20, 2017; "New Street Signs Honoring Ottoman Commander Hung Near UAE Embassy in Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/01/09/new-street-signs-honoring-ottoman-commander-hung-near-uae-embassy-in-turkey>; "Turkish Soap Operas Latest Casualty of Mideast Conflict," *New York Daily News*, March 5, 2018; and "1st King of Saudi Arabia Accused of Receiving Bribes from Britain after Release of Confidential Documents," *Daily Sabah*, April 19, 2018, 3.

50. Omer Taspinar, *Turkey and the Arab Gulf States: A Dance of Uncertain Expectations* (Washington, DC: Arab Gulf States

shifting priorities and approaches, with each player pursuing diverse interests, weakened the original unified resolve to address the Syrian Civil War directly and gave Assad the political and military wherewithal to withstand pressures to remove him from office.

The United States is currently contemplating pulling out its small contingent of military-related personnel from northwest Syria and replacing it with Saudi forces or a combined Arab force, the deployment of which would undoubtedly have unintended consequences. The latter would face a dilemma as it sought to bridge the gap between US and Turkish operational objectives resulting from the continued presence of the US-backed Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces west of the Euphrates River or along the border with Syria. The Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces militia, along with its affiliated Syrian, PKK-US, and Western-terrorist-designated supporters who helped achieve victory against ISIS and the destruction of most of its caliphate in Syria, would almost certainly be sidelined by the presence of any Arab peacekeeping force. Such a force may also advance Syrian Sunni fortunes at the expense of the Kurds and perhaps the Syrian-Iranian-Hezbollah-Russian military alliance. Such a scenario would play into Turkey's original plan of eliminating any Kurdish armed deployment or presence along its borders with Syria west of the Euphrates River.

Institute, 2015), 5. Turkey wants to keep all of its options open because it relies heavily on all gulf states' foreign direct investments (including Iran's) and other economic and financial perks. It does not want to get into a crossfire between rival Muslim Sunni and Shia forces in the Greater Middle East. Mohammed Ayoub, "Behind the Democratic Wave in the Arab World: The Middle East's Turko-Persian Future," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 2 (February 2, 2011): 57-70.

Any proposed, multinational peacekeeping or peacemaking force made up of Saudi and Egyptian soldiers, plus perhaps Bahraini, Emirati, Qatari, and Kuwaiti military personnel, would also most certainly falter, given the competing priorities and current tensions stemming from the June 5, 2017, move by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain to cut diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar, which is a close ally of Turkey, after accusing it of supporting terrorism. A Qatari military contribution to any Arab-Syrian stabilization force would most likely side with Turkey against the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces and associated PKK militia. This would also result in each of the members then pursuing their own operational and strategic priorities and forming independent fiefdom-like enclaves in Syria's northeastern region.

An Arab force under these circumstances would face other more serious complications because of the overlapping nature of peacekeeping juxtaposed with peace-enforcing operations as outlined by the UN Charter. In the latter case, given the current animosities among Saudi Arabia-UAE-Egypt with Iran and Hezbollah in Syria and elsewhere, such operations would almost surely bring the two camps into open warfare by accident or design. The experience of such a combined force with the dual missions in other former troubled areas in the Greater Middle East, particularly Lebanon between 1975 and 1980, has been one of little or no chance of success.⁵¹

51. Julian Borger, "Syria: Proposal to Replace US Troops with Arab Force Comes with Grave Risks," *Guardian*, April 18, 2018; Michael Gordon, "US Seeks Arab Force and Funding for Syria," *Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2018; and Zachary Cohen, "Bolton Dealing to Build an Arab Military Force in Syria," CNN, April 18, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/18/politics/trump-us-syria-strategy-arab-force-pompeo-bolton/index.html>. Then US Defense

For its part, Turkey may also take full advantage of these divisions and competing priorities within any proposed Arab force to quickly reinforce the security belt along its border with Syria, especially in the coveted areas of Manbij and Kobani, which is because of Turkey's obsession with opposing any autonomous Syrian or Iraqi-Kurdish entity or state next to its borders. Turkey intends to use any territory occupied by its military in Syria as a bargaining chip to demand political concessions and guarantees from both allies and foes, gaining tactical and strategic advantage as far as Syria's future is concerned. In any scenario, Syria will almost certainly remain unstable for a long time to come with or without the presence of US troops.

THE AMERICAN SYRIAN EXIT STRATEGY DILEMMA

The debate about the US military deployment and long-term US intentions in Syria goes on in Washington, with President Trump contemplating an end to US military involvement, perhaps because of the lack of important US strategic interests. Congress, however, is increasingly concerned about the lack of a clear US strategy for a post-ISIS Syria once the primary objective of defeating ISIS has been fully met. Several

Secretary James Mattis expressed reservations about the proposed Arab states' involvement in the new proposed security force in Syria, perhaps to placate Turkey, but probably to avoid the clashing interests of such an endeavor. Paul Sonne and Missy Ryan, "Mattis Warns Against Leaving Syria to Arab Allies with No Direct US Role," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2018, A-18. It is worth noting that the current press reporting on the ongoing discussions between the United States and Egypt on the possibility of the latter leading an Arab force to Syria is currently being done through intelligence, rather than diplomatic or political-military, channels.

members of Congress have voiced concern over the long-term presence of Iran and its Lebanese benefactor Hezbollah in Syria, which would threaten the security of America's allies, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon.⁵²

American military field commanders in Syria and US Central Command (USCENTCOM) have advised President Trump on the need to stay in Syria for the long haul to stabilize the areas under their control or under the control of allied Syrian Kurdish forces to rebuild destroyed infrastructure and strengthen Kurdish political and social institutions.⁵³ Such advice may have been driven by or based on US Army Field Manual 3-0, a service document that guides military operations and doctrine and their possible aftermath.⁵⁴ The differences in the strategic and operational approaches between US Joint Commands and the US

52. Karen DeYoung, "President, Congress at Odds on Syria," *Washington Post*, April 19, 2018, A-1.

53. Ranking officers at the DoD; Missy Ryan and Paul Sonne, "Even As Trump Urges Syria Exit, Troops See Unfinished Job," *Washington Post*, April 7, 2018, A-1; Greg Jaffe, "For Trump and His Generals, 'Victory' Has Different Meanings," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/for-trump-and-his-generals-victory-has-different-meanings/2018/04/05/8d74eab0-381d-11e8-9c0a-85d477d9a226_story.html; and Liz Sly, "US Troops in Syria May Be at Risk of 'Mission Creep' After a Deadly Battle in the Syrian Desert," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syria-accuses-us-of-aggression-after-its-warplanes-strike-pro-government-forces/2018/02/08/bab1502a-0cb4-11e8-8890-372e2047c935_story.html; The DoD may have accepted the inevitable downsizing of its military presence in Iraq. Tamer al-Ghobashy and Paul Sonne, "Pentagon Ends Combat Against ISIS in Iraq, But Will Retain Troop Presence," *Washington Post*, May 1, 2018, A-9.

54. Michael Lundy, GEN (USA), and Rich Creed, COL (USA), "The Return of US Army Field Manual 3-0," *Military Review* 97, no. 6 (November-December 2017): 14.

Army are important. Although Field Manual 3-0 is a US Army service document – and although USCENTCOM, as a joint command, is not obligated to follow it – recent statements from USCENTCOM appear to have echoed a similar doctrinal exit approach to Iraq and Syria. In a panel discussion at the United States Institute of Peace on April 3, 2018, the head of USCENTCOM, General Joseph L. Votel, stated Syria is more complicated than Iraq and hard work remains, such as stabilizing areas, consolidating gains, getting people back into their homes, and addressing the long-term issues of reconstruction.⁵⁵

The main challenge for any US military withdrawal from Syria will be translating war gains into political outcomes, given that Syria does not pose a threat to America’s vital interests. The flip side of this coin is, of course, mission creep. At the heart of the matter is the tension between President Trump’s understanding of what constitutes victory on the battlefield in unconventional or asymmetrical combat zones and what his military advisors and field commanders in Syria may want to achieve in the long run in Syria. For its part, Turkey will most likely try to fill the vacuum created by an American exit from Syria and create a de facto safe haven there, if only to repatriate as many Syrian

55. David Staten, SGT (USA), “CENTCOM Commander Discusses Stabilization Posture in Iraq, Syria,” Department of Defense News, April 3, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/News/Article/Article/1483798/centcom-commander-discusses-stabilization-posture-in-iraq-syria/>; Karen De Young and Missy Ryan, “As Trump Talks of Leaving Syria, His Top Commander in the Middle East Emphasizes the Need to Stay,” *Washington Post*, April 4, 2018, A-1; Karen De Young and Shane Harris, “Trump Orders Swift Syria Withdrawal,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 2018, A-1; and Liz Sly, “Kurds Pulling Back from ISIS Fight,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 2018.

refugees from the estimated 3.1 million currently residing in Turkey as possible, and at the same time, secure its border towns and villages from potential PKK attacks. Turkey may also use any territorial gains at the expense of Syrian Kurdish forces to repopulate the liberated areas with its Syrian Muslim Sunni supporters as a bargaining chip in a final Syrian political settlement.⁵⁶

The United States faces the same problem that has always plagued militaries as they grapple with the most appropriate time to withdraw prematurely from theaters of combat. The tyranny of time has haunted US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq before, but the issue touches on a more fundamental question about war termination challenges involving nonstate actors in Syria. Most wars involving terrorist organizations may never end because terror groups evolve depending on contexts and changing regional and international political dynamics. Although terrorist groups can be defeated, the current nature and character of ethnic, national, and religious rivalries in the Greater Middle East will make terrorism an instrument of states and nonstate actors, at least in the near future.⁵⁷

Terrorist adversaries will often come to the fight long after the United States thought it had won and

56. Liz Sly and Zakaria Zakaria, "With ISIS Striking Back in Syria, a US Withdrawal Would Be a 'Disaster,' Kurds Warn," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrian-kurds-warn-of-a-disaster-if-us-troops-leave/2018/04/05/0b5619e0-386e-11e8-af3c-2123715f78df_story.html.

57. Sune Engel Rasmussen, "As Islamic State Fades in Syria, a New Militant Group Takes Root," *Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-islamic-state-fades-in-syria-another-militant-group-takes-root-1524064045>.

its troops had departed a given theater. This may be related to the inability of the US military to bridge the gap between its use of overwhelming force and the difficulties involved in defeating ragtag, illegal combatants bent on dying for their causes. Given that civilians in the United States have supremacy over US military institutions in terms of expectations, the US strategic outcome in Syria may not be as clear-cut.⁵⁸ Given ISIS's degraded combat posture and the increasingly diminished combat capabilities of its remaining enclaves in Syria, the limited maneuver warfare employed effectively by the US Marine Corps and the US Army against Japanese forces during World War II in the Solomon Islands could offer a viable exit strategy for Syria.

Given ISIS's degraded and declining military and large-scale war-making capabilities and political and financial fortunes, especially in Syria and Iraq, US Marine Corps and US Army lessons learned from maneuver warfare since World War II preclude continuing the fight on ISIS's terms by using conventional overwhelming force. Hence, it is more beneficial to use maneuver operations and tactics to contain and deprive ISIS of its momentum in waging violence in these states since ISIS as an insurgency is now more incapable of holding wide swaths. Most ISIS fighters are either incarcerated or corralled in isolated, unpopulated areas; hence, ISIS has been reduced to attacking soft targets rather than carrying out wide-scale warfare as it once did in Iraq and Syria.

58. Philip A. Crowl, "The Strategist's Short Catechism: Six Questions without Answers," in *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1988), 377-88.

In short, maneuver warfare doctrine could serve as a prelude to a US exit strategy, given the operational and strategic insignificance of the remaining ISIS enclaves.⁵⁹ Put another way, the military historian and theorist of war, Carl von Clausewitz, could provide insight into the exit strategy debate in the United States. To win, Clausewitz says the cost of war must remain proportionate to the objective sought, constantly balancing ways, means, and ends.⁶⁰

In the absence of a US war termination strategy in Syria, any alternative, desired end state in Syria will become elusive. The American public's threshold for prolonged warfare remains low and difficult to gauge ahead of time. The objectives and desired end state also change often in the course of war because of domestic, regional, and international actors, as well as other intervening factors, which preclude the achievement of total domination of the battlespace, as is the case in Syria today.

Alternatively, if the objectives are attained, there may be pressure to attain additional objectives beyond those originally set, especially if the United States is seen to be engaged in a limited war and its adversaries and allies in the theater view their operations in terms of total war. Unlike the United States, a superpower that sees a fight against a terror group, regional players and American allies in the Middle East and North

59. Gerhard L Weinberg, *A World At Arms* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 341–48; and Richard Tregaskis, *Guadalcanal Diary* (New York: Penguin Books, 1943). A good discussion of operational maneuver can be found in Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Campaigning*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-2 (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, August 1997), 78–84.

60. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 92.

Africa view the fight as involving the survival of their regimes. An examination of the treatment of political Islamists such as the MB by Egypt, the UAE, Yemen, and North African countries indicates they view the conflict as total war. Thus, Islamic regimes view ISIS as an existential threat just as much as, or perhaps even more than, the West does.

A better state of peace, as opposed to a definite end state, is the more likely outcome in a limited war scenario. By contrast, the Syrian Civil War is likely to result in a clearer end state—the defeat of Assad’s opposition forces. War termination and victory become more elusive under these circumstances.

There is perhaps a current mismatch between what the national command authority wants out of the US involvement in Syria and what the evolving US military strategy is for Syria. Military operations and tactics become irrelevant without a viable national strategy that links ways, means, ends, risks, and consequences to one another.⁶¹

TURKEY-US RELATIONS POINT COUNTER POINT: THE TURKISH PERSPECTIVE

There are several contentious issues separating Turkey from the United States. Foremost among them is US support for the Kurd-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces, which was established with the help of the United States in 2015 to fight and defeat ISIS. Following the fall of ISIS’s purported capital of Raqqa in Syria in October 2017, US military field commanders proceeded to float the idea of converting the Syrian Democratic Forces from an effective offensive

61. Terry L. Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

organization to a defensive border protection and patrol entity to be deployed along the Syrian-Turkish border to protect against any new ISIS resurgence or infiltration into Syrian Democratic Forces-liberated Syrian enclaves. Later, however, under constant protestations from Ankara, the Defense Department announced the new force's mission (stabilization), its intended size (small), and its intended composition (Arab militia, not Kurdish).⁶²

From the beginning, Turkey, suspicious of America's strategic plans for Syria, raised the issue of the ambiguity surrounding US intentions during several high-ranking diplomatic discussions with US diplomats, including former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and President Trump. Turkey also had serious reservations about the US Army training and equipping the Syrian PYD; its militia, the YPG; and most importantly, the PKK, which Turkey and the United States have both designated as a terrorist organization. As far as Turkey is concerned, the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces' association with the PYD, YPG, and PKK is ultimately designed to challenge Turkey's sovereignty and carry out cross-border terrorist attacks deep into the Turkish heartland. In short, Turkey feels the United States is pitting its short-term interests against its principles in Syria by joining forces with known terrorist groups by proxy and by abandoning long-term, strategic partnerships with Ankara in the fight against terrorism.⁶³

The other existential threat Turkey says it faces revolves around what it perceives as the persistent

62. Ranking officers at the DoD.

63. Turkish Foundation for Political, Economic, and Social Research, interview with the author, March 27, 2018. The foundation's views reflect current Turkish government views.

influence of the moderate Muslim cleric, Fetullah Gulen. There is no doubt that the ruling AKP and Erdogan see Gulen as an existential threat. President Erdogan has offered to exchange Brunson, two Turkish nationals, and a dozen or so US citizens currently in custody in Turkey for Gulen and two other Turkish operatives convicted in New York City of violating US- and UN-imposed sanctions on Iran.⁶⁴ There are other disagreements that Turkey has with the United

64. Benjamin Weiser and Carlotta Gall, "At Iran Sanction Trial: A Star Witness Revealed, and a Sleepy Juror," *New York Times*, December 2, 2017; "FETO-Linked Judge Berman 'Won't Allow' Prison Call that Could Indict Zarrab to Be Played For Jury," *Sabah Daily*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/americas/2017/12/19/feto-linked-judge-berman-wont-allow-prison-call-that-could-indict-zarrab-to-be-played-for-jury>; and Mehul Srivastava, "US-Turkey Relations Take Another Turn for Worse," *Financial Times*, October 9, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/39cdc78c-ad04-11e7-aab9-abaa44b1e130>. The two Turkey operatives, Iranian-born Reza Zarrab—a gold merchant residing in Turkey but of Iranian origin—and his coconspirator, Turkish banker Mehmet Hakan Atilla, were convicted along with seven other coconspirators of violating US sanctions worth over a billion dollars for exchanging Turkish gold (an unsanctioned item if sold to private Iranian entities vice Iranian government agencies) in exchange for Iranian oil. Zarrab is reportedly cooperating with US prosecutors in exchange for his freedom. He was captured while vacationing with his family in Florida. US prosecutors traced the gold to Iranian shadow government agencies. The convictions of Zarrab and Atilla shed light on corruption charges against President Erdogan and his family, which he denies, saying only that the gold-for-oil transaction was a private one and a routine trade activity not covered by the US sanction regime, and that the American judge presiding over the Zarrab-Atilla cases is biased against Turkey because of his ties to Gulen, who is out to smear President Erdogan's reputation. More important, however, is the negative impact on US-Turkey relations of any possible US sanctions against Turkey, given the ongoing tensions between them on several other issues.

States, including the latter's unconditional support for Israel against the Palestinians, the decision by Trump to move the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and the subsequent UN General Assembly vote against the US position, at which time the United States threatened to cut off financial aid to countries who voted against the US decision.⁶⁵

Turkey believes that although the current partnership with the United States and NATO is in trouble, there is no viable alternative to its NATO membership and commitment, despite all of the rhetoric to the contrary. Turkey believes that America's shifting tactics, from changing the Assad regime to fighting and defeating ISIS specifically and terrorism in general, are a symptom of the contradictions inherent in US foreign policymaking.

Unlike the United States, Turkey views the ISIS threat as secondary to the bigger, regional problems it faces. ISIS did not and does not impact the region directly, Turkish officials argue. The US-Kurdish-Syrian Defense Forces alliance and its offshoot, including foreign fighters, are more directly Turkey's regional problem. ISIS to Turkey is an American obsession devoid of any long-term, strategic vision, and as a result, the United States is not draining the terror swamp in Syria, but rather focusing on the symptoms and not the root of the terror threats and

65. "President Erdogan Slams US for Threatening to Cut Off Aid to Countries over Jerusalem Vote," *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 31, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/president-erdogan-slams-us-for-threatening-to-cut-off-aid-to-countries-over-jerusalem-vote-125037>. Earlier, President Erdogan thanks Russian President Putin for supporting the UN General Assembly Resolution against the United States. "Erdogan Thanks Putin on Jerusalem Resolution Support in Phone Call," *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 22, 2017.

vulnerabilities emanating from ISIS—namely, ISIS’s broad public and messaging appeal. Turkey also believes that any US-Syrian stabilization projects in Syrian-liberated areas are artificial fixes with no long-term success guarantees because they lack a link to broader strategic objectives. Given the original program under the Obama administration of arming and funding “vetted Syrian opposition groups,” Turkey questions why and how the PKK—a US-designated terrorist organization—became “vetted.”⁶⁶

Turkey argues including the PKK in the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces was a big American blunder because the PKK took advantage of US and NATO terror vulnerabilities in Syria by temporarily switching tactics to fighting ISIS in return for cash, weapons, and training—fighting which Turkey fears will eventually be redirected against its towns and cities. Turkey believes the PKK has its own strategic agenda in Syria that runs contrary to US-Turkish efforts in the fight against regional and international terrorism within their longstanding counterterrorism cooperation and coordination strategies.

According to Turkey, America’s ambiguous position after combat ended in Raqqa can only mean that the United States wants a permanent Kurdish enclave there. Iran, Syria, Russia, and Turkey have strongly opposed any such move. The Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, went as far as demanding the resignation of the “pro-Kurd” US special envoy to the coalition against violent Islamic extremism and ISIS for allegedly backing Syrian Kurdish fighters and

66. “Disrespect for Red Lines: Why Turkey is a US Ally but Not a Partner,” *Sputnik News*, September 11, 2017; and Helen Cooper, “Obama Requests Money to Train ‘Appropriately Vetted’ Syrian Rebels,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2014.

their nationalist aspirations. Last January, Cavusoglu was quoted as saying the United States was guilty of siding with the wrong partner in Syria in reference to the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces and the associated Kurdish militia; however, President Erdogan in earlier statements praised the United States and said Turkey was always ready to cooperate with the United States over Syrian issues.⁶⁷ Meetings between former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Cavusoglu and current Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Cavusoglu have yielded only minor results, although diplomatic channels continue to remain open between Ankara and Washington.⁶⁸ According to press reports, on July 26, 2018, Christian Evangelist Andrew Brunson was moved to house detention from his jail cell in Istanbul following the personal intercession of Pompeo.

TURKEY-US RELATIONS POINT COUNTER POINT: THE US PERSPECTIVE

The American position on current US-Turkish relations differs dramatically from the mostly unified Turkish position given the diverse nature and character of America's liberal constitutional democracy and general political culture. For example, there are currently differing institutional views regarding Turkey

67. "Turkey Says Pro-Kurd US Envoy Brett McGurk Should Leave," *BBC News*, May 18, 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39960381; "US Picked the Wrong Partner, Ankara Criticizes Washington in *New York Times* Article," *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 29, 2018, 1; "Turkey Wants to Cooperate with US in Syria, Erdogan Says," *Daily Sabah*, December 31, 2017, 1; and Turkish diplomats, interview with the author, February 20, 2018.

68. Semih Idiz, "Pompeo's Meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Fails to Calm Tensions," *Al-Monitor*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fa/originals/2018/05/turkey-united-states-cavusoglu-pompeo-meeting.html>.

and its regional and international policies. A majority of members of Congress view Turkey as non-Western, Islamic, authoritarian, and unfriendly to minorities, citing the violent confrontation between Erdogan's bodyguards and Kurdish protesters and their American supporters outside the Turkish Embassy in Washington, DC, on May 17, 2017. Congress is also upset over the detention of two Turkish nationals working on consular issues in Istanbul and Adana, Turkey, as well as the detention of Andrew Brunson, and has demanded their unconditional release. Gulen's Hizmet organization in the United States has been highly successfully in lobbying Congress against Erdogan since at least 2015. Moreover, some members of Congress have expressed objections to Turkey's warming relations with Russia and Iran as well as the proposed acquisition by Turkey of the Russian S-400 air defense system. Congress passed a law in August 2017 forbidding any associated company or state from conducting business with Russian defense entities, which ultimately will adversely impact Turkey as well. Members of Congress have also been unhappy with Turkey's increasingly anti-Israeli and pro-Hamas positions. Some members have threatened to withhold aid and levy special sanctions on Turkey in an effort to get it to change its policies. A noted scholar on Turkey, Steven Cook, went as far as labeling the US-Turkish alliance a myth.⁶⁹

69. Amberin Zaman, "US Sanctions Loom over Defiant Turkey," *Al-Monitor*, April 20, 2018; Gregg Roman, "Navigating the US Collision with Turkey," *The Hill*, March 5, 2018; Barcin Yinanc, "Turkey Could Face Sanctions for S-400 Purchase," *Hurriyet Daily News*, February 1, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/barcin-yinanc/turkey-could-face-us-sanctions-for-s-400-purchase-126601>; and Steven A. Cook, "The American Alliance with Turkey Was Built on a Myth,"

While USCENTCOM and US European Command are in sync as far as broad US military strategy is concerned in the fight against ISIS and other terror groups, both oppose the Turkish purchase of the Russian S-400 system. Both agree to US objectives to minimize the influence of Russia and Iran in the region and both support any US policy in Syria as long as it emanates from the American presidency. They do, however, have different perspectives on Turkey and its current leadership, with US European Command tending to be more open-minded on Turkey's operational and strategic concerns about its neighbors and USCENTCOM less so, according to US officials interviewed by the author. This probably goes back to 2003, when USCENTCOM-led troops were barred by the AKP-led Turkish Parliament from transiting Turkish territory to attack the Saddam Hussein regime in neighboring Iraq. Moreover, USCENTCOM sees Turkey as an obstacle to its end state in Syria – namely, supporting and developing the Syrian Kurdish liberated areas under its direct control.⁷⁰

Former Secretary of Defense General James Mattis went out of his way to serve as an honest broker by moderating disagreements between his commanders and Turkey. He has assured Turkey that the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces will now predominantly be made up of Arab, vice Kurdish, fighters, and there was a difference between the YPG and PKK fighters as far as the United States is concerned. Despite these differences, the Defense Department has forged ahead, providing an alternatively acceptable air defense system

Foreign Policy, October 12, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/12/the-american-alliance-with-turkey-was-built-on-a-myth/>.

70. Ranking officers at the DoS; and ranking officers at the DoD.

to Turkey that would meet its minimum defense needs and sway it away from further Russian weapon purchases if only to ensure that congressional sanctions against Turkey are put on hold. A consensus is emerging in the US policy community that Turkey has yet to master the art of American checks and balances. All of this has developed while the Departments of Defense and State have been working hard to keep Turkey within the Western orbit and away from the Russians.⁷¹

American officials commented in late spring 2018 that current relations between the United States and Turkey are complicated and often swing between cooperation and enmity. The officials acknowledged that US support for the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces has caused bumps in the strategic relationship between the two countries, but this damage is reparable if ways can be found to bridge the declining trust and enhance communication between the two sides. The same officials stated Turkey has some legitimate grievances and the United States was working hard to address them. They opined that although the Syrian YPG militia's close ties to the US-designated PKK terror group are known, the YPG was and still is a "battle necessity" for the United States. The officials emphasized when the United States tried repeatedly to enlist Turkey and its vetted Syrian Sunni Arab fighters in the fight against ISIS, the response from Turkey was mute. The United States had no other choice but to go with the Syrian Kurds.

As the stakes in Syria became high, the US justification for choosing the Syrian Kurdish side hinged on: (1) Turkey's lackluster response to the US position on

71. Ranking officers at the DoS; and ranking officers at the DoD.

setting up a counter-ISIS force; (2) the inability of the United States to enlist the military support of an indigenous Syrian Sunni force that was trustworthy and committed to America's strategic objectives of focusing on fighting and defeating ISIS; and (3) the American goal of defeating ISIS first and foremost. Thus, for the United States, forming a predominantly Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces was picking the best of many bad options, especially given that American public opinion was opposed to new military ventures in the Middle East. In the opinion of US officials interviewed by the author, America needed to recruit Syrian-based fighters to engage and defeat ISIS. The Kurds appeared to fit that bill because they were reliable, capable, and willing to implement the US operational plan against ISIS, according to the same DoS official. Members of the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces had sacrificed and died in Syria for the United States, and now the latter was obligated to return the favor in kind, promising arms, training, infrastructure rebuilding following combat, and the establishment of local governing councils in liberated areas.

At the same time, US officials have made it clear to Turkey that the United States will not engage in hostage diplomacy over the detainees in exchange for Gulen and other demands, in accordance with the long-standing US policy of not making deals with and giving no concessions to hostage takers. As for the Turkish employees of the US consulates in Istanbul and Adana, they were performing routine contacts with Turkish society, which was part of their job description.

Hundreds of thousands of Turkish citizens have also been caught up in this campaign of detention and harassment since the failed coup under the seventh

state-of-emergency decree. State Department officials acknowledged to the author that the United States has lost the messaging battle with the majority of Turkey's youth as more and more of them are today buying into President Erdogan's populist, anti-NATO and anti-US, nationalist rhetoric. Erdogan engages in this rhetoric to please his most ardent and loyal AKP constituency; nevertheless, he keeps the door open for dialogue with the United States and other NATO allies. Some scholars on Turkey attribute Erdogan's domestic populist strategy and authoritarian tendencies to his success at the ballot box and to his unique political skill of keeping his domestic rivals off-balance—a winning electoral strategy. Others have alluded to the need for a corrective strategy to bring Turkey to a more liberal constitutional system, complete with accountability and oversight.⁷² These officials also believe that although Erdogan's detractors see him increasingly becoming a dictator, he sees himself as a reformer reflecting the longstanding public quest for domestic change and power, especially regarding the military that ruled Turkey indirectly from 1923 to 2002. Given Turkey's historic loss of territory following World War I, state survival remains paramount today, but, at the same time, Turkey is willing and able to serve as America's eyes and ears against terrorist threats and vulnerabilities. In other words, Turkey remains a significant US strategic partner in the fight against terrorism, especially given its geostrategic location in one of the most unstable corners of the world. Russia, on the other hand, is taking advantage of Turkey's differences with the United States and NATO to advance

72. Henri J. Barkey and Omer Tspinar, "Republic of Turkey," in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East*, ed. Mark Gasiorowski and Sean L. Yom (Boulder, CO: The Westview Press,

its interests in the Greater Middle East at the latter's expense. In short, Russia is playing an opportunistic game with Turkey's help—something that is acceptable to neither NATO nor the United States given Russia's overall stated goal of weakening and ultimately destroying the alliance politically.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

While the current standoff between Turkey and the United States appears to be moving from bad to worse, it has yet to reach a breaking point or a point of no return. Although tensions and policy differences continue to plague US-Turkish relations, efforts by well-meaning policymakers within the US government and Turkey's civilian and military establishment point to perhaps better days to come, given the resilience and endurance of the ties that bind the two nations together. The US perspective on Turkey could be traced to many factors, starting with the refusal of the Turkish Parliament to allow US forces to transit Turkish territory to attack Iraq in 2003 and the slow Turkish support for the US-led coalition against ISIS. Turkey is also being put on notice by the United States for feuding against other NATO allies—namely,

2017), 203–32; Henri J. Barkey, "Erdogan's Foreign Policy is in Ruins," *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/04/erdogans-foreign-policy-is-in-ruins/>; Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey's Moment of Inflection," *Survival* 52, no. 3 (June–July 2010): 39–50; Steven A. Cook, *False Dawn: Protest, Democracy and Violence in the New Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Soner Cagatpay, *The New Sultan, Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2017). Both Cook and Cagatpay have raised the issue of Turkey becoming an illiberal, authoritarian democracy under Erdogan's AKP-led regime and political party; Henri J. Barkey and Eric Edelman, "Turkey's Forgotten Detainees," *Washington Post*, July 30, 2018, A-17.

Germany, the Netherlands, Cyprus, France, and Greece. In the last case, tensions have been brewing in recent months over new border disputes in the Aegean and the refusal of Greece to extradite a group of Turkish officers allegedly involved in the failed coup. Although resolving the Cyprus issue remains high on the US agenda, tensions between Turkey and Cyprus over oil and gas exploration rights and access off the coast of Cyprus are forcing the United States and the European Union to side with Cyprus and even entertain sending US naval ships to protect Cypriot gas and oil tracks at sea.

Despite these and other policy differences over Syria and other domestic problems facing Turkey, both sides seem reluctant to cause irreparable damage to their alliance. The United States, which has traditional ties with Turkey, does not want a military confrontation with the country over Syria. The most hopeful sign of addressing some of the protracted problems currently facing US-Turkish relations stems from the fact that Turkey is still seen by the United States as important to America's national security interests, especially given Turkey's geostrategic location and cultural familiarity with its volatile neighbors. Turkey is currently self-absorbed with its ambitions and Muslim neo-Ottoman nationalist revivalism, but its unique ballot-box democracy, albeit imperfect by Western standards, will work toward increasing harmonization toward the United States and its NATO allies in the long run. This can only happen through a sustained strategic dialogue.

The idea is to keep Turkey and the United States engaged while trying to find solutions to the issues that separate them, because once the current tactical posturing is stripped away, the strategic alliance becomes

more visible. There is indeed current evidence for better US-NATO-Turkish cross-cultural communication techniques to manage and resolve outstanding policy and strategic differences. In short, Turkey is not yet lost, but there are challenges facing America and its NATO partners in how to bridge the growing gap between them and Turkey. This challenge touches on a fundamental question: What kind of strategic relationship do the United States, NATO, and Turkey want or desire? Clearly, they are at a policy and strategic crossroad. The answer lies in the need for the United States to craft a new strategy toward Turkey and vice versa that takes into account the new realities of Turkish, NATO, and American domestic political dynamics, their changing nature and character, as well as Turkey's quest for regional influence and ambitions and its goal of becoming a great regional power. Turkey, NATO, and the United States share Western values, and these values, although not equal for all partners, are keys to better multicultural harmony if applied properly across the board.

Turkey, NATO, and the United States must come to realize the context that brought them together is changing and their interests and policy directions must be reset. This is driven by the changing nature of world politics and the liberal structure of the international system, given the rise of China's economic diplomacy and Russia's political and economic interventionism abroad. While US and NATO involvement in the Syrian Civil War was a game changer, so was Turkey's involvement, given the unintended consequences, including the presence of over 3.1 million Syrians in Turkey – a high price to pay. Domestically, the refugee issue necessitated the strategic shift in Turkey's domestic, regional, and international postures

after the third AKP win in the November 2015 snap elections.

Turkey, NATO, and the United States have worked and fought together since the Korean War in 1950. That war was an important milestone for Turkey in particular, much like perhaps the Gallipoli Campaign, albeit not at the same level. The Turkish brigade in Korea lost 400 defending the US Army's retreat after the battle of Chongchon River. Such memories linger on in the Turkish psyche with great nostalgia. The Korean War for Turks is yesterday in historical terms. A few years ago, American scholars and analysts outlined policy differences between the United States and Turkey and provided constructive paths toward reconciling the differences.⁷³

The Brunson affair appears to be the key to moving forward if it can be resolved diplomatically. For now, each side is digging in from recent moves and counter-moves, including economic sanctions and asset freezes. Although the Gulen affair looms large over all outstanding contentious issues, Turkey's back is to the economic wall; this leaves Erdogan with many bad options and little room for maneuver, despite all rhetoric to the contrary. Turkey's economy, which ranks 17th in the world, is today facing not only serious domestic challenges, but, should its economy collapse altogether, the impact would most certainly

73. Graham E. Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2008), 151–62; Steven Cook et al., *US-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership* (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012); Phillip H. Gordon and Omer Taspinar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe, and Turkey Can Revive a Fading Partnership* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2008); and Hugh Pope, "Pax Ottoman?: The Mixed Source of Turkey's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (November-December 2010).

reverberate throughout the international liberal monetary and trade order the United States has championed and worked so diligently to sustain since World War II. There is no win-win outcome here.⁷⁴

The removal of tariffs and sanctions against Turkey by the United States can be initiated by a presidential executive order; this could be a short-term fix and a face-saving mechanism for Turkey in the current standoff. But under the currently charged circumstances, this cannot happen without Turkey making the first move to release Brunson. Short of that, Turkey still holds a wild card – namely, the status of the strategic Incirlik Air Base, which it could play by ordering the shuttering of the base, a move which would have disastrous strategic consequences for all parties involved. The bottom line is that there is no easy exit from the current messy standoff between Turkey on one hand and the United States and NATO on the other. The long-term implications for US-NATO-Turkish relations are dire.

Therefore, given the more complicated but inherently symbiotic nature of the relations between the United States and its NATO allies vis-à-vis Turkey, the following policy recommendations are in order.

74. David Lynch and Kareem Fahim, "Turkey's Currency Crisis Triggers Global Worries," *Washington Post*, August 14, 2018, A-1; Carlotta Gall and Jack Ewing, "Tensions between Turkey and US Soar as Trump Orders New Sanctions," *New York Times*, August 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/business/turkey-erdogan-economy-lira.html>; and Jack Ewing and Alexandra Stevenson, "Plunge in Lira, Turkey's Currency, Fuels of Financial Contagion," *New York Times*, August 13, 2018, 1.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION FOR THE UNITED STATES

- The United States should continue its strategic, political-military dialogue with Turkey, regardless of the latter's economic and military ties with its neighbors. Turkey's relations with Iran and Russia, for example, are transactional and tactical, yet its relations with the US and NATO are strategic and enduring.
- The United States should develop a clearer strategy for Syria, especially toward the Kurds. The lack of a clear exit strategy, coupled with the American public reluctance to support expanded military operations in Syria, should be a signal that the time has come to elevate tactical and operational activities to a strategic level.
- USCENTCOM and US Special Operations Command commanders and their staffs should sustain their direct, face-to-face communication with their Turkish counterparts, not just institutional communication. There is no substitute for effective, personalized command relationships. Turks respond positively to such personal approaches, even though they may not show it, because culturally they avoid losing face. Questioning a Turkish decision on any issue is seen as attacking the decision-maker. Command relationships can help avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation on all political-military levels.
- The Defense Department should reinvigorate its long-term professional military education projects with Turkey. Specifically, the US National

Defense University, which has credible and long-standing experience in all fields of research and defense studies, should offer assistance to the newly established Turkish Defense University in the form of curriculum development, leadership, and exchange programs between resident specialists both civilian and military. Mid-level professional military education institutions such as the US Army War College and the Marine Corps University can also play a critical supporting role in this endeavor. This will help familiarize Turkish officers with US procedures and capabilities and promote interoperability, which will facilitate future cooperation, create goodwill, and lead to the development of long-term personal relationships.

- A review of the ongoing exchange of International Military Education and Training-type programs between the United States and Turkey should take place to identify problem areas and seek ways to increase the enrollment of officers on both sides, including in service branch training schools. In short, service-to-service connections need to be reinvigorated. Planners and commanders in the US Army, for example, should be continually sensitized to the interests and objectives of Turkey, including with respect to the Kurdish issue, and how this may affect the operational environment in zones of continuing conflict in order to facilitate deconfliction and avoid confrontations.
- Given US-Turkish military-to-military relations have been affected in recent years, primarily by USCENTCOM because of the wars in Iraq and Syria, US European Command should be

encouraged to take the lead in rebuilding this relationship in the future.

- The United States should strive to rebuild trust with Turkey and its citizens—a country and people who, given their history after Turkey’s defeat in World War I, tend to believe in great power dismemberment conspiracies directed against them.
- The F-35 training program in Texas for Turkish pilots should be expanded because it has had a positive public diplomacy impact on the Turkish press and public. A recent photo of a Turkish pilot training in the cockpit of an F-35 jet in Texas was very well received in Turkey as a good-will American gesture.
- The United States should emphasize it will ensure the Syrian Kurds will have a political role in Syria once hostilities end, but any Kurdish national aspirations will be contained within Syria. Failing this, the United States would have to decide whether its strategic partnership with Turkey is more important than its partnership with nonstate partners.
- The United States should emphasize it will not support sectarian enclaves or territorial dismemberment in Syria.
- The United States should assure Turkey that its security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are an integral part of the US-NATO commitment to the country.
- The United States should reinvigorate its Turkish youth outreach through educational and cultural messaging to regain the momentum for a secular, stable, and pro-West Turkey.

- The United States should use existing, multilateral and bilateral, diplomatic formats, such as the G20, for higher-level engagements. American policymakers should emphasize areas of convergence and common interests—such as terrorism, international crime, drug and human trafficking, and migrant rescue—where the Turkish and US military can cooperate.
- The United States should continue military-to-military talks at the level of the Secretary of Defense to, among other things, avoid accidental clashes in Syria.
- The United States should persist in sharing the realities and shortcomings of Turkish policies that have a direct, adverse effect on the United States and its NATO allies without threatening Turkey with dire consequences. Turkish officials respond better to learning about issues through person-to-person, diplomatic exchanges, rather than institution-to-institution exchanges through diplomatic demarches. This will require efforts to better understand the Turkish narrative through increased linguistic training and other educational and cultural exchanges.
- The United States should exhibit patience, presence, and perseverance in Turkey. Turkey and the United States cannot afford to lose each other.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATO

- NATO should continue to be inclusive of all of its members and avoid encouraging the perception Turkey currently has of the organization, which is some members are more equal than

others. Turks have long held the perception that despite their sacrifice in joining NATO and getting involved in the Korean War and in protecting Europe's southern flank during most of the Cold War period, Greece has been Western Europe's more favored strategic partner. This is one of the main reasons Europe continues to treat Turkey as second-class when compared to Greece and the Greek Cypriots.

- NATO should continue to make constructive efforts to resolve internal and bilateral problems with Turkey, acting as an honest broker.
- NATO should work to resolve lexicon definitions and reach final consensus with Turkey on terms such as "terrorism," "Islamic terrorism," and "Islam" to enhance counterterrorism and counterintelligence cooperation and in-service coordination at all levels.
- NATO should embark on a messaging campaign that celebrates Turkey's history and culture and downplays the importance or relevance of NATO to neo-Ottoman Turkey, since the latter has more to do with Turkey's domestic politics than its foreign policy.
- NATO should manage and resolve strategic, operational, and tactical differences with Turkey, taking into more realistic assessment the latter's evolving military doctrine and changing chain-of-command structure.

WHAT TURKEY MAY WANT TO CONSIDER DOING

The following are policy initiatives that could have positive effects on US-Turkish relations.

- Turkey should cut down on the political rhetoric against the United States and Western European partners and release Brunson and other US citizens from detention unconditionally.
- Turkey should continue the strategic dialogue with the United States and NATO.
- President Erdogan should shed his authoritarian tendencies in favor of the rule of law and fair and free elections, given his increasingly authoritarian tendencies, as stated previously.
- Turkey should search hard for points of convergence with the United States and NATO to re-rebuild trust through confidence-building measures.
- Turkey should explore new ways to establish a new dialogue with Israel on the Palestinian question.
- Turkey should brandish and revive its moderate, multicultural, Muslim credentials as a model.
- Turkey should address the issue of minorities head on, as it did when President Erdogan communicated the message of sorrow for the victims of the 1915 Armenian Genocide.
- Turkey should end the state-of-emergency decrees.
- Turkey should ensure that the protection of human and civil rights in Turkey go hand-in-hand with the fight against terrorism.
- Turkey should revisit its laws governing terrorist offenses and bring them in line with universally acceptable standards.
- Turkey should end its siege mentality and insecurities driven by conspiracy theories and unproven facts.

- Turkey should fully support the UN peace initiatives on Syria as the best alternatives for achieving long-term Turkish regional security and stability.

POSTSCRIPT

Several key developments that confirm rather than invalidate the basic assessments in this study have emerged since this manuscript was submitted to the editors. Foremost among them is the arrival of the first shipments of the S-400 antimissile platforms from Russia in July 2019 despite strong US and NATO objections.⁷⁵ The US Congress in particular has threatened to levy sanctions against Turkey – a key NATO ally – should Turkey deploy the system, which Congress sees as violating existing trade sanctions against Russia. These latter sanctions extend to any foreign entity or state that imports weapon-related technologies from Russia.⁷⁶ The Trump administration, under pressure from Congress, finally canceled the Turkish-coveted \$428 billion F-35 aircraft sale to Turkey to compel the latter to reverse its decision regarding the S-400 purchase worth several billion dollars.⁷⁷

75. Ryan Browne, Nick Paton Walsh, and Kara Fox, “Russia Starts Delivery of S-400 Missile System to Turkey, Setting up Stand-off with US,” CNN, July 12, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/12/europe/turkey-russia-missiles-intl/index.html>.

76. Karoun Demirjian, “The Law Says Trump Must Punish Turkey. Congress May Force Him to Follow through,” *Washington Post*, August 6, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/law-says-trump-must-punish-turkey-congress-may-force-him-to-follow-through/2019/08/06/92d77a38-b597-11e9-8f6c-7828e68cb15f_story.html.

77. Richard Abouafia, “Turkey after the F-35: Choice for Alternative Fighter Will Help Shape Country’s Future,” *Forbes*, July 21, 2019. Ironically, the Turkish press on August 2, 2019,

For his part, President Erdogan has stated publicly the S-400 purchase from Russia was a commercial, not a strategic, transaction, stressing that the decision to go ahead with the purchase was also based on Turkey's sovereign right—thus rejecting US and NATO claims that the purchase endangers NATO's operational and military intelligence systems.⁷⁸ He also threatened that if the United States went along with its decision to impose sanctions on Turkey, the latter would retaliate.⁷⁹ It is not clear how, but should such events unfold, they could undoubtedly lead to irreparable damage and could push Turkey more into the Sino-Russian orbit. Such developments would most likely adversely impact US and NATO interests.

The other current irritant in US-Turkish relations revolves around Turkey's insistence on removing pro-US Kurdish Syrian militias from all areas contiguous to its historic border with Syria. The goal is to revive the idea of establishing a 20-mile safe zone for Syrian refugees returning from Turkey that is free of any PKK-YPG presence. President Erdogan first surfaced the idea of a free zone inside Syria in 2012. He revived the idea on December 19, 2018, but has not

ran stories picked up from Israel's Channel 12 television station saying that Israel pressured members of Congress and the Trump administration to cancel the F-35 program with Turkey. See "Israel Secretly Lobbied Trump's Government to Cancel F-35 Deal with Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, August 2, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/defense/2019/08/02/israel-secretly-lobbied-trumps-government-to-cancel-f-35-deal-with-turkey-reports>.

78. "Turkey Expects US to Act as a True Ally: Erdogan," *Daily Sabah*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2019/08/06/turkey-expects-us-to-act-as-true-ally-erdogan>.

79. "Turkey to Retaliate if US Imposes Sanctions over S-400 Purchase, FM Cavusoglu Says," *Daily Sabah*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/defense/2019/07/22/turkey-expects-us-not-to-impose-sanctions-over-s-400-fm-cavusoglu-says>.

received US consent to the plan. A free zone in Syria would mean the end of any Kurdish Syrian militia presence, including the US-backed Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces west of the Euphrates River. President Erdogan threatened to establish the free zone with or without support from his NATO allies; this prompted a visit to Ankara by Ambassador James Jeffrey on July 22, 2019, to dissuade Turkey from any unilateral move that would adversely affect US Special Forces or their Syrian Kurdish proxies.⁸⁰ Such a unilateral military incursion by Turkey against the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces has been rejected by the United States on several occasions before. US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper pointed out recently that any such moves by Turkey to push the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces east of the Euphrates River by force would not be acceptable.⁸¹ The most recent meeting between DoD and Turkish military officials in Ankara indicates the diplomatic talks may yet bear fruit, but differences between the two sides concerning the size of the free zone and the status of Kurdish fighters west of the Euphrates still have to be fully developed. The United States is aiming to address Turkey's concerns about the YPG/PKK presence along its border without abandoning the latter, given their strong role in defeating ISIS and containing associated forces such as the Nusra Front militia made up of former al-Qaeda

80. Jean Yackley, "US Envoy Holds Talks in Ankara as Turkey Threatens to Invade Syria," *Al-Monitor*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/us-envoy-talks-turkey-invade-syria-threat.html#ixzz5vxPGeMhf>.

81. Idrees Ali, "Any Turkish Incursion into Syria 'Unacceptable,' Will Prevent It: Pentagon Chief," *Reuters*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-turkey-syria/any-turkish-incursion-into-syria-unacceptable-will-prevent-it-pentagon-chief-idUSKCN1UW0TG>.

elements.⁸² There are, however, other complications surrounding the establishment of any buffer zones in Syria given Syrian President Assad's insisting all uninvited foreign troops, including those from the United States and Turkey, leave and turn territories under their control over to Syria. Russia, Iran, and Iran's Lebanese Hezbollah proxy all support Assad's position. The current violation of several cease-fires and daily bombardments by Syria and its allies in Idlib, a small enclave controlled by Turkey in northwest Syria and inhabited by al-Qaeda and anti-Assad, Syrian militia, that is Ahrar al-Sham, and their families, attest to Assad's strategic interest in extending his full control over all territories lost during the early days of the Syrian popular uprising in 2011.

In the meantime, continuing tensions between Turkey and its regional neighbors—especially Syria, Libya, the Arab gulf states, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus—are likely to ensure that Turkey-US relations remain at a crossroad.

POSTSCRIPT II

On October 14, 2019, Turkey entered Syria with tacit support from President Trump to secure strategic terrain adjacent to its border areas and to primarily expel its old nemesis, the PKK, and its Syrian affiliate, the YPG—whom Turkey and its Kurdish umbrella organization, the Syrian Defense Forces, consider to be terrorist organizations. Turkey may finally be able to establish its long-coveted safe zone in the liberated

82. Sarah Dadouch, "Turkey, US Agree to Form Joint Operation Center for Syria Safe Zone," WHTC, August 7, 2019, <https://whtc.com/news/articles/2019/aug/07/turkey-says-us-getting-closer-to-its-views-in-syria-safe-zone-talks-anadolu/925363/?refer-section=world>.

areas to allow some of the 3.5 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Turkey to return. This of course is a temporary solution to Turkey's more complex and protracted economic and financial problems resulting from the Syrian refugee problem it currently faces. It is most likely, however, that such a zone will remain unstable for the foreseeable future because of strategic differences with Russia, Iran, and Syria, who prefer full and total control over all Syrian territory by the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad—an end state that is inimical to Syrian Kurdish aspirations for local autonomy. Moreover, though it has the tacit support of Russia, the current Turkish incursion into Syria is not likely to reach deep into Syria's heartland, which is currently under the control of Damascus and its Iranian, Hezbollah, and Russian military. In short, the current Turkish military operations in Syria are indeed limited both in scope and sustainability. In the meantime, President Trump is under increasing pressure from key supporters in Congress and elsewhere to halt or to slow down Turkish military operations against the Kurds. Sanction threats against Turkey by key allies of the president and Congress could backfire, however, given that Turkey is an important strategic partner in NATO and an important player in the global fight, along with the United States, against terrorism and extremism in the region. The unintended consequence of the proposed US sanctions against Turkey is to move Turkey closer to the Russian orbit, thus weakening NATO as an alliance and forcing Turkey to take dramatic steps to curtail US military presence on Turkish soil, especially at Incirlik Air Base. In the meantime, there appears to be a split between NATO on one hand and Western European capitals on the other over the timing and aggressiveness of Turkish military operations currently underway in Syria. NATO has refrained from

criticizing Turkey, thus recognizing that the latter has legitimate grievances, while Western European leaders have been quick to criticize Turkey for attacking the Syrian Kurdish-controlled areas. NATO is currently struggling to preserve the cohesion of the troubled alliance, while individual Western European states are taking steps to contain Turkey.⁸³ The current US objective to reach a settlement between Turkey and the Kurdish Syrian Defense Forces to redeploy the Kurdish militia as far away as possible from Turkey's border is a step in the right direction.

83. Michael Birnbaum, "European Leaders Demand a Halt to Turkish Offensive in Syria," *Washington Post*, October 14, 2019, A-15; "Germany, France Stop Arms Exports to Turkey Amid Operation Peace Spring in Syria," *Daily Sabah*, October 13, 2019, 1; and "Turkey Has 'Legitimate Security Concerns': NATO Chief," Anadolu Agency, October 14, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkey-has-legitimate-security-concerns-nato-chief/1613310>. For an insightful look into why the US-Syrian-Kurdish alliance was doomed to fail, see Amanda Sloat, "Our Alliance with Kurdish Fighters Was Doomed," *Washington Post*, October 13, 2019, B-4.

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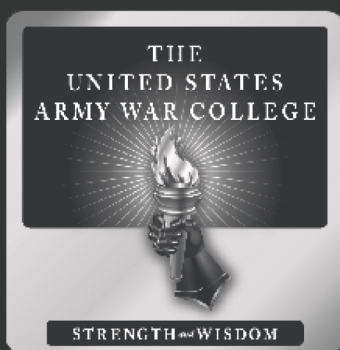
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