

# **BRIDGING THE GAP: TURKEY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST**

---

## **HEARING OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFAIRS U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION**

---

March 5, 2025

---

### **Serial No. 119-3**

---

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov>, <http://docs.house.gov>, or <http://www.govinfo.gov>

---

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

60-235 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BRIAN J. MAST, Florida, *Chairman*

MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas	GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York, <i>Ranking Member</i>
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey	BRAD SHERMAN, California
JOE WILSON, South Carolina	GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania	WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts
DARRELL ISSA, California	AMI BERK, California
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee	JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
MARK E. GREEN, Tennessee	DINA TITUS, Nevada
ANDY BARR, Kentucky	TED LIEU, California
RONNY JACKSON, Texas	SARA JACOBS, California
YOUNG KIM, California	SHEILA CHERFILUS-MC CORMICK, Florida
MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR, Florida	GREG STANTON, Arizona
BILL HUIZENGA, Michigan	JARED MOSKOWITZ, Florida
AUMUA AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN, American Samoa	JONATHAN L. JACKSON, Illinois
WARREN DAVIDSON, Ohio	SYDNEY KAMLAGER-DOVE, California
JAMES R. BAIRD, Indiana	JIM COSTA, California
THOMAS H. KEAN, JR, New Jersey	GABE AMO, Rhode Island
MICHAEL LAWLER, New York	KWEISI MFUME, Maryland
CORY MILLS, Florida	PRAMILA JAYAPAL, Washington
KEITH SELF, Texas	GEORGE LATIMER, New York
RYAN K. ZINKE, Montana	JOHNNY OLSZEWSKI JR, Maryland
JAMES C. MOYLAN, Guam	JULIE JOHNSON, Texas
ANNA PAULINA LUNA, Florida	SARAH McBRIDE, Delaware
JEFFERSON SHREVE, Indiana	BRADLEY SCOTT SCHNEIDER, Illinois
SHERI BIGGS, South Carolina	MADELEINE DEAN, Pennsylvania
MICHAEL BAUMGARTNER, Washington	
RYAN MACKENZIE, Pennsylvania	

James Langenderfer, *Majority Staff Director*  
Sajit Gandhi, *Minority Staff Director*

---

## SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE

KEITH SELF, Texas, *Chairman*

MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas	WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts, <i>Ranking Member</i>
JOE WILSON, South Carolina	DINA TITUS, Nevada
MARK GREEN, Tennessee	JIM COSTA, California
YOUNG KIM, California	GABE AMO, Rhode Island
WARREN DAVIDSON, Ohio	JULIE JOHNSON, Texas
ANNA PAULINA LUNA, Florida	SARAH McBRIDE, Delaware

# C O N T E N T S

## REPRESENTATIVES

	Page
Opening Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Keith Self .....	1
Opening Statement of Subcommittee Ranking Member William Keating .....	2

## WITNESSES

Statement of Dr. Anna Borschlevskaya, Harold Grinspoon Senior Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy .....	4
Prepared Statement .....	6
Statement of Dr. Jonathan Schanzer, Executive Director, Foundation for De- fense of Democracies .....	11
Prepared Statement .....	13
Statement of Dr. Celeste Wallander, Adjunct Senior Fellow, Center for New American Security .....	24
Prepared Statement .....	26

## APPENDIX

Hearing Notice .....	56
Hearing Minutes .....	57
Hearing Attendance .....	58



## **BRIDGING THE GAP: TURKEY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST**

---

**Wednesday, March 5, 2025**

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
Washington, DC.**

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Keith Self (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SELF. The Subcommittee on Europe will come to order. The purpose of this hearing is to discuss the future trajectory of Turkiye between the West and the East, as well as Turkiye's relationship with the United States, Europe, neighboring countries, and adversaries such as Russia.

I would like to start with a moment of silence for the passing of Representative Sylvester Turner of Texas. Let's take a moment of silence.

[Moment of silence.]

Mr. SELF. Thank you. I would also like to welcome Representatives Lawler, Cherfilus-McCormick, Zinke, Issa, and Schneider who will be joining us today. They are all members of the full committee, so there is no reason to vote them on. They will be joining us.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN KEITH SELF**

I welcome everyone to the first Europe Subcommittee hearing. It is an honor to chair this subcommittee that deals with a dynamic and potentially dangerous environment in a crucial region for U.S. national interests. I look forward to our work as a subcommittee.

Today our objective is to examine Turkiye's roles in NATO and by necessity the Middle East, even though this is the Europe Subcommittee. It will be necessary to look at Turkiye's track record in NATO and the Middle East in order to gain perspective on its role going forward in both regions.

As a NATO member, historically Turkiye has operated as a member of the NATO alliance often aligning its foreign policy interests with the goals of NATO, but in the last decade there have been some actions that don't line up with the NATO goals.

Take for example the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the barbaric October 7th attacks on Israel in 2023. While Turkiye supports most of the agenda within the NATO alliance, it did operate as a lone member, NATO lone member refusing to condemn the actions

of nefarious players in the Middle East. The world is changing quickly, and Turkiye's geographic location places it at the epicenter of the most tumultuous regions as conflicts rage in Europe and the Middle East.

Turkiye has also assumed the position of power broker in the vacuum created by Syria's regime change and is vexed by its unresolved issues with the Kurds going forward. The world, particularly the United States, is watching closely as Turkiye decides whether or not to ease tensions with the Kurds. America has relied on the Kurds' partnership in the region, and opposition to their success will be a major sticking point in Turkiye's relationship with the United States.

Turkiye is also unique in that geographically it straddles both Europe and Asia. It is a prominent member of the Minerals Security Partnership and could be a strategic partner for the West by operating as an alternative to Beijing. Recently Turkiye laid claim to one of the largest rare earth element reserves in the world with a 694 million ton rare earth deposit.

Historically, Turkiye was the anchor for NATO's southeast corner against the old Soviet Union, but over the past decade Turkiye's commitment to anchoring that region has begun to crack. They have the second largest military in NATO, only behind the United States, which makes Turkiye a key asset to the alliance, but its geographic location also makes it vulnerable to bad actors in the region.

I look forward to hearing testimony from our three experts today as they share their views on Turkiye's role in both Europe and the Middle East.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member, the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Keating, for any statement he may have.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER WILLIAM KEATING**

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I share your thoughts at this time with the Turner family. I would like to thank you and I would like to thank our witnesses here today.

For years Turkiye has been balancing its relationship with Europe and the Middle East, most recently following Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Turkiye has been a vital—has been vital in enabling the shipment of grain through the Black Sea and standing up for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. These are principled stances, and Turkiye should be applauded for those decisions.

Yet, significant challenges remain with Turkiye including Turkish support for Hamas, a brutal terrorist organization which conducted the heinous attack on October 7th. This support must end.

At the same time Turkiye's acquisition of Russian S-400 air defense systems as well as its delays in approving Finland and Sweden for NATO membership certainly complicated our bilateral relationship.

I also believe firmly that Turkiye must use its leverage with Azerbaijan and push for durable long-term peace in the Caucasus.

In our bilateral relationships with Turkiye we have a mixed history, but when assessing the U.S.-Turkiye relationship, it is impor-

tant to acknowledge that it is a relationship. Both sides must contribute and work for the benefit of our relations and our safety worldwide. I can't sit here this morning and ignore the deeply concerning events on the U.S. side of this relationship which undermines our influence regionally, but more importantly with our transatlantic and global allies. Simply put, we must take a look in the mirror. In our own relationship with Turkiye there are a variety of issues which warrant this view and observation of U.S. policy.

First, on the important issue of NATO. Since 1949 NATO has been the bedrock of the U.S.-Turkiye relationship. As I have said, Turkiye's delay in admitting Finland and Sweden into NATO following Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine complicated this relationship. Yet, I can't sit here without stating the obvious. President Trump's go-it-alone strategy does not further our relationship with NATO. It does not help us work on important issues like counter-terrorism in Turkiye. It does not help pressure allies, many of whom have shed blood on our behalf following 9/11, of our appreciation of our commitment to NATO.

On the issue of Russia, I am deeply concerned with Turkish involvement and unwillingness to cut trade with the Kremlin and cease the export of important dual-use items to Russia which Putin needs for his war effort. Yet, we must look in the mirror. President Trump has sided with Russia. He has praised Putin's authoritarian leadership style, and he has been unwilling to call Putin the aggressor.

Importantly on Ukraine, Turkiye is a critical ally and has helped facilitate the Black Sea Grain Initiative and enforce the Montreux Convention in the Black Sea. Turkiye can and should do even more, but so must the United States.

The Trump Administration has repeatedly shut the door on Ukraine. Rather than bolster Ukraine with military support to combat Russian aggression, this administration has frozen all U.S. assistance to Ukraine, halted intelligence assistance in Ukraine, and paused offensive cyber operations against Russia here at home. Rather than make clear at the United Nations that Russia is an aggressor State and that Vladimir Putin, a war criminal, is to blame for this war, this administration sided with Belarus and North Korea in opposition. Rather than work with President Zelenskyy to secure a lasting secure peace agreement, the President and Vice President berated him in the Oval Office, echoing Putin's talking points and lecturing Zelenskyy about democracy while the President and the Vice President make a mockery of that with that performance here at home.

At this time with so much on the line, we must speak up for our values, for our allies in Ukraine, for the people in this country, what they believe, that appeasing dictators and attacking our allies who have died with so many Americans in our history dating back to this great 80-year-plus period since World War II. Doing that is simply wrong.

I will close with this. My uncle died on French soil during World War II. As a Member of Congress I have had the opportunity to meet with dozens of Gold Star families like my own who suffered loss at the hands of enemies. Today I can't help but think of the

Ukrainian families, hundreds of thousands of them, who are looking to the United States for partnership, are instead receiving an empty hand, a closed fist, and thankless public rebukes designed to the benefit of Vladimir Putin.

While our President abandons Ukraine, many in Congress won't, and I urge all of my colleagues to stay with Ukraine, to stand up for what we all know is right, to stand up for Ukraine. I look forward to our witnesses' testimony here today, and I yield back.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, ranking member.

Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

We are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this important topic. We have Dr. Anna Borschевskaya, the Harold Grinspoon Senior Fellow for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. We have Dr. Jonathan Schanzer, the Executive Director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. And we have Hon. Celeste Wallander, Adjunct Senior Fellow, Center for New American Security.

This committee recognizes the importance of the issues before us and is grateful to have you here to speak with us today. Your full statements will be made part of the record, and I will ask each of you to keep your spoken remarks to 5 minutes in order to allow time for members' question.

I now recognize Dr. Borschевskaya for her opening statement. Welcome.

#### STATEMENT OF ANNA BORSCHEVSKAYA

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, honorable members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. With your permission I am submitting my written testimony, and I would like to summarize it.

I would like to focus on three key issues. First, Turkiye now has the potential to emerge as the primary naval power in the Black Sea. Second, the Russia-Turkiye relationship is no longer decisively tilted in Russia's favor, though Russia still retains some advantages. Third, Turkiye has maintained a pragmatic balancing act between Ukraine, Russia, and NATO after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

All of this, Mr. Chairman and honorable members, means that the United States has an opportunity to use Turkiye's new position to advance in the context of Russia's war on Ukraine, especially as the U.S. shifts its strategic investments toward the Indo-Pacific.

So here is how we can dive into this opportunity to advance America's interests. Check Russia's ability to return to the Eastern Mediterranean. Russia will inevitably seek to return to the Eastern Mediterranean. It is a historic Russian aspiration. The U.S. should look for linkages between European and Middle East theaters.

Turkiye has outmaneuvered Russia in Syria. The U.S. could see how it can work constructively with Turkiye to block Russia's influence there to ensure Russia does not regain influence.

Take advantage of Turkiye's growing primacy in the Black Sea. Restoration of security in the Black Sea region is a goal Turkiye and the West share. Over the long term the U.S. should use the end of the war in Ukraine to limit Russia's presence, if not to expel

Russia altogether from the Black Sea. It is in the U.S. interest to remove the threat of Russia from NATO's underbelly. In addition, neutralizing Russia in the Black Sea could also help blunt Russia's influence in the Levant.

Support Turkiye's normalization with Armenia in a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan. If Ukraine is to achieve a lasting victory, the West will need to act outside Ukraine by putting Russia under pressure in other theaters and specifically by depriving it of resources and influence in those regions.

The South Caucasus is one such region. It is a vital strategic link between Europe and the Middle East. Loss of influence in the South Caucasus will hurt Russia strategically because it will show Russia no longer has the same degree of control in its so-called near abroad. Promoting stability in this region is especially important now because Russia is gaining influence in Georgia.

Work to reduce Turkiye's dependence on Russian gas. Approximately 15 percent of EU gas still comes from Russia, and the revenue Russia generates helps it to fund its war effort in Ukraine. TurkStream and the new Turkish Blend project create an opportunity for Moscow to hide the origin of its gas and exert influence across Europe. The U.S. could sanction companies involved in infrastructure of TurkStream and Turkish Blend. At the same time the U.S. could look for opportunities to work on alternative energy projects with Turkiye to further eliminate dependence on Russia.

Take advantage of Turkiye's role as a mediator. Turkiye's mediation in the Black Sea grain deal was useful even if the deal ultimately collapsed. To the extent that it is advantageous to U.S. strategic interests, the U.S. should leverage Ankara's role as a mediator on the future.

Mr. Chairman, honorable members, how the war in Ukraine ends will have far-reaching implications for American credibility, security, and economy. It will affect American allies and partners across the world. If Russia is victorious, if Russia succeeds, it may lead to a bigger confrontation between Russia and NATO, along with NATO partners. In this context the U.S. has an interest in focusing a constructive pragmatic relationship with Turkiye. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Borschanskaya follows:]

**Anna Borshchevskaya**  
**Harold Grinspoon Senior Fellow**  
**The Washington Institute for Near East Policy**

Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, Honorable Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Russian president Vladimir Putin made Russia's war in Ukraine about the United States and the West more broadly. How the war in Ukraine ends will have far-reaching implications for American credibility, security, and economy. It will also affect American allies and partners across the world. Russia's victory may lead to a bigger confrontation with NATO and its partners. In this context, the U.S. has an interest in focusing on a constructive, pragmatic relationship with Turkey.

My testimony will cover three key issues. First, Turkey now has the potential to emerge as the primary naval power in the Black Sea. Second, the Russia-Turkey relationship is no longer decisively tilted in Russia's favor, though Russia still retains some advantages. Third, Turkey has maintained a pragmatic balancing act between Ukraine, Russia and NATO after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It would be in our interest to likewise be as pragmatic. Washington has an opportunity to use Turkey's new position to its advantage in the context of Russia's war on Ukraine, especially as the US shifts its strategic investments towards the Indo-Pacific.

#### **RUSSIA AND TURKEY: WHAT CHANGED AND WHAT STAYED THE SAME**

##### *Energy, trade, and defense*

For years, the Russia-Turkey relationship has been skewed in Russia's favor, as Russian president Vladimir Putin has sought to deepen Turkey's strategic reliance on Moscow. Putin worked to exacerbate divisions between Turkey and the West overall, and within NATO in particular. He was successful. Turkey has grown dependent on Russia's oil, gas, nuclear technologies, trade and tourism. Turkey has also become vulnerable to Russian disinformation operations, primarily through Russia's state-owned media organization Sputnik. This dynamic remains the same now. Moreover, Turkey's exports to Russia during Putin's tenure has been a fraction of Turkey's imports from the Russians, putting the bilateral trade relationship in Russia's favor. In addition, Erdogan's purchase of Moscow's S400 air defence system in late 2019 still remains an area of tension with Washington and NATO. In response, the US sanctioned Turkey under CAATSA Section 231 and prohibited Turkey from purchasing the F-35 joint strike fighters. Turkey also lost its co-production work in the program.

Meanwhile, the expansion of the TurkStream pipeline carrying Russian gas to southern Europe since January 2020 strengthened the bond between Ankara and Moscow. This is no accident, as Putin has long envisioned making Turkey a Russian gas hub; in late 2022, he proposed creating a gas base in Turkey as a way of redirecting supplies from the damaged Nord Stream pipeline to the European market. Developing this role for Turkey also allowed Putin to bypass Ukraine, thus replacing it as a transit hub. In August, Turkey announced plans to expand gas export as part of a new "Turkish Blend" project mixing gas from various sources, which would export between 7-8 billion cubic meters of gas through Bulgaria to Central Europe. Russia's state-owned giant Gazprom reportedly has a 40 percent share in the mix, though the real amount is likely higher. Furthermore, the construction of Turkey's nuclear plant at Akkuyu is based on four units of Russian-designed VVER-1200 reactors. Rosatom, Russia's state-owned nuclear energy company, is both financing and building it.

*Upper hand in Syria and the South Caucasus*

Yet something significant has changed. The dramatic opposition victory in the Syrian civil war means that Moscow can no longer use Syria as a pressure point against Turkey. In fact, Turkey has now gained the upper hand. Kurdish nationalism has been a perpetual concern of the Turkish state. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been engaged in an insurgency against Turkey since 1984, initially seeking an independent Kurdish state and later advocating for autonomy within Turkey. The US and EU, as well as Turkey, consider the PKK a terrorist group. Moscow's deep ties to the Kurds go back over two centuries. Russian and Soviet leaders have used them against Turkish leaders to exercise influence. Indeed, the Kremlin supported the creation of the PKK during the Cold War with that goal in mind. Turkey's fear of Kurdish nationalism stood behind its interventions in Syria in recent years, while Russia's military presence in Syria created another point of leverage for Putin over Erdogan, both to keep Assad in power and to convince Ankara to change its posture against him.<sup>1</sup> Turkey over the years had been vulnerable to refugee flows from Syria, which Russia has used as leverage throughout the conflict in Syria. Earlier Erdogan had maintained that Assad must go, but after Russia intervened in Syria, he no longer issued such demands. Once Turkey occupied Syrian land, its presence made Turkey dependent on Russia as the dominant power, which gave Russia additional leverage over Turkey. But now Turkey has outmaneuvered Russia in Syria.

In addition to Syria, Russia is also losing a substantial degree of military control in the South Caucasus, where Russia and Turkey (along with Iran) historically compete. This creates openings for Turkey. Russia's failure to come to the aid of Armenia, its treaty ally, has pushed Armenia closer to the West in the past few years. Armenia and Azerbaijan are moving closer to a peace treaty. Moscow does not want peace and stability in this region. To be sure, Moscow is gaining influence in Georgia, a Black Sea power, by exerting greater political control and potentially gaining military control there. The South Caucasus as a whole is also crucial at this juncture. Given the shifting power balance in this region, Washington has a unique window of opportunity. Peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan would be in the interest of both the US and Turkey, and would significantly curtail Russian influence.

**A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE**

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Erdogan has played a pragmatic balancing act between Russia and Ukraine to boost his domestic and foreign political standing and improve Turkey's influence in regions such as the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region. As Soner Cagaptay has noted, Erdogan's position has been pro-Ukraine but not anti-Russian.<sup>2</sup>

At the start of Russia's invasion, Erdogan condemned Russia's invasion as "unacceptable" but also emphasized that Turkey will not abandon ties to Russia or Ukraine. He described the American and Western stance as "indecisive," and emphasized that Turkey will not compromise its commitments to alliances, including NATO, but also its own national interests.<sup>3</sup> Erdogan also said on a number of occasions that Ukraine deserves to be in NATO.

<sup>1</sup> Anna Borshchevskaya, "The Kurdish Role in Russia's Middle East Power Play," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 29, 2020 <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kurdish-role-russias-middle-east-power-play>

<sup>2</sup> Soner Cagaptay, "Unpacking Turkey's Non-Binary Ukraine War Policy," March 7, 2023, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/unpacking-turkeys-non-binary-ukraine-war-policy>

<sup>3</sup> "Erdogan says Turkey cannot abandon ties with Russia or Ukraine," Reuters, March 1, 2022

Turkey did not join Western sanctions on Russia but sold armed drones to Ukraine as part of bilateral coordination with Ukraine that began in 2019, prior to Russia's invasion. Turkey played a key role in negotiating the Black Sea Grain Deal (which collapsed in July 2023 when Russia pulled out) and mediated or facilitated several prisoner exchanges. These included a release of over 200 Ukrainian prisoners in September 2022, a deal Turkey brokered jointly with Saudi Arabia. Turkish National Intelligence Agency (MIT) also helped coordinate an August 2024 prisoner exchange between the US and Russia—the largest such exchange since the Cold war.

Turkey (along with the UAE) emerged as a top destination for Russian oligarchs, including those sanctioned in the West. In March 2022, shortly after Russia's invasion, the number of Russian-owned businessmen quadrupled over the previous year. These businesses planned to take advantage of Turkey's "golden passport" law, which allows foreigners to obtain Turkish citizenship within 3-4 months by investing at least \$250,000 in real estate or \$500,000 in government bonds, companies, investment funds, or local bank accounts.

Turkey also expanded a number of flights between Russia and Turkey, helping facilitate the flow of Russian tourists to further boost Turkey's economy. In 2023 and 2024, Turkey was ranked as the top destination for Russia's tourists.<sup>4</sup> The increased flights also offset Russia's isolation by Western closures of airspace and sanctions on Russian airlines and companies. Turkey has correspondingly emerged as a key connectivity link for Russia on the international flights market.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, in July 2024, Erdogan reaffirmed his commitment to increase bilateral trade between Russia and Turkey from \$55 billion to \$100 billion.

#### **BLACK SEA, NATO, AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY**

In effect, the result of Turkey's balancing act between Russia and Ukraine appears to be a continuation of Ankara's policy of strategic autonomy in terms of its foreign policy overall, and within NATO in particular.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this approach, Turkey extracted benefits from the West for its support of Ukraine. Turkey's actions also highlighted the desire to keep both the West and Russia out of the strategically-vital Black Sea region.

Soon after Russia's invasion, Turkey closed the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits to Russian military vessels, the first such closure since World War II. Turkey invoked Article 19 of the Montreux Convention

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/erdogan-says-turkey-cannot-abandon-ties-with-russia-or-ukraine-2022-02-28/>

<sup>5</sup> "Top travel destinations Russian tourists visited 2023," February 14, 2024, Russian Travel Digest

<https://russtd.com/top-travel-destinations-russian-tourists-visited-2023.html>

"Outbound tourism from Russia up one-fourth in 2024," February 6, 2025, Interfax

[https://www.interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/109646/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/109646/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>6</sup> "Turkey became key for those who need to fly between Russia and America or the rest of Europe," Aviacionline, March 6, 2022

<https://www.aviacionline.com/turkey-became-key-for-those-who-need-to-fly-between-russia-and-america-or-the-rest-of-europe>

"Russia, Turkey agree to increase flights for Russian tourists," TASS April 28, 2023

<https://tass.com/politics/1611361>

<sup>6</sup> Sinan Ülgen, Sophia Besch, and İlke Toygür, "Strategic Autonomy as a Dynamic of Convergence in Türkiye-EU Relations," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 22, 2024

<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/strategic-autonomy-as-a-dynamic-of-convergence-in-turkiye-eu-relations?lang=en>

for the closure, but also went further and asked “non-riparian” states (which implied NATO non riparian states), to abstain from requesting permission to enter the Black Sea, a decision that appeared at the time to favor Russia. It was a decision that highlighted Turkey’s longstanding desire to keep the West out of the Black Sea region, an interest Turkey shares with Russia. Indeed, this interest for Turkey is longstanding. Still, in hindsight, as Turkey analysts had pointed out, the Straits closure limited Russia’s ability to reinforce its Black Sea fleet,<sup>7</sup> which was consistent with Turkey’s pragmatic balancing act between Ukraine, the West and Russia while still leaning closer to the West. Indeed, as the war progressed, Turkey consistently supported NATO’s defense efforts in the Black Sea, for example, by contributing F-16 fighter jets to a NATO policing mission in Romania and sending forces to a NATO battlegroup in Bulgaria, established shortly after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile, throughout the course of the war, Ukraine has been remarkably successful in its attacks on Russian naval forces in the Black Sea, putting Moscow on the defensive there. Russia has lost approximately forty percent of its naval tonnage according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.<sup>8</sup> Ukraine’s success is largely due to uncrewed surface vessels (USV), as well as other military tools. Kyiv has thus managed to push Russia’s Black Sea Fleet back to Novorossiysk.

The fact of the matter is, NATO remains one of very few venues where Turkey can exert pressure on the West. Putin for his part preferred that Turkey remained in NATO precisely for this reason. Russia’s war in Ukraine gave Erdogan an opportunity to draw greater Western attention to Turkey’s security concerns. Thus, the US appeared to have rewarded Turkish approval of Sweden’s NATO membership bid with a promise of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey, an important concession to Ankara that showed Erdogan’s transactional approach with the West. In December of last year, Turkey announced that it was scaling back the F-16 fighter jet package, but reports also suggest that Turkey is looking to acquire 40 Eurofighter Typhoon fighters.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Check Russia’s ability to return to the Eastern Mediterranean.** Russia will inevitably seek to return to the Eastern Mediterranean. It is a historic Russian state aspiration that transcends not only Putin’s 2015 Syria intervention but also the Cold War. After the partial withdrawal from Syria, Russia moved a number of assets to Libya, while Sudan announced “no obstacles” to a Russian base on the Red Sea coast.<sup>9</sup> At present, Russia is only halfway out of Syria; it retains leverage there as it looks to build relations with the new caretaker government in Damascus. The US should look for linkages between European and Middle Eastern theaters, and in Syria, in particular, the US should see how it can work constructively with Turkey to block Russia’s influence. This could include tackling Russia’s so-called “ghost fleet” of illicit oil tankers by cracking down on the fleet’s legal violations and ecological threats, especially given the massive oil spill in the Sea of Azov in December 2024.

---

<sup>7</sup> Alan Makovsky, “Turkey and the Ukraine War: Ankara Charts its Own Course,” The Turkey Analyst, May 12, 2022 <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/687-turkey-and-the-ukraine-war-ankara-charts-its-own-course.html>

<sup>8</sup> “Maritime Domain Lessons from Russia-Ukraine,” Conflict in Focus, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Transcript — February 27, 2025 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/maritime-domain-lessons-russia-ukraine-conflict-focus>

<sup>9</sup> Basilio Rukanga, “Sudan-Russia deal: Final agreement reached over Red Sea naval base, says Sudan,” BBC, February 13, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c30del8dz51o>

**Take advantage of Turkey's growing primacy in the Black Sea.** Restoration of security in the Black Sea region is a goal Turkey and the West share, even if Turkey, like Russia, does not want to see the West in this region. Over the long term, the US should use the end of the war in Ukraine to limit Russia's presence, if not expel it altogether, from the Black Sea. Russia was expelled from this region before by the 1856 Treaty of Paris, which effectively "neutralized" Russia in the Black Sea, limiting Russia's military presence to a small fleet of ten small ships. It is in the US interest to remove the threat of Russia from NATO's underbelly; neutralizing Russia in the Black Sea could also help to blunt Russia's presence in the Levant, which is important given Russia's strategic partnership with Iran. Neutralizing Russia in the Black Sea would be to the US's overall strategic advantage, and to that end, the US can seek shared interests with Turkey.

**Support Turkey's normalization with Armenia and a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.** If Ukraine is to achieve a lasting victory, the West will need to act outside of Ukraine—by putting Russia under pressure in other theaters, and specifically by depriving it of resources and influence in those regions. This includes the South Caucasus, which straddles both Europe and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> Russia has held a key military position here for over two hundred years. Weakening Russia's influence in this region will hurt Russia strategically, as it will demonstrate that Russia no longer has the same degree of control in its so-called "near abroad." Promoting stability in this region is especially crucial now that Russia is reportedly building a military base in Ochamchire, Abkhazia, a breakaway region of Georgia. The US can look for ways to work on projects in this region that support Turkish and Western objectives, rather than Russia's interests.

**Work to reduce Turkey's dependence on Russian gas.** Approximately 15 percent of the EU's gas still comes from Russia, and the revenue Russia generates helps it fund its war effort in Ukraine. TurkStream and the new "Turkish Blend" project create an opportunity for Moscow to hide the origin of its gas and exert influence across Europe. The US could sanction companies involved in TurkStream infrastructure and the new "Turkish Blend." The US sanctioned one line of TurkStream in 2020, but more sanctions could help reduce Europe's dependence on Russia's gas and send the message that the West supports Ukraine. At the same time, the US could look for opportunities to work on alternative energy projects with Turkey to further eliminate dependence on Russia.

**Take advantage of Turkey's role as a mediator.** Turkey's mediation in the Black Sea grain deal was useful even if the deal ultimately collapsed. To the extent that it is advantageous to US strategic interests, the US should leverage Ankara's role as a mediator in the future.

---

<sup>10</sup> Anna Borshchevskaya and Andrew J. Tabler, "Iran's Tensions with Azerbaijan Point to Broader Shifts in the South Caucasus," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 31, 2023  
<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/irans-tensions-azerbaijan-point-broader-shifts-south-caucasus>

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Dr. Borschanskaya.  
I now recognize Dr. Schanzer for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF JONATHAN SCHANZER**

Mr. SCHANZER. Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, on behalf of Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Turkiye has made headlines since the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria collapsed late last year, and this is because Turkiye is the power broker behind the new government led by the al Qaeda affiliate known as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS. Turkiye's backing of al Qaeda in Syria is not new. Since the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011, Turkiye has supported several Jihadi groups fighting the Assad regime. However, Assad didn't fall for 14 years, and that explains how the Jihadi problem in Syria has grown worse.

Ankara promotes HTS as a moderate entity. This is a farce. The violent history of HTS must not be ignored. The closest analog to this scenario, a designated terror group taking over an entire country, is the Taliban, and we know how that worked out for Afghanistan.

Turkiye also supports Hezbollah. Last month Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar revealed that Turkiye is aiding Iran to smuggle funds to the Lebanese terror group. Last year the U.S. imposed sanctions on a network in Turkiye and Lebanon for funding the IRGC Quds Force and Hezbollah. Other Turkish-based entities have earned sanctions in recent years for similar reasons.

Ankara is a leading patron of Hamas. For nearly two decades Turkiye has operated—openly backed, rather, the terror group, providing political cover and financial support. In 2011 Palestinian sources allege that Erdogan earmarked \$300 million to Hamas. After the Gilad Shalit prisoner swap that year, scores of Hamas prisoners were deported to Turkiye including Saleh al-Arouri, one of the group's most dangerous terrorist operatives. In 2014, Arouri ordered the killing of three teens in the West Bank sparking a major war with Hamas that year. The Erdogan government cheered Arouri when he claimed credit for that attack.

After Hamas slaughtered 1,200 Israelis on October 7th, Erdogan doubled down on his Hamas support. He welcomed Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh in Istanbul. Just before he was killed by Israel in July 2024, the two discussed relocating Hamas's political headquarters from Qatar to Turkiye.

To this day Turkiye is a hub for Hamas's global finances. Numerous U.S. sanctions designations underscore this trend. Trend GYO, a Turkish construction conglomerate, was designated by the U.S. in 2022 for generating revenue for Hamas. That company is still active today as are other firms that are funding Hamas in Turkiye.

In December U.S. legislators received a classified briefing about Turkiye and Hamas. I hope that one theme emerged, namely that Erdogan has invested nearly 20 years legitimizing, funding, and empowering Hamas.

So why does Erdogan support these terror groups? Because he aspires to regional, if not global domination, and he thinks that supporting these groups can help him. The collapse of the Assad

regime and the rise of HTS was Erdogan's first major Middle East conquest, and he wants more.

During the Arab Spring Turkiye backed Islamist factions vying for power as ossified Middle East regimes collapsed one after the next. Egyptian, Libyan, and other Islamist groups all looked to Ankara for political and financial support. Some still get Turkish backing hoping to replicate the success of HTS.

Erdogan's Hamas rhetoric is a very clear attempt to position himself as a leader in the Muslim world. His failed call for an Islamic war against Israel led to nothing, but it was a clear attempt to rally the Muslim world around the Turkish flag.

I am also concerned about Turkiye's Blue Homeland policy of aggression. Tensions are currently rising in the Eastern Med with Turkish vessels challenging Greek and Cypriot vessels, even in their own exclusive economic zones.

The U.S. can no longer afford to ignore Turkish aggression. A policy shift is needed, and I offer these recommendations. The U.S. should maintain its modest military presence in Syria to counter Turkish aggression. The U.S. should block Turkish attempts to deploy military forces or contractors anywhere in the Middle East. The U.S. should expose and punish Ankara's policy of allowing Jihadi fighters and terror financiers to use Turkiye as a transit and logistics hub. The U.S. should preserve—rather than pressure Ankara to sever all ties with Hamas including shutting down its offices, extraditing known operatives, and revoking travel documents. Failure to do so should result in tough sanctions. The U.S. should closely monitor Turkish involvement in weapon smuggling with a focus on Syria's borders with Jordan and Lebanon. And finally, Congress should limit any major arms sale to Turkiye until it stops supporting terrorism and destabilizing NATO.

I offer additional recommendations in my written testimony. I hope this subcommittee considers all of them. On behalf of FDD, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Schanzer follows:]

**CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY: FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES**

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
*Subcommittee on Europe*

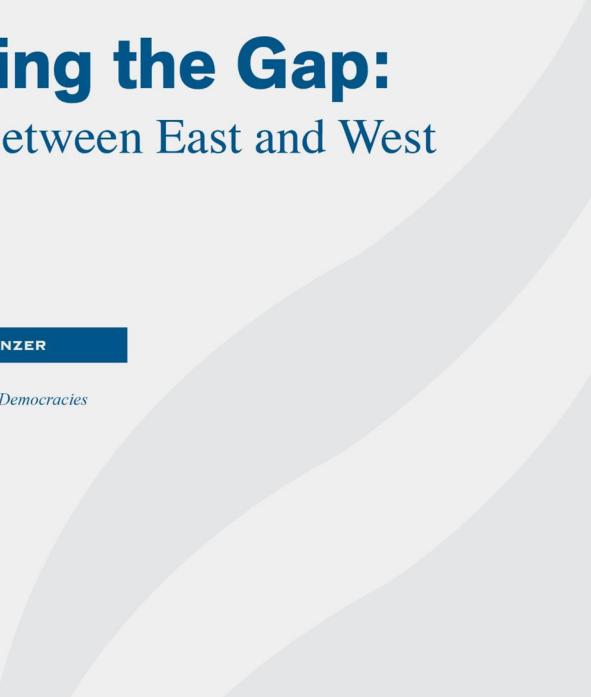
---

# Bridging the Gap: Turkey Between East and West

**DR. JONATHAN SCHANZER**

Executive Director  
*Foundation for Defense of Democracies*

Washington, DC  
March 5, 2025



[www.fdd.org](http://www.fdd.org)

Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The government of Turkey has become a headache for U.S. policymakers. If Ankara maintains its current trajectory, that headache will soon become a migraine.

Once hailed as a rare “Islamic Democracy” by Washington<sup>1</sup> and celebrated as a potential governance model for the Middle East, the Turkish government under strongman Recep Tayyip Erdogan is in no way a model for the Middle East today. Indeed, Turkey’s governance model is largely indistinguishable from the regimes of Arab strongmen. More worryingly, Turkey has strayed from its alliance with the United States. The country behaves too often like an adversary, pursuing malign domestic and foreign policies that fly in the face of U.S. interests. Some might posit that Ankara has employed a hedging strategy toward the West. I view it differently. Turkey has systematically tested American patience for more than a decade, and it has yet to pay a significant price for doing so.

There are five key concepts that American policymakers must understand if we are to properly assess and address the challenge from Turkey.

First, Turkey has become a state sponsor of terrorism. It may not appear on the State Department list right now. But it should. Ankara has a long and established track record for supporting Middle East terrorist groups and rogue states.<sup>2</sup> The Erdogan government has been unabashed in backing terror groups like Hamas, al-Qaeda, and even the Islamic State.

Second, Turkey has ambitions of regional if not global dominance. Erdogan has made no secret of his irredentist and Neo-Ottoman aim.<sup>3</sup> To put it plainly, he seeks to make Turkey great again. Ankara is actively working to expand its traditional sphere of influence in the Middle East and beyond, and it is doing so at the expense of the stability of our allies — and even the United States.

Third, Turkey threatens the cohesion and security of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>4</sup> Turkey has adopted policies that support NATO adversaries like Russia. But some of Ankara’s other policies simply fly in the face of the values of this important alliance.

Fourth and relatedly, Turkey plays a duplicitous role in Russia’s war against Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> This must not continue.

---

<sup>1</sup> David Dolan, “Vice President Biden chides Turkey over freedom of expression,” *Reuters*, January 22, 2016. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us-politics/vice-president-biden-chides-turkey-over-freedom-of-expression-idUSKCN0V01PB>)

<sup>2</sup> “Israel Foils Hamas Terror Attack Directed by Turkey,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, July 21, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/07/21/israel-foils-hamas-terror-attack-directed-by-turkey>)

<sup>3</sup> Abdul Rasool Syed, “Erdogan: A Man Obsessed With Neo-Ottomanism,” *Modern Diplomacy*, November 9, 2020. (<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/11/09/erdogan-a-man-obsessed-with-neo-ottomanism>)

<sup>4</sup> Michael Crowley and Steven Erlanger, “For NATO, Turkey Is a Disruptive Ally,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 2022. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/30/us/politics/turkey-nato-russia.html>)

<sup>5</sup> Sinan Ciddi and Sophia Epley, “Washington Should Demand Turkey Donate its S-400 Missiles to Ukraine and the U.S.,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, September 25, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/09/25/washington-should-demand-turkey-donate-its-s-400-missiles-to-ukraine-and-the-u-s>)

Finally, Turkey's domestic politics portray a country that is gripped by the autocratic rule of Erdogan. The country today is an outlier among our democratic allies and partners.

My testimony will explore these five problems. In the conclusion, this testimony offers policy prescriptions to address these challenges.

#### **Terrorism Support**

Turkey has garnered significant attention since the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria late last year. This is because Turkey is the primary power behind the rise of the al-Qaeda affiliate group known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS. A few short years ago, HTS went by the name of Jabhat al-Nusra, which was designated by the United States as a terrorist group on account of its violent, jihadist track record and its partnership with the Islamic State. The group changed its name in a bid to make a break from its dark past.<sup>6</sup>

Turkey's backing of this group is not new. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Turkey provided support to several jihadi groups fighting to bring down the Assad regime.<sup>7</sup> This was clear early on to American officials serving in the region. One such official told me in 2012 that U.S. agencies confronted the government in Ankara, which did not deny its support for violent jihadis. Rather, the Turks acknowledged their proxy campaign to bring down the Assad regime with violent non-state actors and promised to clean up the problem after the Assad regime fell. Assad, as we all know, didn't fall for 14 years. This contributed to a jihadi problem in Syria that American policymakers must now confront. Ahmad al-Sharaa (aka Abu Mohammed al-Jolani), the leader of HTS, is now the head of state in Syria. Ankara is keen to promote al-Sharaa's government as a moderate entity. It may be pragmatic for now, but whether it stays moderate remains to be seen. HTS has a brutal history that must not be ignored.<sup>8</sup> The closest analog there is to this scenario — a designated terrorist group taking over a country — is the Taliban. And that has not worked out well in Afghanistan, to put it mildly.<sup>9</sup>

But Turkey's support for HTS is not an anomaly. As early as 2012, known terrorist organizations became increasingly reliant on Turkey's permissive border policies for their ability to operate, if not their survival.<sup>10</sup> In the early stages of the Syrian civil war, officials from the Free Syrian Army (later renamed the Syrian National Army) began alerting Washington that known terrorists were crossing

---

<sup>6</sup> Mattisan Rowan, "Al Qaeda's Latest Rebranding: Hay'at Tahrir al Sham," *Wilson Center*, April 24, 2017. (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaedas-latest-rebranding-hayat-tahrir-al-sham>)

<sup>7</sup> "10 Things to Know About Turkey's Interventions and Influence in Syria," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, February 24, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/02/24/10-things-to-know-about-turkeys-interventions-and-influence-in-syria>)

<sup>8</sup> Bill Roggio, "Hayat Tahrir al Sham's terror network in Syria," *FDD's Long War Journal*, December 12, 2024. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2024/12/hayat-tahrir-al-shams-terror-network-in-syria.php>)

<sup>9</sup> Divyabharthi Baradhan, "UN expert expresses concern over worsening human rights situation in Afghanistan," *Jurist*, February 28, 2025. (<https://www.jurist.org/news/2025/02/un-expert-expresses-concern-over-worsening-human-rights-situation-in-afghanistan>)

<sup>10</sup> Sinan Ciddi and Sophia Epley, "Turkey and HTS: A New Era of Extremism in Syria?" *19FortyFive*, January 15, 2025. (<https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/turkey-and-hts-a-new-era-of-extremism-in-syria>)

freely between Syria and Turkey and that Turkish border guards looked the other way.<sup>11</sup> This was not passive complicity. A 2012 report revealed that Ankara joined forces with Qatar and Saudi Arabia to establish a covert operations center to enable jihadi assaults on the Assad regime.<sup>12</sup>

Ankara's sympathizers are often quick to note that Turkey's policies in Syria are driven by its fears of Kurdish separatism.<sup>13</sup> As the Syrian civil war raged on, Ankara became increasingly alarmed by the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish zone in northern Syria led by the Syrian Democratic Forces. The SDF became the primary U.S. partner in the fight against the Islamic State.<sup>14</sup> For Ankara, the SDF was nothing more than an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a terrorist group designated by Turkey, the United States, and the European Union. We often hear from Turkish mouthpieces that Ankara's reckless policies in Syria are driven by this friction.

First, let us acknowledge that even legitimate political grievances do not grant American allies the right to support jihadi violence. But the problem is bigger than Syria. Turkey's fingerprints can be found in Lebanon. Just last month, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar told a visiting delegation of U.S. senators and the deputy Middle East special envoy that Turkey is aiding Iran to smuggle funds to Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>15</sup> One year earlier, in January 2024, the United States imposed sanctions on three entities and one individual based in Turkey and Lebanon for providing "critical financial support" to a financial network used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and Lebanon's Hezbollah.<sup>16</sup> Several other Turkish-based entities have earned sanctions or other punitive actions by the U.S. government in recent years for similar reasons.

But it doesn't end there. Ankara is a leading patron of Hamas, the terrorist group that committed the October 7 massacre in 2023. Erdogan's support for Hamas began in 2006, if not earlier.<sup>17</sup> Erdogan shocked Western leaders when he invited top Hamas leaders to Ankara just weeks after privately assuring them he would not do so.<sup>18</sup> Since then, Turkey has openly backed the terror group, providing political cover and financial support. It is the only country in NATO that openly embraces Hamas as a "resistance" movement.

<sup>11</sup> Lauren Frayer, "Who's been funding the HTS rebels now in control of Syria?" *National Public Radio*, December 20, 2024. (<https://www.npr.org/2024/12/19/nx-s1-5232809/syria-hts-funding>)

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Schanzer and Merve Tahiroglu, "Bordering on Terrorism: Turkey's Syria Policy and the Rise of the Islamic State," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 19, 2014. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2014/11/19/bordering-on-terrorism>)

<sup>13</sup> Sinan Ciddi and Sophia Epley, "Turkey and HTS: A New Era of Extremism in Syria?" *19FortyFive*, January 15, 2025. (<https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/01/turkey-and-hts-a-new-era-of-extremism-in-syria>)

<sup>14</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "What Role Is Turkey Playing in Syria's Civil War?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 6, 2024. (<https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/what-role-turkey-playing-syrias-civil-war>)

<sup>15</sup> "Israel accuses Turkey of helping Iran get cash to Hezbollah," *Iran International*, February 17, 2025. (<https://wwwiranintl.com/en/202502172540>)

<sup>16</sup> "US targets Iranian, Hezbollah financial network with sanctions," *Reuters*, January 31, 2024. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-targets-iranian-hezbollah-financial-network-with-sanctions-2024-01-31>)

<sup>17</sup> Ece Goksedef, "What is behind Turkey's staunch support for Hamas in Gaza?" *BBC (UK)*, January 2, 2024. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67861266>)

<sup>18</sup> "Hamas Visit to Turkey Deepens Secular-Islamist Rift," *Middle East Media Research Institute*, March 14, 2006. (<https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-visit-turkey-deepens-secular-islamist-rift>)

By 2011, Palestinian sources alleged that Erdogan earmarked \$300 million to Hamas.<sup>19</sup> While never confirmed, \$300 million would have constituted nearly half of Hamas's budget at the time. After the Gilad Shalit prisoner swap of 2011, scores of Hamas operatives were deported to Turkey, including Saleh al-Arouri, one of the group's most dangerous terrorist operatives.<sup>20</sup> The group increasingly sought to establish a base of operations in Turkey. Erdogan welcomed both visiting Hamas delegations and Turkey-based operatives with open arms, saying "I don't see Hamas as a terror organization, Hamas is a political party."<sup>21</sup> Erdogan's position did not waver after Arouri boasted before a large crowd in Turkey that he ordered the killing of three Israeli teens.<sup>22</sup> That triple murder led inexorably to the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas.

Erdogan's support of Hamas has not flagged since, even after the October 7 attacks. In fact, the Turkish strongman doubled down on his support after the war began. He declared, "Hamas is not a terrorist organization, it is a liberation group, 'mujahideen' waging a battle to protect its lands and people."<sup>23</sup> As if to underscore this, Hamas Political Chief Ismail Haniyeh met with Erdogan in Istanbul just months before he was killed by Israel in Tehran on July 31, 2024.<sup>24</sup> According to reports at the time, the two discussed formally relocating Hamas's political headquarters from Qatar to Turkey.<sup>25</sup>

In December 2024, American legislators received a classified briefing about Turkey's deep and growing ties to Hamas.<sup>26</sup> For the members who received this briefing, one thing should have become clear: Erdogan has invested more than 15 years legitimizing, funding, and empowering Hamas. This has positioned Turkey as an indispensable patron of the terrorist organization.

A key component of that patronage is Turkey's facilitation of Hamas's global financial operations in the country. Numerous U.S. sanctions designations underscore this troubling dynamic. Trend GYO, a Turkish construction conglomerate with an estimated worth of \$500 million, was designated by the United States in 2022 for "generat[ing] revenue for the terrorist group through the management

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, "Hamas for Sale?" *The Weekly Standard*, December 21, 2011. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2011/12/21/hamas-for-sale>)

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, "Thorn in the Side," *Foreign Policy*, September 17, 2013. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/09/17/thorn-in-the-side>)

<sup>21</sup> Tovah Lazaroff, "Erdogan: 'Hamas is not a terrorist organization,'" *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), May 13, 2011. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/erdogan-hamas-is-not-a-terrorist-organization>)

<sup>22</sup> "Hamas admits kidnapping 3 Israeli teens in West Bank," *CBS News*, August 21, 2014. (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hamas-admits-kidnapping-3-israeli-teens-in-west-bank>)

<sup>23</sup> "Turkey's Erdogan: Hamas aren't terrorists, they're a liberation group," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), October 25, 2023. (<https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-770084>)

<sup>24</sup> Abby Sewell, "Hamas' top political leader is killed in Iran in strike that risks triggering all-out regional war," *Associated Press*, July 31, 2024. (<https://apnews.com/article/iran-hamas-israel-30968a7acb31cd8b259de9650014b779>)

<sup>25</sup> "Hamas Chief Meets Turkish President, Considers Move from Qatar to Turkey," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 22, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/04/22/hamas-chief-meets-turkish-president-considers-move-from-qatar-to-turkey>)

<sup>26</sup> Office of Rep. Josh Gottheimer, Press Release, "Gottheimer, Goldman, Bilirakis, & Malliotakis Lead Bipartisan Letter with 39 Members of Congress To Blinken and Haines Regarding Turkey Harboring of Hamas leaders," November 22, 2024. (<https://gottheimer.house.gov/posts/release-gottheimer-goldman-bilirakis-malliotakis-lead-bipartisan-letter-with-39-members-of-congress-to-blinken-and-haines-regarding-turkey-harboring-of-hamas-leaders>)

of an international investment portfolio.<sup>27</sup> The scheme was rather simple: Hamas supporters poured funds into seemingly legitimate construction projects only for the proceeds to be funneled through pro-Hamas charities and ultimately into Hamas's accounts in Gaza.

On December 28, 2024, the U.S. Treasury Department designated Turkish company Al Aman Cargo for financing arms transactions to Houthi rebels on behalf of Iran's IRGC-QF.<sup>28</sup> The same designation also targeted several currency exchange houses located in Turkey and Yemen for their role in transferring millions of dollars to the Guard's Quds Force.

Understanding these financial networks together makes it clear that Turkey is not just ignoring terrorist financing — it is actively facilitating it. Turkish banks, construction firms, and financial intermediaries are all part of a system that props up groups like Hamas and the Houthis.

Finally, it is important to note that Turkey is a long-time supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is not a U.S.-designated terrorist group. However, it probably should be. It is a vast global network of Islamist extremists whose primary goal is to regain worldwide dominance. In 2018, I testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform and noted that Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) is effectively the Turkish arm of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>29</sup> The AKP-led government today provides centers of operations for Brotherhood operatives, and it has helped the network establish television and radio channels, foundations, schools, and businesses.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Neo-Ottoman Ambitions**

The backing that Erdogan has provided Islamist terror groups is not simply a reflection of the Turkish strongman's affinity for violent jihadists. Erdogan aspires to regional if not global domination, and he appears to believe that supporting these groups can help him achieve that.

The lightning collapse of the Assad regime and the equally rapid rise of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham was Erdogan's first major conquest in the Middle East. Turkish influence can be seen throughout the new regime. Turkish minders often attend HTS meetings with foreign diplomats.<sup>31</sup> The Turkish lira is the currency of choice in Syria's population centers.<sup>32</sup> In many ways, Syria looks like a Turkish

<sup>27</sup> Sinan Ciddi, "Turkey is a Sanctuary for Terrorism Financing," *Washington Examiner*, February 17, 2024. (<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/2861072/turkey-sanctuary-for-terrorism-financing>)

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Targets Network Financing Houthi Attacks on International Shipping," December 28, 2023. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2014>)

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Global Threat," *Testimony before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee*, July 11, 2018. (<https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/testimony-Schanzer-House-Oversight-Muslim-Brotherhood.pdf>)

<sup>30</sup> "Muslim Brotherhood 'Rabaa' channel launches in Turkey," *Al Arabiya* (UAE), December 22, 2013. (<https://english.alarabiya.net/media/television-and-radio/2013/12/22/Muslim-Brotherhood-Rabaa-channel-launches-in-Turkey>)

<sup>31</sup> Carlotta Gall, "Turkey Emerges as a Big Winner in the Wake of al-Assad's Ouster," *The New York Times*, December 13, 2024. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/13/world/middleeast/turkey-syria-rebels-erdogan.html>)

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas Frakes, "Turkish Lira Becomes Unofficial Currency in Syria as Economy Sinks," *Al Arabiya* (UAE), June 15, 2020. (<https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2020/06/15/Turkish-lira-becomes-unofficial-currency-in-Syria-as-economy-sinks>)

“sanjak” or province — which harkens back to a time (the 14th to the 20th centuries) when Turkey was a global power.

In the wake of the Arab Spring, the hand of Turkey could be seen supporting multiple Islamist factions vying for power while ossified Middle Eastern regimes collapsed, one after the next. Egyptian, Libyan, and other Islamist groups vying for power were all reliant upon Ankara for political and other support.<sup>33</sup> Some still look to Ankara for backing in the hopes that they might replicate the success of HTS. Ankara would welcome the opportunity to further expand its regional influence through the ascendance of these groups.

Even Erdogan’s support for Hamas reflects his regional aspirations. Indeed, he has adopted rhetoric and policies that eclipse the tone of some of the most virulent populists in the Arab world. This is designed to position him as a leader of the Islamic world.<sup>34</sup> Erdogan’s recent calls for a pan-Islamic response to Israel’s military campaign in Gaza is a case in point.<sup>35</sup> Of course, the Islamic world did not heed his call. But this has not stopped the Turkish strongman from trying to gather the world’s Muslims under the Turkish flag.

But perhaps the most dangerous indicator of Turkey’s ambition is its “Blue Homeland” policy of dominating the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, even at the expense of other NATO members, such as Greece.<sup>36</sup> Tensions are rising in the Eastern Mediterranean today, with Turkish vessels challenging Greece and Cyprus at an alarming rate, even in their own exclusive economic zones. Ankara’s goal is nothing less than regional dominance.<sup>37</sup> Policymakers in Washington must keep a close eye on this dangerous dynamic. War in the Eastern Mediterranean becomes more likely with every act of Turkish aggression.

Amid all of this, Erdogan continues to push for Turkey to be a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.<sup>38</sup> “The world is more than five” is one of his common refrains.<sup>39</sup> This is, of course, a terrible idea. But it is also a warning to the West. The Turkish strongman has global ambitions. The Eastern Mediterranean is, quite literally, not the water’s edge.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Schanzer and Merve Tahiroglu, “Bordering on Terrorism: Turkey’s Syria Policy and the Rise of the Islamic State,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 19, 2014. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2014/11/19/bordering-on-terrorism>)

<sup>34</sup> Steven Cook and Sinan Ciddi, “Erdogan Gets His ‘Leader of the Muslim World’ Moment,” *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2024. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/12/09/erdogan-turkey-syria-assad-muslim-world>)

<sup>35</sup> “Turkish President Calls on Islamic World to Unite Against Israel’s Genocide in Gaza,” *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey), November 4, 2024. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkish-president-calls-on-islamic-world-to-unite-against-israels-genocide-in-gaza/3383600>)

<sup>36</sup> Ryan Gingeras, “Blue Homeland: The Heated Politics Behind Turkey’s New Maritime Strategy,” *War on the Rocks*, June 2, 2020. (<https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy>)

<sup>37</sup> “Turkish Tensions Rise in Eastern Mediterranean: NAVTEX Challenge South of Kastellorizo,” *Greek City Times* (Australia), July 18, 2024. (<https://greekcitytimes.com/2024/07/18/turkish-tensions-rise-in-eastern-mediterranean-navtex-challenge-south-of-kastellorizo>)

<sup>38</sup> “Erdogan Says Turkey Eyes Permanent Seat on UN Security Council,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), September 27, 2024. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-says-turkiye-eyes-permanent-seat-on-un-security-council>)

<sup>39</sup> Times of India, “Erdogan UN Speech Live, NATO Nation’s Fiery UNGA Address: ‘World Is Bigger Than Five,’ YouTube, September 25, 2024. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmkCD03yhOs>)

### **Turkey's Role in NATO**

Unfortunately, Turkey's membership in NATO has provided the Recep Tayyip Erdogan government with a platform to further undermine American and Western interests. Erdogan is Turkey's first leader to undermine the collective interests of NATO. The Turkish strongman has been able to simultaneously maximize his leverage and test the limits of the alliance.

This was made clear during NATO's most recent effort to include Sweden and Finland.<sup>40</sup> Initially, Erdogan welcomed the addition of the Scandinavian nations without reservation.<sup>41</sup> However, Ankara quickly backtracked, holding Washington hostage by demanding the sale of F-16 fighter jets in exchange for its approval.<sup>42</sup> Erdogan thus used Turkey's NATO vote as a bargaining chip, undermining the cohesion of the alliance and signaling a shift in Turkey's NATO commitments.

Turkey's adherence to NATO principles is by now seen by the Western alliance for what it is: a farce.<sup>43</sup> Since 2015, Erdogan has deepened Turkey's relationship with Vladimir Putin's Russia — the country that necessitated the creation of NATO in the first place. In 2019, despite warnings from the Trump administration, Erdogan purchased the S-400 missile defense system from Russia, resulting in Ankara's removal from the F-35 program, and the imposition of U.S. sanctions.<sup>44</sup> To date, Turkey continues to possess the Russian system. The presence of Russian technology is a cyber threat to all NATO and U.S. systems in Turkey. This is a clear and present danger to NATO's interoperability and, in particular, the safety and security of the alliance's fifth-generation fighter aircraft.

It's also worth noting that Turkey has flirted with other alliances that undermine NATO. This includes engagement with the China-backed Shanghai Cooperation Council and BRICS.<sup>45</sup>

### **Turkey's Relations With Russia and Ukraine**

Unfortunately, Turkey's policy of duplicity is not limited to NATO. Ankara has adopted a duplicitous policy toward Ukraine, playing both sides of the confrontation between Moscow and the West.

---

<sup>40</sup> "What's Behind Turkey's Reversal on Sweden's NATO Bid?" *Georgetown University*, July 12, 2023. (<https://www.georgetown.edu/news/whats-behind-turkeys-reversal-on-swedens-nato-bid-a-foreign-policy-professor-answers>)

<sup>41</sup> Paul Levin, "The Turkish Veto: Why Erdogan is Blocking Finland and Sweden's Path to NATO," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, March 8, 2023. (<https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/03/the-turkish-veto-why-erdogan-is-blocking-finland-and-swedens-path-to-nato>)

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Lee, "US approves F-16 fighter jet sale to Turkey, F-35s to Greece after Turkey OKs Sweden's entry to NATO," *Associated Press*, January 26, 2024. (<https://apnews.com/article/us-turkey-sweden-nato-ukraine-russia-02418dd7644bc8865fdafdf4c848dbd>)

<sup>43</sup> Sinan Ciddi, "It's Time to Reconsider Turkey's NATO Membership," *Foreign Policy*, December 6, 2023. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/06/turkey-nato-membership-alliance-russia-erdogan-sweden-syria>)

<sup>44</sup> Michael R. Pompeo, U.S. State Department, Press Statement, "The United States Sanctions Turkey Under CAATSA 231," December 14, 2020. (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-united-states-sanctions-turkey-under-caatsa-231>)

<sup>45</sup> "Risking New Rift with Western Allies, Turkey Pursues Memberships of BRICS Bloc," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, September 4, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/09/04/risking-new-rift-with-western-allies-turkey-pursues-membership-of-brics-bloc>)

On the one hand, Ankara provided military aid to Ukraine and closed the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to Russian warships when the war began in 2022.<sup>46</sup> However, Turkey also maintained close trade and energy ties with Russia. It has also served as a conduit for Russian evasion of Western sanctions, including via the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project, which is built, owned, and operated by Russia's Rosatom.<sup>47</sup> Worryingly, a significant percentage of Russia's illicit procurement of Western components used in military hardware has flowed through Turkey.<sup>48</sup>

Over the years, Russia and Turkey have managed to compartmentalize their relations. They have engaged in major energy projects and cooperated on some geopolitical issues even as they competed on others. The fall of the Assad regime, however, has significantly altered the dynamic between Russia and Turkey. Whereas Moscow previously used its military presence in Syria and the threat of a refugee exodus from Idlib as a pressure point on Ankara, Russia's access to its key Syrian bases is now at the mercy of Syria's new rulers and their Turkish patrons.

While Erdogan plays the delicate game of diplomacy on the international stage, he must be careful. On the one hand, he has a seat at the big table. On the other hand, he is engaging with a brutal Russian strongman who may lose patience with his Turkish counterpart.

#### Domestic Political Developments

Since the 2016 coup attempt by U.S.-based cleric Fetullah Gulen and his followers, the Turkish leader has systematically dismantled Turkey's parliamentary system, replacing it with an increasingly centralized presidential system.<sup>49</sup> Erdogan is no longer accountable to any legal mechanisms, including the courts or the legislature. This grants him nearly unchecked power. He has wielded this power by deploying systematic suppression and steadily eroding the power of his political opposition.<sup>50</sup>

In the meantime, the media in Turkey has been gutted. Once seen as somewhat robust and representative of all of Turkey's diverse population, the scope of coverage has narrowed considerably. Those who dare to publicly challenge Turkey's strongman publicly can pay a steep price. And that does not only hold for Turkish nationals. Several years ago, my FDD colleague Mark Dubowitz and I helped the Department of Justice with its prosecution of the sanctions-busting bank Halkbank, which helped the Turkish government move \$20 billion in cash and gold to Tehran. Mark and I soon found our names and faces on the front pages of the Turkish newspapers. We learned

<sup>46</sup> Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, "Closing the Turkish Straits in Times of War," *Lieber Institute West Point*, March 3, 2022. (<https://ieber.westpoint.edu/closing-turkish-straits-war>)

<sup>47</sup> "Turkey faces scrutiny as exports to Russia surge, fuelling concerns of sanctions evasion," *Euro News* (France), November 27, 2023. (<https://www.euronews.com/business/2023/11/27/turkey-faces-scrutiny-as-exports-to-russia-surge-fuelling-concerns-of-sanctions-evasion>)

<sup>48</sup> "Turkey Snubs NATO with Russian Arms Deal," *Arms Control Association*, October 2017. (<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-10/news-briefs/turkey-snubs-nato-russian-arms-deal>)

<sup>49</sup> Carlotta Gall, "The Coup Attempt That Set Turkey on a Path to Authoritarianism," *The New York Times*, October 22, 2024. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/22/world/europe/fethullah-gulen-erdogan-turkey.html>)

<sup>50</sup> Nate Schenkkan and Aykut Garipoglu, "Turkey's Elections Won't Be Free or Fair," *Foreign Policy*, May 3, 2023. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/03/turkey-elections-erdogan-kilicdaroglu-vote-manipulation-suppression-media>)

Jonathan Schanzer

March 5, 2025

that we were terrorists, coup plotters, and members of a notorious sex cult.<sup>51</sup> Our Turkish colleague endured far worse.

Some apologists for this regime insist that Turkey is still a democracy. The facts do not support this. Recently, Erdogan floated the possibility of running for a fourth term in 2028.<sup>52</sup> The Turkish constitution limits presidents to two terms.

#### Recommendations

The United States can no longer afford to ignore Turkey's malign foreign policies. Our government must undertake a robust policy shift to address these challenges. I offer the following 13 recommendations:

1. To counter Turkey's Neo-Ottoman aspirations, the United States should maintain its modest military presence in Syria to counter Turkish expansionist efforts and ensure regional stability.
2. The United States should actively block Turkish attempts to deploy private military contractors anywhere in the Middle East.
3. The United States should expose and punish Ankara's policy of allowing jihadist fighters to use Turkey as a transit and logistics hub.
4. The United States should confront Turkey over its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Sanctions are necessary to punish Ankara for allowing financial transactions via Turkish banks. A number of targets have already been identified by Israel's Shin Bet for laundering money to fund terror operations in the West Bank.
5. The United States should pressure Ankara to sever all ties with Hamas, including shutting down its offices, extraditing known operatives, and revoking travel documents issued to Hamas members.
6. The United States should continue to monitor Turkish involvement in weapons smuggling across the region, particularly along the Syrian borders with Jordan and Lebanon.
7. To better restrict Turkey's destructive role in NATO, the United States should leverage the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and appropriations mechanisms to block any efforts to reengage Turkey on the F-35 program or approve additional F-16 sales until Ankara fully dismantles and removes the Russian S-400 air defense system from its territory.

---

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, "I'm a Wonk at a Think Tank. Turkish Media Say I'm an International Man of Mystery," *The Weekly Standard*, November 29, 2018. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2018/11/29/im-a-wonk-at-a-think-tank-turkish-media-say-im-an-international-man-of-mystery>)

<sup>52</sup> "Fresh term for Turkey's Erdogan 'on our agenda', ruling party spokesman says," *Reuters*, January 13, 2025. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/fresh-term-turkeys-erdogan-on-our-agenda-ruling-party-spokesman-says-2025-01-13>)

8. The United States should prevent Turkey from indigenously producing or co-producing aircraft engines to support its existing fleet, including blocking modernization kits, future parts, and maintenance purchases. This should include blocking the Turkish acquisition of any company involved in the production of these items.
9. The United States should exclude Turkey from regional maritime NATO exercises in the Mediterranean to limit its ability to exploit military drills for strategic gains.
10. The United States should ensure that Turkish aircraft do not train near disputed Greek and Cypriot islands. Additionally, Washington should explore options to stockpile U.S. military assets on Cyprus and expand the U.S. presence at British military facilities on the island as a means to send a clear signal in response to Turkish maritime aggression.
11. If Turkish harassment of Eastern Mediterranean states continues, the United States should support joint patrols by Israel, Greece, and other allied nations. The United States should consider participation, as appropriate.
12. The United States should compel Ankara to support the international sanctions regime against Russia, which it has thus far refused, citing economic concerns. The United States should also crack down on the activities of Russian oligarchs and Russian officials who have exploited Turkey's financial system to bypass international sanctions.
13. The United States must pressure Turkey to restore the rule of law and democratic governance. This includes demanding the release of opposition figures unjustly imprisoned and the reversal of other punitive measures taken against the political opposition.

On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Dr. Schanzer.  
I now recognize Dr. Wallander for her opening statement.

#### **STATEMENT OF CELESTE WALLANDER**

Ms. WALLANDER. Thank you. Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today on one of the most consequential bilateral geopolitical relationships that the United States enjoys with a key ally, the Republic of Turkiye. Turkiye is a strong ally across key global security priorities of the United States, however too often Turkiye is also at odds with U.S. policies and priorities. And at other times the U.S. and Turkiye share strong common interests, but have differing approaches to resolving problems that threaten American interests.

I lay this out as the good, the bad, and the complicated. The good. For over 70 years Turkiye has been a strong front-line member of the NATO alliance. Spanning the Bosphorus and holding one-third of the Black Sea coast, Turkiye has been key to credible defense and deterrence against Soviet and now Russian threat in Europe. Turkiye's location affords NATO allies key overflight access for defense and surveillance operations across Southeast Europe. During the cold war Turkiye played this vital alliance role along with Greece, the two forward locations for NATO in Southeast Europe.

Today they are joined by Bulgaria, Romania, and the Western Balkan allies to enable NATO air, sea, and ground defenses that force Russian military planners to contemplate defense from the Arctic to the Caucasus. With Turkiye as a NATO ally, the Kremlin cannot afford to focus on attack on simply ground forces on one axis in Central Europe.

The U.S. military is better able to fulfill its missions for European and global security because of our alliance with Turkiye. The U.S. operates military bases in Incirlik and Izmir along with other NATO allies. These bases support air, ground, and sea components of allied forces and support a network of censors that provide warning and surveillance capacity to the alliance, deep in Europe's eastern areas. Hosting U.S. military forces at these bases has meant that Turkiye has enabled and supported U.S. operations and NATO deterrence for decades.

Turkiye has a strong industrial base including production of some of the most advanced and innovative capabilities crucial to modern warfare, notably unmanned aerial vehicles, UAVs, military ships, and electronic warfare systems. Turkiye has also invested in American-built advanced weapons that advance NATO's strength and interoperability, notably its fleet of F-16 fighters.

This advanced capability is one of the forgotten stories in Ukraine's surprise success in the early months of Russia's invasion in 2022. One of the signature headline capabilities the Ukrainians used for surveillance and attack that caught the Russian army by surprise was Turkish Aerospace Industries produced Bayraktar UAVs. In a war that changed our understanding of how conventional conflict can and must be fought, that has—and that has led to the massive growth in production of UAVs for military use, the leading example was Turkiye's use and development of UAVs.

In other places globally Turkiye has contributed where American partners are supported by U.S. military forces, however there is no question that at times Turkiye has also taken actions that are contrary to American national security interests. We have already heard mention of Turkiye's arming of Azerbaijan that led the President Aliyev to believe that he could achieve his objectives against Armenia and take territory in a way that led to the displacement and refugee status of tens of thousands of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians.

Turkiye has also acted against U.S. interests in NATO, notably with delaying Finland and Sweden's memberships and therefore sending a message to Putin of disunity within NATO. And Turkiye did acquire the S-400 Russian system putting at risk the entire European NATO F-35 program by operating and deploying that system.

The complicated issue I want to highlight is Turkiye's concerns and track record of striking at PKK-affiliated groups in Northern Syria and in Iraq. For years Turkiye did this without coordination with the United States and often put at risk U.S. military forces exercising the counter-ISIS missions that the U.S. Government has designated. With the change in Syrian leadership and the evolution of the government of Turkiye's relationship with the leadership of the PKK within Turkiye, there is an opportunity to build upon better communication, alignment in counterterrorism operations, namely counter-ISIS operations in Syria and Iraq, and perhaps begin to untangle this unfortunate period in U.S.-Turkiye relations. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wallander follows:]

Testimony for the Hearing  
“Bridging the Gap: Turkey Between East and West”  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Dr. Celeste A. Wallander  
Adjunct Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security  
March 5, 2025

Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Keating, distinguished members of this committee – thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today on one of the most consequential bilateral geopolitical relationships that the United States enjoys with a key ally, the Republic of Türkiye. Türkiye is a strong ally across key global security priorities of the United States. However, too often Türkiye is at odds with U.S. policies and priorities. And at other times, the U.S. and Türkiye share strong common interests, but have differing approaches to resolving problems that threaten our common interests. As Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs until January 2025, I had the privilege of working to advance U.S. national security interests under all three of these contexts that together comprise this key relationship with Türkiye. I would like to use my time today to share with you my experience on many of those opportunities and challenges in the hope that I might inform your important work going forward on Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

*The Good*

Our productive relations lie at the heart of European security. For over 70 years, Türkiye has been a strong frontline member of the NATO alliance. Spanning the Bosphorus and holding one-third of the Black Sea Coast, Türkiye has been key to credible defense and deterrence against Soviet and now Russian threat in Europe. Türkiye’s location affords NATO allies key overflight access for defense and surveillance operations across southeast Europe. During the Cold War, Türkiye played this vital alliance role along with Greece – the two forward locations for NATO in southeast Europe. Today, they are joined by Bulgaria, Romania, and western Balkans allies to enable NATO air, sea, and ground defenses that force Russian military planners to contemplate defense from the Arctic to the

Caucasus, stretching Russia lines and resources and complicating offensive options for attack. With Türkiye a NATO ally, the Kremlin cannot afford to focus an attack on simply its ground forces across a manageable front, as it has demonstrated in Ukraine with devastating effect.

The United States military is better able to fulfill its missions for European and global security because of our alliance with Türkiye. The U.S. operates military bases in Incirlik and Izmir, along with other NATO allies. These bases support air, ground, and sea components of allied forces, and support a network of sensors that provide warning and surveillance capacity to the alliance deep in Europe's eastern areas. Hosting U.S. military forces at these bases has meant that Türkiye has enabled and supported U.S. operations and NATO deterrence for decades, as well as U.S. government planning for both combat and non-combat missions such as potential humanitarian and civilian evacuations in support of U.S. embassies in the Middle East.

Türkiye has a strong defense industrial base, including production of some of the most advanced and innovative capabilities crucial to modern warfare notably Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), military ships, electronic warfare systems, and advanced electronics. Türkiye has also invested in American built advanced weapons that advance NATO's strength and interoperability, notably its fleet of F-16 fighters. Turkish defense industry capacities were advanced to such a degree that it was a member of the F-35 program, with the opportunity to integrate multiple components for these advanced fighters (until it was removed from the program, more on this below).

This advanced defense capability is one of the forgotten stories in Ukraine's surprise success in the early months of Russia's invasion in 2022 when it drove Russian forces from Kyiv and some 50% of the territory Russia initially seized. Many factors contributed to Ukraine's success, but one of the signature headline capabilities the Ukrainians used for surveillance and attack that caught the Russian army by surprise was the Turkish Aerospace Industries produced Bayraktar UAV. In a war that changed our understanding of how conventional conflict can and must be fought, and that has led to a massive growth in production of UAVs for military use, the leading example was Türkiye's provision of security assistance from the conflict's early days.

The Turkish Ministry of National Defense participated in every meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group chaired by the United States from April 2022 to January 2025. There are numerous instances and untold stories of key Turkish security assistance support to Ukraine, including investment in Ukraine's indigenous UAV and artillery production. And in October 2022, I was privileged to meet the Ukrainian and Turkish teams preparing for a ceremony to of the new Ukrainian flagship the Hetman Ivan Mazepa, built in Turkish naval yards, during the annual U.S.-Türkiye bilateral defense consultations in Ankara. This anti-submarine corvette will be the foundation of Ukraine's NATO interoperable Navy.

Türkiye's role in Ukraine's early defenses should not come as a surprise, as it has held a strong principled stand against Russia's invasion and occupation from the first time Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014. Türkiye has refused to recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea, and has been a steady and vocal advocate for the rights and well-being Crimea's historic population of Crimean Tatars.

Türkiye also played a decisive role in Ukraine's defenses by invoking the Montreux Convention of 1936, declaring Russia's invasion of Ukraine a war and therefore denying the passage of all warships, including Russian navy vessels, through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles into the Black Sea. This denied Russia the ability to surge additional warships to support its invasion in 2022. It also prevented Russia from being able to replace naval vessels damaged or sunk by Ukraine since 2022, leaving the Russian Black Sea Fleet a crippled navy unable to support Russian ground forces in the northwestern Black Sea. This in turn enabled Ukraine to develop a lifeline for its economy by preventing the Russian navy from closing off Ukraine's commercial shipping, especially grain. Ukraine's lifeline was further strengthened when Türkiye lead negotiations to enable Ukrainian grain shipments from summer 2022 through July 2023, when Russia refused to extend the agreement.

In Africa, Türkiye has trained counter-terrorism forces, complementing the U.S. training and equipping of Somalia's Danab brigade with the training and equipping of Gorgor battalions, specialized in special forces operations. Türkiye's professional and extensive training has advanced Somalia's ability to degrade and defend against al-Shabab, an affiliate of al Qaeda, that U.S. officials assess is the only African terrorist organization at present with the intention and capability to

execute complex global operations, were it able to consistently and securely control territory in Somalia. By investing in Somalia's CT forces, Türkiye has supported global support to prevent Somalian territory from becoming a safe haven for renewed global terrorist strikes, including against the U.S. homeland.

*The Bad*

At the same time, Türkiye has also taken actions that are contrary to American national security interests, and have undermined our efforts to advance peace and security. Türkiye's material and political support to Azerbaijan enabled President Aliev to strike at Armenia to achieve his objectives by military force instead of through negotiations. The same defense industrial base that has contributed to NATO power and Ukrainian defenses enabled Azerbaijan over many years to build a military capability aimed at successive campaigns that resulted not only in the seizing of territory, but the displacement of tens of thousands of men, women, and children whose ancestors had lived in Nagorno-Karabakh long before the Soviet Union decreed the territory to be part of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. Armenians' experience and memory of genocide make the forced exodus all the more tragic. Although the international community – and the United States – had not recognized Armenia's claim to the territory it had occupied, the U.S. has been a strong and consistent leader in support of a negotiated solution. In enabling Azerbaijan to take decisive military action, Türkiye undermined a key U.S. commitment.

Türkiye has also taken negative steps against U.S. interests in NATO in the political and diplomatic realm. When Finland and Sweden applied for membership in NATO, reversing their decades long stance of neutrality in the face of Russia's threat to European security, Türkiye's delays and singular maneuvering for concessions and advantage risked the signal of unity and strength that NATO needed for strategic clarity to Moscow. Every NATO ally has the right to settle disagreements and address legitimate security concerns with alliance aspirants, but Türkiye's on-again-off-again evolving demands of Sweden (in particular) had the feel of opportunistic bargaining instead of historic statesmanship. In the end, Türkiye approved both countries as NATO allies (and thus the Turkish delegation will be seated next to the Swedish delegation for years to come, as the North

Atlantic Council is seated at an oval table in alphabetical order), but the alliance seemed diminished in the process.

In other cases, Türkiye's choices have undermined U.S. military security, not only political and diplomatic policies. In 2019, Türkiye chose to purchase the S-400 system from Russia. The S-400 air defense system is designed specifically to counter advanced U.S. military capabilities, notably the 5<sup>th</sup> generation fighter F-35. With its technological advances and ability to integrate multiple sensors and platforms while literally on the fly, the stealth F-35 is the core of U.S. fighter, strike, and air defense systems. Furthermore, with numerous NATO allies acquiring the F-35 for their air forces, and with the opportunity for highly integrated air operations as a result, it will be the backbone of a lethal NATO force for decades to come.

By purchasing, deploying, and operating the S-400, Türkiye not only turned away from the alliance in which it is integrated and which commits to its defense against attack (by the very Russia from which it purchased the S-400), Türkiye was also potentially putting at risk the entire F-35 arsenal. Türkiye had joined the joint F-35 development program, and was scheduled to receive delivery of 100 F-35 aircraft. Experts assess that in operating both platforms, Türkiye might put at risk the F-35 program by exposing its features to Russian intelligence. When Türkiye failed to be dissuaded from the Russian purchase, it was removed from the F-35 program, its aircraft were not delivered, and defense sector entities were sanctioned under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). The U.S. government could act to deliver F-35 jets to Türkiye, if Congress and the White House agreed that Türkiye had rendered the S-400 system verifiably inoperable and remove itself as a current or potential future customer of the program. However, as long as Türkiye continues to own and operate the S-400 system, it remains a deep challenge to U.S. and NATO military operations and security. And while Türkiye's F-35 program must remain suspended, Greece will field its first F-35s before the end of this decade.

*The Complicated*

The most tangled security challenge in U.S. relations with Türkiye is counterterrorism in northern Syria and Iraq. The tangle's origins lie in the history of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a U.S. designated foreign terrorist

organization that is responsible for over 40 years of violence against Türkiye and thousands of casualties. Early in its history, the PKK established bases in both Syria and Iraq as safe havens to plan and execute operations within Türkiye, at times with support from Iran and Syria.

The cross-border nature of PKK presence and operations, and the development of localized political and military arms of the PKK in both neighboring countries, resulted in complicated and shifting U.S.-Turkish cooperation and clashes over Turkish counter-PKK operations throughout the region. Following the Gulf War in 1991, the United States cooperated with Türkiye to end Iraq's brutal suppression of Iraqi Kurdistan, with Turkish territory serving as base for relief and no-fly zone operations. At other times, U.S. concerns for Turkish disregard for human rights in its campaign resulted in political pressure and penalties including withholding military cooperation from the Turkish armed forces.

This fragile balance of cooperation and contestation was fundamentally upended with the collapse of Syrian state authority and the Iraqi security forces in the early 2010s, enabling the rise of the Islamic State in both regions. The expanding territorial control and freedom of operations by ISIS to terrorize and murder local populations, and to build the base for global terrorist operations, were the opportunity for PKK units in northern Iraq and affiliated units (primarily the YPG – the People's Defense Units, the military arm of the PKK's political operation) in Syria to expand their military capabilities as defenders against ISIS. These units quickly became elements of the broader coalition to fight ISIS, eventually receiving U.S. training, equipment, and financing to degrade and defeat ISIS.

Today in Iraq, America's partners in the enduring defeat of ISIS are the national armed forces of Iraq and the Pershmerga, the armed forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government, a government entity of the federal Republic of Iraq. U.S. and coalition armed forces are located in Iraq with the agreement of the Government of Iraq to train and assist both of the military organizations in their counterterrorism operations and national defense against ISIS. The PKK continued to violate Iraqi sovereignty and to operate from locations it holds in the mountains of northern Iraq, and the U.S. and Türkiye are in solid agreement that these forces

are illegal and terrorist units. However, there have been serious frictions and concerns when Turkish targeted operations against PKK units in northern Iraq have not been coordinated with U.S. and coalition forces, resulting in risks to U.S. military personnel supporting Peshmerga training.

The far more serious challenge to bilateral relations has been in Syria. The PKK-offshoot YPG is a component element of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the central U.S. partner in defeating, degrading, and containing ISIS in Syria since 2015. U.S. training and equipping of the SDF has been a friction point in the relationship since then. The U.S. views the SDF as a valued partner for its extraordinary military capabilities, role in effectively shattering ISIS, and protecting U.S. military forces in Syria. The SDF remains responsible for operations against remnants of ISIS in Syria, and secures prisons and detention facilities for ISIS fighters and supporters in northern Syria. Turkish operations against the SDF have risked counter-ISIS operations and the security of those facilities, and thus the safety and security of the rotational U.S. forces operating in Syria in the ongoing counter-ISIS security mission. Bilateral frictions arising from this tangle periodically led to tactical coordination and communication between the two allies over the years, but continued to risk miscalculation and to poison trust. The U.S. remained convinced that Turkish CT operations in Syria and Iraq disregarded U.S. mission priorities and risked not only U.S. casualties, but ISIS resurgence. Türkiye remained convinced that U.S. support for the SDF (and thus in Turkish views the PKK) prevented the Turkish armed forces from degrading and destroying a terrorist organization that continued to be very real daily threat to its nation.

In the summer of 2024, the U.S. and Türkiye met in the first of a series of discussions on this tangle. The first discussion, hosted by the Department of State in Washington, allowed for a very professional, frank, and extensive airing of the history and conflicting views of the origins and solutions to the tangle. The result of the initial discussion was a Turkish hosted meeting in October 2024 which yielded a productive step in communication and incident prevention: a direct channel between the leadership of the Turkish Armed Forces and U.S. military commanders responsible for U.S. training and support to partners in Syria and Iraq. While this military channel could not begin to disentangle the political dispute at

the heart of the challenge, it helped to prevent incidents that would risk disaster in the bilateral relationship, and took first steps in creating a measure of trust.

With the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria in December 2024, the new Syrian leadership has made clear its determination to unify its control of armed forces within Syrian territory, including the SDF. With the announcement by Abdullah Öcalan calling on the PKK to disband and disarm on February 27, 2025 the first knot in this tangle may have been loosened. If the Turkish leadership does not overplay the opportunity to achieve its national security objective of eliminating the terrorist threat to its country that the PKK poses, it may be able to work with the United States in ensuring that these tectonic shifts in the region secure the enduring defeat of ISIS, and enable the United States to end its presence once that mission objective is achieved. Thoughtful leadership could move this bilateral challenge from complicated tangle to positive partnership on global and national security.

Mr. SELF. Thank you.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning. Dr. Schanzer, I will start with you. Turkiye has the second largest military in NATO after the United States. And we are hearing, and I am hearing from individual delegations that Europe is starting to expand their defense capabilities. As they expand their capabilities, what does that mean for Turkiye and their participation in NATO? And specifically I would like to ask you to address Greece and the S-400.

Mr. SCHANZER. Sure. Chairman Self, thank you for the question. First, I think there does need to be an assessment. I think it could be an interesting report, perhaps produced by the congressional Research Service or some other.

But to question this assertion that Turkiye's army is invaluable to NATO, its size does not mean that it is effective, or that it is updated, or that its army is capable of tangling with Russia, or any other country for that matter. So I do think an assessment could be necessary.

I think there is a question though among the European powers right now about Turkiye's role within NATO and within Europe. Specifically I think when we look at the number of clashes that have—or near clashes that have taken place in the Eastern Med, I am concerned. Turkiye has been very aggressive of late in challenging the Greeks and the Cypriots in their own exclusive economic zones. They have been engaged in illegal drilling, but they have also tried to assert, I mentioned in my spoken remarks, this Blue Homeland policy of denying countries in the region to be able to go into international waters.

This cannot continue if the goal is to preserve even a modicum of stability within NATO, and I think it is crucial that we address this now. I would say that having the U.S. patrol with Greece may be actually useful. Having the Israelis patrol with Greece in the Eastern Med may be useful. But Turkiye needs to understand that it needs to share these waterways. This is going to be crucial moving forward.

Mr. SELF. Thank you. Either of our other witnesses?

Ms. WALLANDER. I would highlight the value of Turkish armed forces in the area of special operations forces. Turkiye has contributed to, for example, the training of Somali special operations forces alongside American trained and equipped Somalis, the Danab Brigade, which is aimed at preventing the success of al-Shabaab in Somalia and holding it at bay. Al-Shabaab has identified by American intelligence as the only terrorist organization in Africa with the capability and the intent to strike through global operations, including against the U.S. homeland.

So there are areas of strength that we have worked, the United States has worked in cooperation with the Turkish armed forces. I would highlight that on in particular.

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. I agree with my colleagues and want to add only one brief comment. Turkiye's support for Ukraine, Turkiye's military support for Ukraine, as, Mr. Chairman, you have highlighted in your remarks, has been useful. And in that regard I—well, I agree with everything my colleagues said, but there has to

be more of a nuanced approach to Turkiye's—to our understanding of Turkish military.

Mr. SELF. Thank you for that. I want to ask about this rare earth element find. Can any of the three of you comment on that? Because one of the critical areas that we need to divorce ourselves from China is rare earths, critical minerals, because they are mined lots of places, but China controls 92 percent of the processed critical minerals.

Ms. WALLANDER. I mean, it is certainly an opportunity to partner with Turkiye in that commercial endeavor. The Trump Administration has made clear that it is seeking those kinds of partnerships. And I would simply observe, watching Chinese operations throughout Africa and the Middle East. If the United States is not active and offering a value proposition to countries, Chinese ability to move in with what look like very lucrative commercial opportunities usually create facts on the ground that are difficult to walk back.

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Yes, I would agree. The fact of the matter is we are focused on great power competition as a trajectory of our foreign policy. And as such, a focus on minerals is a part of this debate.

Therefore, if we don't have a seat at the table, somebody else will fill in that space. It is better that we find a way to do it rather than our adversaries.

Mr. SELF. Thank you very much.

I now recognize the ranking member for 5 minutes.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Audio malfunction.] Keep going with this, but see if it resets my time, if I could, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

There are many here in Congress that don't think Ukraine is important to us back here at home, that what happens over there is their business and we should worry about our own priorities here.

I am looking at, as we discuss Turkiye, I mentioned before their involvement in keeping navigation and the Black Sea free. I sponsored the Black Sea Security Act, which was incorporated in the NDAA last year, to underscore this importance.

Now can you tell us how important, Dr. Wallander, it is to have the access through Odessa and through Ukraine and make sure that doesn't fall in the hands of Russia and what that would mean for the—our security and what would it mean for economic impact worldwide and at home if that should fall to Russia?

Ms. WALLANDER. Thank you, sir. There is a lot of focus the last 3 years on security assistance and how vital the ability for Ukraine to fight on the battlefield was to its survival, but its military success is both not enough, but also not possible without the Ukrainian economy. And Turkiye's decision to invoke the Montreux Convention in—the 1936 Montreux Convention shut off the Russian navy from being able to reinforce the Black Sea fleet.

As Ukrainians were skilled in using various coastal defense capabilities and unmanned surface vehicles and sinking Russian ships, Russia was not able to repair or resupply the Russian Black Sea fleet to the point where the Russia Black Sea fleet had to retreat from Sevastopol in Crimea to Novorossiysk and it is stuck back in the Eastern Black Sea.

This has affected Russia's ability to launch attacks in the Odessa area. It has not eliminated, but it constrained Russia's ability to use surface ships to attack Ukrainian cities, and it is something that Russia has persistently throughout the conflict pressed Turkiye to change to allow Russian warships to enter the Black Sea, and Turkiye has prevented that.

Ukraine's ability to send grain, to send manufactured goods out, to import the components for its own defense industry has vitally depended on the openness, the commercial openness of the Western Black Sea. And that will be a major element of any cease-fire or peace negotiation going forward as well.

Mr. KEATING. What would be your concerns if that fell into Russia's hands? And how would China view that change?

Ms. WALLANDER. Control of the Black Sea would give Russia control of Eastern Europe. It would give control of not just the sea, but air flight, overflight permissions that the United States uses, for example, to access the Middle East. It would give Russia the ability to continue its stranglehold on Georgia, to influence Azerbaijan and support Azerbaijan in negotiations for a peace settlement in Armenia.

I mean, the Black Sea as a Russian lake would be a significant strike against European security and American global access, working with our NATO partners and allies in the region.

Mr. KEATING. Yes, and following that along and the importance of that, in the aftermath of what happened last week in the Oval Office, disrupting our Transatlantic alliances, there was a meeting of European leaders. The core of that, I thought, was to have a peace agreement that made sure there was a security component to that. We can't trust Putin's word, and there has to be a backstop to make sure that that's enforced.

Can you tell us the importance of any agreement having that security agreement that, if Putin does what he always does, lies and goes back on his word, that there would be some kind of security built into any agreement, so that he couldn't advance himself with another aggressive attack, illegal, immoral attack on Ukraine?

Ms. WALLANDER. Well, if you look at the track record of Russian failure to implement peace agreements, cease-fire agreements in Georgia, Russia has never lived up to the commitments that were made in 2008. Russia has never lived up to the commitments that it made to withdraw forces from Transnistria in Moldova, and Russia never implemented the successive Minsk agreements in 2014 and 2015. The first step in those agreements was a cease-fire. Russia never implemented it, and the international community only put in a lightly armed monitoring mission.

So, based on the track record, you would need a strong agreement. You would need a strong, armed presence, not merely a peacekeeping presence, but a peace enforcement presence. And that would mean a substantial ground force with substantial air support as well.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. I think that is one of the most important things coming out of any agreement.

I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Green.

Mr. GREEN. Chairman Self and Ranking Member Keating, thank you for convening this hearing on the critical role Turkiye plays in geopolitics today, Turkiye's strategic location and strong military give it the unique ability to put NATO's security mandate into action. Yet, I do have some concerns about Turkiye's willingness to do so.

As a flight surgeon during the War on Terror, I served on the frontlines, balancing dual roles as a soldier and a healer. I treated U.S. NATO soldiers' combat wounds in the middle of firefights—learning firsthand that strength against our enemies and building trust with our allies are inseparable duties.

Today, we are here to discuss both standing strong and building bridges. From the war in Gaza to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkiye plays an integral role in the current geopolitical landscape, but these actions of late are, as I have said, very concerning.

From seeking membership with BRICS countries who clearly have taken a position to destabilize the United States dollar to attempting to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, I do see some red flags. This explicit flirtation with U.S. adversaries undermines NATO's cohesion.

The purchase of the Russian S-400 missile systems, dragging its feet on Sweden's and Finland's admission to NATO, and continuing to fund terror groups just doesn't go with what the goals—doesn't align with the goals of the United States or NATO.

Turkiye's conflicting loyalties are exemplified by the role it played in Russia's war on Ukraine. Turkiye closed the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to Russia and supplied drones to Kiev, but it also helped Russia evade sanctions.

In Syria, Turkiye's antagonism against our allied Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces jeopardizes the mission to defeat ISIS. This could lead to an ISIS resurgence. We all know what that would be.

My hope for Turkiye is that it will give up its support for Hamas, renew strong economic relationships with Israel, and together, that these two countries can revitalize the Middle East. But this isn't going to happen if Turkiye chooses to support terrorist proxies.

Now, I will say that Turkiye has a unique position in the world—its history with Russia, its Ottoman heritage, and its relationship with the West. It is sort of like threading a needle, if you will.

There seems to be in foreign policy, or at least my study of it in foreign affairs and history, the approach, I like to call it the "put a foot in each bucket" approach or "a foot in every bucket" approach.

I get, for example, a nation like India that desires to be a third or fourth pole in the multipolar system of the world might do things that are both pro-American and aligned with Russia or China at various points in time. I get that. However, we don't have a treaty like NATO with India.

That leaves us to ask hard questions. And I think, you know, in being as fair as I possibly can, with that unique history, that geopolitical position or that location, the geographic location of the country and the challenges around it, I just want to ask, first, Dr. Schanzer, what external pressure would the United States need to put on Turkiye for it to properly distance itself from Hamas?

Mr. SCHANZER. Congressman Green, thank you for the question.

I don't know what the exact answer is, but I do know that Turkiye does respond to sanctions pressure. We saw this during the first Trump administration. Pastor Brunson had been taken hostage by the Turkish government. The Trump administration put significant sanctions on Erdogan's inner circle, really began to target his closest allies in government, and the threats began to ratchet up, and then, he released Pastor Brunson.

I believe that the threat of sanctions on Turkiye, economic pressure as a place to start, but I think we need to consider other ways that we can put pressure on them as well—political, diplomatic. But giving them the leverage that they have right now in NATO doesn't help, and, of course, there is no mechanism for releasing them from NATO.

Mr. GREEN. Right. Let me ask one other quick question because I'm about to run out of time. And you guys can respond in writing.

Can Erdogan run for reelection? Is he going to run for reelection, if he can? And if he doesn't run for reelection, is it the Istanbul mayor? I mean, who is the heir apparent in Turkiye?

I would love to get that in writing because I am now out of time. Thank you.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the gentlelady from Florida, Mrs. Cherfilus-McCormick.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-MC CORMICK. Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member.

Although Turkiye and Israel restored full diplomatic ties in 2022, relations have dramatically worsened since Hamas' October 7th attack and Israel's military operation in Gaza. Erdogan has taken a very harsh stance against Israel, and in May 2024, Turkiye stopped all trade with Israel until a permanent cease-fire is achieved in Gaza and humanitarian aid is allowed without interruption. Under Erdogan, Turkiye has provided consistent political support to Hamas and has periodically hosted Hamas' political officials.

What is the nature of Turkiye's relationship with Hamas and how is it likely to affect Turkiye's ability to: one, improve its relationship with Israel; two, play a role in mediating the Israel-Palestine conflict, and three, assist with post-conflict recovery and reconstruction in Gaza?

Mr. SCHANZER. I will take it that's for me. Thank you for the question.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-MC CORMICK. Yes.

Mr. SCHANZER. Look, the relationship between Turkiye and Hamas goes back to at least 2006. That was the first time we saw a major delegation hosted by Erdogan. We saw Erdogan get into an open fight with Shimon Peres, then President of Israel, Nobel Prize Laureate, accusing him, essentially, of war crimes.

Then, we began to see the money flowing from Turkiye. We began to see more operatives finding a home in Turkiye, businesses created in Turkiye, operatives planning and executing attacks out of Turkiye.

Let me just put it this way: Turkiye is to the letter of the law a State sponsor of terrorism as it relates to Hamas. They are unquestionably the largest jurisdiction right now for Hamas operatives and for Hamas finance in the world. That is, obviously,

deeply troubling when we think about the fact that this is a NATO ally and a country that we rely on for a modicum of stability in the Middle East.

So, as of right now, especially after October 7th, I see no way forward between Turkiye and Israel if Turkiye's policies continue along these lines. They have not stood down. They have not dialed back on their Hamas support of anything. Erdogan appears to be more committed to this terror group right now, and I think this is why this hearing, in particular, strikes me as so crucial at this moment.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCCORMICK. What steps do you think the United States should take to addressing the risk of Turkiye's continued support to Hamas?

Mr. SCHANZER. Oh, I think we need to make very clear demands right now on Hamas. I mean, No. 1, I think we should be sanctioning Turkiye for any evidence we have. We know there are a number of companies right now that are throwing off cash for Hamas and sending it to the Gaza Strip. There are charities that are doing the same. I think they need to be designated by the Treasury Department. We need to be demanding the extradition of Hamas operatives that are based in Turkiye. We should be asking the Turks to revoke travel documents that have been issued formerly by the Turkish government to Hamas operatives.

There are many steps that we can take that we have yet to take. I cannot tell you exactly why we haven't taken them. And I would actually argue that it is a bipartisan problem. Both Democrats and Republicans have failed to address this, I think maybe for fear of upsetting the alliance that we have with the Turks, knowing that they are NATO allies and that they have vital roles to play in other areas. But I think they have fallen down on the job as American allies if they are so openly and willingly supporting a violent group like Hamas.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCCORMICK. As the Syrian people emerge from decades under Assad's brutal dictatorship, I'm concerned about Turkiye's actions against Syria's Kurds community and support of fully inclusive Syria, representative of all its people.

I'm also equally concerned about the potential rise of ISIS in Syria and the dangerous consequences of freezing foreign aid to that region. This is not just a matter of foreign policy. This is a national security issue and the consequences will be felt right here at home. This evil terrorist group committed heinous terrorist attacks, including the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando that killed 49 people.

Let me be clear. Foreign aid is not a handout. It is an investment in our national security. That aid helped prevent ISIS from regaining strength and keeps local forces trained and equipped and stabilizes communities, so terrorism does not take root again.

But by cutting it off, we are giving ISIS exactly what it wants—a power vacuum, a weakened opposition, and a chance to rebuild. And who will pay for this mistake? It will be the American people, unfortunately.

Humanitarian needs in Syria are at an all-time high. In 2024, 16.7 million people were estimated to require assistance, the largest number since the beginning of the civil war in 2011. We are ei-

ther going to feed them now or we are going to end up fighting them later.

Ms. Wallander, do Turkish officials seek to weaken U.S.-backed Kurdish forces, such as the SDF, which are a strong counterterrorism partner to the United States and its European allies?

Ms. WALLANDER. Thank you, Congresswoman.

The Turkish government has stated, or when I served in government until January stated, that it sees an opportunity to now distinguish PKK-affiliated groups in northern Syria and in northern Iraq, expect them to be disarmed and to cease their operations, but not to act against Syrian Kurdish groups that are not affiliated with PKK. Now is the time to test that commitment and see whether they can live up to it. Because it would be significant progress, but their actions need to meet their words.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK. Thank you.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the gentlelady from California, Mrs. Kim.

Mrs. KIM. Thank you, Chairman Self and Ranking Member Keating, for holding today's hearing.

I want to thank you all for joining us today.

Turkiye has expressed its desire to have close relations with both the West and the East, and it is the first NATO member that has openly asked to join BRICS, which is led by our adversaries Russia and China.

So, I want to ask you, what are the—I mean, I'm going to direct this question to any one of you—what are the top drivers for Turkiye's pursuit of BRICS membership or partner country status?

Ms. WALLANDER. Briefly, thank you, Congresswoman.

So, I think that what Turkiye often points to—I'm not advocating this—is the limitations of their integration in the European Union and the economic opportunities there. I don't necessarily think that that is a good argument for, as you point out, seeking deeper economic relations with America's two top strategic competitors, Russia and China, because the relationships of economic trade with Europe don't bring with them dependence and influence in a way that trade investment and economic entanglement with China and Russia do.

The United States should be very clear with Turkiye that our own economic relationships, our own integration in different industries would be limited—

Mrs. KIM. But do you think Turkiye's membership in BRICS or, like, Shanghai Cooperation Organization is likely?

Ms. WALLANDER. I don't know that—I think that Russia, in particular, would see that as a prize because of the influence. I think that it would extend China's influence in the European terrain, given that Europe itself is now quite resistant to Chinese influence in the economic sphere. So, I do think it is a risk and I think you put your finger on something important.

Mrs. KIM. I think you wanted to add to that?

Mr. SCHANZER. Yes, I would love to add this: that I believe that Turkiye's dalliance in both sides of this equation reflects President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's deep discomfort with American values, with Western values. I don't think that he feels like he belongs there.

This is a man who identifies very openly as an Islamist. This is a man who does not put a lot of faith in democracy. And you can see he's already testing the limits of the democracy in Turkiye. He is putting strain on the judiciary, putting strain on the media. I would actually argue that he has been eviscerating Turkiye's democracy. It wasn't exactly strong to begin with, but it continues to weaken.

This is driving Turkiye into the hands of some of these other organizations populated by less liberal countries. You can see the alliances or the semi-alliances that Turkiye has maintained with the likes of Iran over the years or engaging in illicit financial activity with the Russians. This is a man who does not see himself squarely fitting within NATO, and that is why we are watching him stray into these other organizations.

Mrs. KIM. Well, let me address this. I saw the Pew Research Center polling from 2024 where it says fewer than 20 percent of Turks have a favorable view of the United States, while their favorable rating of China is 30 percent and their rating for Russia is 26 percent.

Why do you think this is the case? And how can the U.S. gain greater favorability among the Turks?

Mr. SCHANZER. Look, a lot of what we see right now is actually the result of the manipulation of the Turkish media, which is fully controlled or almost fully controlled by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. If you want to see some of the public sentiment begin to shift, maybe allow for more liberal media. Once upon a time, there was a lot more of it. Now there is not. I would say that is a major point of concern, but as for exactly why Turks feel the way they do, I think you would have to ask the Turks.

Mrs. KIM. And then, more than 40 percent of Turks, they have a favorable view of NATO and the European Union. Why is that? Why do you think that is the case?

Ms. WALLANDER. I wish it were higher. I think the favorable view is that "in between." Turks see themselves also as European and see the NATO alliance as contributing to Turkish security, although they have concerns about terrorism, but, also, the aspiration to play a role as a leading European country. So, I think that that is rooted in the country, but it is also balanced—I agree with Jonathan—by the views of having larger global aspirations as well.

Mrs. KIM. Got it.

I wish I can engage more with you, but my time is up. So, I will yield back.

Mr. SELF. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Johnson.

Ms. JOHNSON. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. It is an honor to be on this subcommittee.

I have been listening to your testimony with great interest. It has been fascinating to me.

The U.S.-Turkiye relationship is complex and sometimes challenging, as you have well-educated us here today. Turkiye has continued to engage with Hamas, which has fueled heartbreakingly conflict in the Middle East that many of my constituents keenly feel.

But even Turkiye consistently rejects Russia's claim over Ukraine and joined the free world in voting for the United Nations

Resolution in opposite of the U.S. vote, where we, unfortunately and tragically, cast our vote to align with Russia and North Korea, two dictatorships that represent the opposite of our values, in voting against our allies and voting against peace in the region.

So, my question is, does this sort of give permission, this signal by the United States to align with Russia and China and North Korea, does that give permission for Turkiye to do the same?

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Yes, I think you are making a very important, a very important point here and I think it points to the larger geostrategic dilemmas that we are facing as part of this discussion. Because, as we have all discussed here today, Turkiye is a very problematic ally. And yet, on the one hand, it supports Hamas. Its actions oftentimes go against our values.

Yet, when we think about the bigger geopolitical picture, as you brought up Ukraine right now, we have to think about, how do we navigate; what is the way forward? How do we go forward from here?

Well, first, if I may go back to the earlier part of our discussion with Turkiye, Representative Kim's comment, the problem is Turkiye's actions do not—Turkiye does not align with our values. And so, when we think about the way forward in our relationship with Turkiye, it is looking toward interests rather than values. And that is a very different way of looking at this issue, because we tend to, when we think about the NATO alliance, we certainly think of a values-based alliance.

Ms. JOHNSON. You know, many of you all testified that—well, I loved your analysis, sort of the good, the bad, and the complicated.

On the one hand, we really much need Turkiye. We need their policing—we need the openness that that provides to the region. We need so much from them. But they are acting very bad, you know, like a very bad child.

If you had to say, which interest is more important to the United States, if you have to pick a policy path? Is it more important to rein in their bad behavior or is it more important to keep them wanting to be on our side?

Ms. WALLANDER. So, a global superpower, the United States, the most powerful country in the world, doesn't have to choose. We have influence. We can work with not just Turkiye, but other countries with whom we can solve problems and advance American interests, but we can also hold them to account.

For example, I fully support and believe it was a constructive move for Congress to include Turkiye under the CAATSA sanctions, precisely because, by buying the S-400 system, Turkiye was putting U.S. pilots and NATO pilots at risk.

Ms. JOHNSON. Right. So, we need to step up our game, I think. It seems like the diplomacy in this country needs to be elevated to a high level to make sure that we rein in their bad behavior, is what it is really sounding like. Their interaction with Hamas, their interactions with terrorist groups, their support—their running to Russia and China are all such things that should be very, very concerning to the United States and it needs to be a top focus of our interactions with them. Is that fair.

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Well, I think that's fair and I would add to that, Turkiye is certainly not choosing. Turkiye is making it very

clear in its behavior that they don't want to choose. All of its actions after Russia's invasion of Ukraine show that they, on the one hand, were certainly supportive of Ukrainian territorial integrity, but they also continue to do business with Russia. As we discussed, Turkiye is talking about joining the BRICS.

So, if Turkiye is not willing to choose, we, as a superpower, certainly don't have to choose and we can balance—and, in fact, it is a prerogative of a superpower to be able to focus on more than one priority at a time.

Mr. SCHANZER. I will only add one thing here. We are entering into an era of great power competition. We hear this all the time. We are going to have to deal with China. We are going to have to deal with Russia. We have got great challenges on the horizon.

We need reliable allies, period. We need to make demands of our allies. And by the way, Turkiye is not alone; you have got countries like Qatar that are supporting Hamas. You have got countries like Oman that are supporting the Houthis.

None of this should be allowed to continue under an alliance structure that demands discipline. That is what I think we need to start to see out of our diplomats, out of our State Department, out of our White House. I think this has gone on for too long.

Mr. SELF. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you all so very much.

Mr. SELF. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Indeed, Secretary Wallander, I want to thank you for your analysis about the Black Sea, how important it is. And I'm really grateful for Ranking Member Keating raising that issue up.

Because we have already seen the efforts by the collaboration between War Criminal Putin and the Chinese Communist Party and the regime in Tehran. And it was October 26th that the War Criminal Putin rigged the Presidential elections in the Republic of Georgia, and the consequence of that is that now there's an effort by the Chinese Communist Party to scheme and build a port on the Black Sea.

The collaboration between the axis of evil is clearer every day and we should be supporting, indeed, as Europe is, the legitimate President Salome Zourabichvili of the Republic of Georgia and call for new and fair and free elections.

With that in mind, America and Turkiye have been NATO allies beginning even in 1952 with Turkish soldiers fighting alongside Americans in the Korean War and in every conflict since, including I have had my son serve with Turkish troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There's always been ups and downs in our relationship, but I believe that, ultimately, what we have as mutual benefits should be a basis of our partnership for ultimate good results for both of our countries and for freedom and democracy.

Additionally, Turkiye has been crucial for the victory in the cold war, defeating communism, liberating countries of Central and Eastern Europe, of Central Asia, of the Caucasus. We have worked together and we need to focus on that. And, indeed, we have been partners in the Global War on Terrorism.

The Turkish American community, for over 130 years, has been very assimilated into American society as business leaders and so appreciated.

I was grateful to actually host the Turkish Ambassador Sedat Onal to the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee. And I was grateful that he was there with Senator Scott of my State, Tim Scott, and Senator Lindsey Graham, and Governor Henry McMaster. Everybody welcomed the Ambassador.

It was just so positive that, actually, the Ambassador came to Columbia, South Carolina, after the election, and I was grateful to have him welcomed by Mayor Dan Rickenmann; by Carl Blackstone, Chamber of Commerce President; the Secretary of Commerce; Republican and Democrat legislators.

So, every effort I think should be made to reinforce the relationship that has been so beneficial.

I'm also grateful that President Donald Trump, as we saw last night, believes in a pragmatic foreign policy and reducing the burdens on America. I really appreciate that President Donald Trump has praised Turkiye and Saudi Arabia for working with the new government in Syria.

Additionally, Qatar, too, has been helpful with the new government in Syria.

What we need to do is to seek to end the conflicts and the self-declared enemies of America in the Middle East and North Africa who create the migration crisis to Europe. We should be, I believe, working with Turkiye for stabilization in the area.

Indeed, I'm really grateful that Turkiye has played a positive role supporting assistance to Ukraine from the beginning and, also, agreeing to possibly send peacekeepers to Ukraine.

Then, it is also that Turkiye was so critical in the fall of the narco-trafficking Assad Syrian regime. And with that in mind, we should be working, and we can already see that the foreign minister of the regime in Tehran condemned Turkiye yesterday, calling their actions for a free Syria as unconstructive, when, in fact, Turkiye has been working to publicly calling for the rights of women and Christians.

With all of this in mind, Dr. Borschanskaya, what is the best way for the United States to encourage positive progress, working with the country of Turkiye?

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. So, thank you. Thank you for the question.

I think the best way to encourage positive progress is to be very pragmatic and practical and compartmentalized, our relationship. Again, Turkiye is a problematic ally on many fronts, but we also need it and it is part of NATO.

Specifically, in Syria, we have an incredible opportunity. With Assad in power, Syria had no chance and the rest of the Middle East would continue to be unstable. In other words, Syria sat at the center of terrorism, of narco trafficking, of enormous instability that harmed our direct national security interests and the interests of our allies.

Now, we are in an era of uncertainty. We have a lot of questions about where Syria goes. But at least Syria has a modicum of a chance. And the best way we can ensure that is to be present, to

have a seat at the table, to attempt to shape the outcome. That is what we need to do.

Here, we can look for ways on how Turkiye can be helpful, along with keeping our own presence in Syria, keeping our troops in Syria. So again, compartmentalize the relationship; be pragmatic.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. Costa.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the ranking member, for this hearing. It is important.

I want to kind of go beyond bridging the gap between East and West. Turkiye has been a challenge, and you talked about the good, the bad, and the complicated, I think, the previous witness.

I apologize if I'm asking questions that have already been asked and please let me know.

But I am very perplexed and troubled by Turkiye's influence and its unwillingness to understand the importance of its agreements with Armenia and its engagement with Azerbaijan that I think really threatened Armenia's ability to continue to focus toward the Western interests.

Would you care to comment?

Ms. WALLANDER. Thank you, Congressman. I very much appreciate your question.

Turkiye has an opportunity to help resolve a tragic, longstanding dispute, but instead—

Mr. COSTA. They do.

Ms. WALLANDER. And instead—

Mr. COSTA. But they have not been helpful. Their history has not been there.

Ms. WALLANDER. Exactly. Instead, Turkiye helped to arm Azerbaijan to the point where President Aliyev believed and had a military advantage. And rather than continuing to work with the international community, Turkiye included for a peaceful resolution of the unresolved dispute, tipped the balance—

Mr. COSTA. Well, and it is not clear to—

Ms. WALLANDER [continuing]. to allow that.

Mr. COSTA [continuing]. what role this administration is going to play in supporting Armenia's efforts there. Nagorno-Karabakh, which you both referenced, it was outrageous what they did there—120,000 refugees that are now in Armenia, and not recognizing that historic Artsakh, as the Armenians like to refer to it as.

I want to switch to about Ukraine here. You know, some of my colleagues here on the other side talk about that we should leave the war in Ukraine to the President. I don't subscribe to that. I don't think they do so when Joe Biden was President. I think Congress must assert its role during the oversight responsibility on behalf of the American people.

Russia was the aggressor that invaded Ukraine. Putin is the dictator. Russia is a syndicate masquerading as a country with a mob boss called Putin. And I think if you look at it through those lenses, that prism, you understand the dynamics that we are dealing with here in trying to reach a peace.

Do you believe, either of you, that this President is giving up our leverage in negotiations, while kneecapping Ukraine's military ca-

pabilities on the battlefield, most recently today or yesterday, that we are not going to share the ability for them to target key targets?

Ms. WALLANDER. Congressman, President Putin believes he is winning. He believes his economy can continue to produce weapons that are being used to attack Ukraine. For 3 years, we have disabused him of that notion. And to get leverage to get President Putin to the table for a peace agreement, which I believe a just peace agreement would be in Ukraine's interest because it allows Ukraine to return on its path of Euro-Atlantic integration, you need to impose costs on President Putin—economic and military costs.

Mr. COSTA. So, when you hear the Vice President's comments at the Munich Summit Security Council; when you hear the vote on the U.N. last Monday, siding with autocrats and dictatorships against our democratic allies; when you see the debacle on Friday, would you say this is either gross incompetence or malign intent, or neither, in terms of what we need to be doing to reach a ceasefire; ultimately, to get a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia?

Ms. WALLANDER. I, along probably with Anna, have closely watched what is said in Moscow. And to all of those instances, you know—

Mr. COSTA. I think they are popping champagne in the Kremlin right now.

Ms. WALLANDER [continuing]. they have explicitly said that all of those developments are in Russia's interests and are going to support Russian success—

Mr. COSTA. So, tell me, why is the success of Ukraine beneficial to our national security, and why should Americans care about what Ukraine's fate is?

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Thank you. Can you hear me?

Mr. COSTA. Yes, please. I'm running out of time.

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Success of Ukraine is vital to our national security interests because, if Russia is not stopped in Ukraine, NATO and Europe at large will most likely have to face a bigger war in Europe.

Mr. COSTA. Georgia and Moldova and possibly the Baltic states. They have already undermined the Romanian Presidential election. We know what Putin's intentions are. He has made it clear. He wants to recreate the old Soviet Union. He thinks he is a reincarnation of Peter the Great. That is the bottom line and that is what we should understand when we are dealing with Russia.

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. I absolutely agree with you.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you.

Mr. SELF. I recognize the gentleman from Montana, Mr. Zinke.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You know, I have a lot of experience with Turkiye military and I do recognize the contributions to the Korean War. I fought in Kosovo with Turkish troops, both armor and infantry, and have a great deal of joint operations experience with their special forces. And I respect their military, and their military is actually key to NATO.

But I have concerns about PKK/YPG. You talk about a thorn in the side between the two countries. We have a thorn in the side

called ISIS and Al Qaeda. Turkiye has also a thorn in the side called PKK and YPG.

A friend of our enemies is not necessarily a friend of ours. And I do think or recognize that the United States made a mistake diplomatically of not separating PKK/YPG from Kurds.

I have a lot of experience with the Peshmerga. And I give the analogy of the Irish. Not all Irish are IRA and not all Kurds are PKK or YPG.

But, you know, I think there is a recognition that PKK and YPG are responsible for at least 30,000 deaths of Turkish, which is 10 times what happened in 9/11.

How do we separate in Syria the Kurds that are Marxists-Leninists, terrorist organizations, from Kurds that support democracy that may not be our type of democracy, but certainly aren't terrorist organizations?

Ms. Wallander, I would love to hear a comment from you.

Ms. WALLANDER. Thank you, Congressman.

I would give an example. And you, yourself, pointed to it. Which is Turkiye's relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and with the Peshmerga is quite positive. They have worked constructively with those entities and with the government of Iraq, the Federal Government of Iraq in Baghdad on counterterrorism operations at times.

At times, there's been frictions because they have unilaterally struck at PKK elements in northern Iraq, but the fundamental reality is that it is possible—and we should hold Turkiye to it—to be able to distinguish between the terrorist organizations and units, such as PKK, and not, as you point out, incorrectly with a broad brush characterize all Kurds with that same category. And they have done it in Iraq, and we should hold them to that now with the opportunity in Syria.

Mr. ZINKE. I have an equal concern about Turkiye's support of Hamas, because they have. They offer harbor. They offer financial assistance at times, although not as much as Iran.

So, Doctor, how can we—I mean, is it possibly also, if we have a deal where we don't support the YPG/PKK, do you think it is possible for Turkiye to stop their support of Hamas, which is an irritant to us?

Mr. SCHANZER. I think it is wishful thinking, unfortunately, Mr. Congressman. I would say that, right now, Turkiye has pushed all of its chips into the middle of the table as it relates to Hamas. I would also argue for Al Qaeda, for that matter, for HTS in Syria. I don't think there is any walking back from that.

This is an ideological commitment that this government has made to the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, and even some worse movements. I think a reckoning is needed here. I don't think a deal is what is needed to get them to stop the support. At this point, I am convinced, after watching this play out since 2006, I believe that significant American pressure is what is needed in order to force a divorce between Hamas and Turkiye.

Mr. ZINKE. Dr. Anna, do you also share the same opinion?

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Yes, I share that opinion. I think pressure is needed. I also think, again, when we think about our bigger geostrategic interests in Syria, our presence, our presence in this

region is what is going to create that pressure, but also our engagement and our willingness to show that we are not leaving this region, that we are willing—that we are committed to our interests, and we are not fair weather friends.

Mr. ZINKE. Doctor, you can comment on that if you would like.

Ms. WALLANDER. Yes, the job is not done in Syria. ISIS remains a threat. The detention facilities, if not monitored and kept secure, would be a huge setback in American and global security. And so, the job is not done.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you.

I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SELF. I recognize the gentleman from Rhode Island, Mr. Amo.

Mr. AMO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Look, while I appreciate the focus on Turkiye, I think the Subcommittee on Europe should be discussing the most dire threat to European security. That is Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine. That's right, Russia.

And again, so we align on some facts, it was Russia that invaded Ukraine and launched an unprovoked war. It is an aggressive Russia that poses one of the greatest threats to Europe's freedoms, stability, and democratic values. It is Russia who now believes the visions—believe that—the visions of our two nations are aligned.

So, instead of having a hearing to address the threat posed by Vladimir Putin, this committee is looking the other way, literally. No one should choose to sit back and let President Trump parrot Kremlin propaganda and blow up our European relationships.

Make no mistake, the scene caused by the President and Vice President at the White House last Friday was unnerving. It was, in my opinion, disgraceful. Ukrainians are dying every day to defend democracy. Yet, our colleagues were more concerned about President Zelenskyy and the flattering that he should have done of President Trump, and his wardrobe, than the existential war that he is fighting.

So, unlike my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, I cannot stay silent while our President sides with a dictator over our allies. Abandoning our allies, refusing to send them aid, belittling leaders in public does not make the United States stronger. It makes us weaker. It is clear that America First is rapidly turning into Putin first and America alone.

Instead of leading by example, our President is siding with North Korea and Iran at the United Nations, voting to protect Russia. This is not the company we want to keep.

Now, I recognize that Turkiye is the subject of today's hearing, a NATO member that has offered to host peace talks between Ukraine and Russia. Turkiye has also pushed back against false Russian claims to Ukrainian land. But while Turkiye supports sovereign territory in Ukraine, they fail to support it in their own backyard, in countries like Armenia.

In 2023, Turkiye provided material support for Azerbaijan's brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh, the ancestral home of the Armenian people. The United States supports Armenia. We provided over \$57 million in foreign assistance to Armenia last year, including humanitarian assistance for refugees from

Nagorno-Karabakh. But this assistance was halted by President Trump's illegal foreign aid freeze. It is yet another example of Trump abandoning an ally—all while Turkiye has reportedly discussed establishing a corridor to connect with Azerbaijan across Armenia's sovereign territory.

So, I know that Mr. Costa touched on this a bit, but I want to go a little bit deeper. Ms. Wallander, what steps can the United States take to push back on Turkiye's support of Azerbaijan's aggression against Armenia, and how can the United States dissuade Turkiye and Azerbaijan from encroaching on Armenia's sovereignty with a ground transport corridor?

Ms. WALLANDER. Thank you so much, Congressman.

I agree with you that Turkiye has played a negative role in the last couple of years on this conflict. And it is difficult to imagine that Azerbaijan would come to the table with a reasonable and equitable and just resolution without Turkiye's positive influence.

The specifics could be to look at specific arms transfers that contributed to the loss of life and the expulsion of those tens of thousands of Armenians from that region. It also could look at possible sanctions on Turkish relations with Russia in the technology sphere that fuels some of those defense industrial productions. I do think targeted sanctions, if they were used for leverage to push toward diplomacy, could help Turkiye to play a constructive role in influencing, in particular, Azerbaijan.

Mr. AMO. And could you speak a little bit to the ground transport corridor specifically?

Ms. WALLANDER. I don't have any secret ideas or public ideas of how to succeed in pressing that ground transit corridor. I would appeal to Turkiye's principled support in support of the U.N. and international law for Ukraine and ask them to consider no less in recognizing the international community's obligation for Armenia to be able to have control of its own territory, to negotiate an acceptable solution to the issues of transport with Azerbaijan, and offer the kind of positive influence and example that the Turkish leadership so often seeks.

Mr. AMO. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the gentlelady from Nevada, Ms. Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Sorry to walk right in here. Well, thank you.

As you all have been hearing and talking about the numerous challenges throughout the region, preserving peace in the Middle East is vital. Now, as a reliable and stable security partner in the region, Greece best represents U.S. interests there. Allowing Greece to maintain the qualitative and strategic advantage over Turkiye is crucial in this respect. It provides a deterrent to Turkiye's historic aggression toward Greece, which shouldn't be upset, and this balance would be upended if Turkiye were to acquire F-35s.

Despite the recent easing of tensions between Greece and Turkiye, Erdogan's fundamental positions and claims, in violation of Greek and Cypriot sovereignty, remain unchanged. This year saw a sudden uptick in Turkiye's violations of Greece's airspace, while the violations of its territorial waters continued throughout

the last year. Meanwhile, Erdogan is cozying up to Hamas and threatening to invade Israel.

Yet, Greece continues to play a constructive role in the region by promoting energy security through the three-plus-one Great Sea Interconnector; providing crucial assistance for Ukraine, as Russia continues its war of aggression, and serving as a responsible NATO member by working with the U.S. to coordinate mutual security goals. Greece's responsible ally ship promotes U.S. interests in the region, while Turkiye seems only interested in promoting Erdogan's neo-Ottoman ambitions.

I would ask—Dr. Schanzer, is it?—

Mr. SCHANZER. Yes.

Ms. TITUS [continuing]. if the United States has imposed CAATSA sanctions on any other NATO ally besides Turkiye.

Mr. SCHANZER. No, it has not.

Ms. TITUS. Yes.

Mr. SCHANZER. No other ally has acquired the Russian S-400 system. No other ally has put our technology and our allies at risk the way the Turks have. And I'm actually shocked that this crisis continues so many years after it began. It is actually inconceivable to me that we have not forced this crisis to a suitable conclusion. I understand that Turkiye put itself in a pickle, but that is not our problem any longer. We need that S-400 out of Turkiye.

But I would also just like to say, the way that you have just characterized what is happening in the Eastern Med is exactly as I understand it. I think Greece has done more than its fair share to shoulder its load, and it continues to come under attack, under threat, from Turkiye.

The question is, at some point, what does the United States do to help support our allies in Greece? I do think that there's an opportunity to perhaps forge some kind of mechanism that would enable the United States, Israel, and Greece to work together for the betterment of security in the East Med. I sincerely hope we see that materialize in the months or years to come.

Ms. TITUS. I do, too. I think Greece is strategically located geopolitically to play a leadership role in that area.

Just to add to that, are there any other NATO allies who occupy a country the way that Turkiye occupies Cyprus? And are there any other NATO allies that are actively seeking BRICS membership or status with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization? I think I know the answer. No?

Mr. SCHANZER. You're correct.

Ms. TITUS. OK. Thank you.

One other question. In your written testimony, you mention Turkiye's "Blue Homeland" policy of dominating the Eastern Mediterranean. Could you elaborate on this for a little bit and tell us how it threatens Greece and Cypriot sovereignty in the region?

Mr. SCHANZER. Oh, absolutely. What Turkiye has done is it has extended the way it views its own territorial waters to cover, effectively, almost all of the Eastern Med. It is almost as if Cyprus doesn't exist. It is as if Greece doesn't exist. They have got a relationship, an agreement with Libya that, basically, wipes Cyprus off the map. Right?

And all the while, we see illegal drilling, Turkiye drilling in the territorial waters off of Cyprus and near Greece. When you see Greek and Cypriot vessels coming out of their Exclusive Economic Zones into international waters, they are challenged by Turkish vessels. This is extremely aggressive and it is articulated in this “Blue Homeland” policy that this is the design of Turkiye. It is to dominate the Eastern Med.

I would argue that conquest of Syria by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the Al Qaeda group, has now made Greece, Israel, and Cyprus, and other countries in the region very alarmed. They see now a surge in power on the part of the Turkish regime, and I get the sense right now that they are looking to work together to begin to counter it.

Ms. TITUS. It doesn't sound like Turkiye is a very reliable ally to me.

Mr. SCHANZER. No.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you and I yield back.

Mr. SCHANZER. No, ma'am.

Mr. SELF. Thank you.

We are going to recognize the ranking member and the chair for a second round of questioning, and I will go ahead and let the ranking member begin.

Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to use the second round to go back at statements made by our witnesses, and there are two that I would like to emphasize.

No. 1, Dr. Schanzer said, “We need reliable allies.” I couldn't agree more. But, honestly, right now, the U.S., on the part of our closest allies, our Transatlantic allies, that reliability is openly being questioned—just recent comments by French officials, German officials, our Scandinavian allies. It is clear. I don't have to go—they are public record.

But I can see their point after looking at the United States taking an ally like Ukraine and cutting off its intelligence capabilities that were so integral to success here; cutting off weapons funding, important for just their survival as a country. The actions where we have distanced ourselves from our allies at the U.N. and the comments in the aftermath of the Oval Office incident of last week, which prompted an emergency meeting of our European allies in Great Britain. These all make us less reliable.

So, I would like to ask, question one, how important is this reliability? And since I believe it is unmistakable—these are the words of our allies themselves, essentially, saying we are not reliable—how important that is that America First can't be America alone?

Now, the second point that was brought up—I'm not sure which witness brought it—but it was on, you know, how come Turkiye has a view of the United States of only 20 percent favorable? And the comments of our witnesses were, well, Erdogan's repression of journalists and a free press really resulted in the people of Turkiye not getting a full message, and not a clear message and a very skewed message.

So, the second question I have is, the importance of funding and making sure we are positioning our Radio Free Europe and our

Radio Liberty capabilities, making sure that those things are able and present to break through that very problem that our witnesses raised themselves.

I question that, given funding threats in the past. I question it, frankly, by the advancing of Kari Lake, a seven-time election denier, to lead that entity. So, I'm concerned. I'm concerned on the reliability and I'm concerned on our ability to get democratic messages through Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

I will start with Dr. Wallander.

Ms. WALLANDER. Thank you, Congressman.

So, Russia will be able to rebuild its military and adjust its military and be poised to be able to threaten not just Ukraine, but NATO, assessments are, in about 5 years.

European countries, as of last year, 23 were meeting at least the 2 percent of GDP spending on defense, and many more are moving toward that. And what we have heard in the last couple of months is a determination to spend even more and invest in defense industrial base.

The United States is on the cusp of achieving something that American leaders have demanded of Europe for 75 years of NATO, which is that European countries really invest in their defense and really take the lead in defending their country with the United States as an ally. But it is going to take them some time.

At this point, being that reliable ally, giving Europe the opportunity to take that leadership role, to free up the United States for our important global challenges, especially strategic competition and the pacing challenge of China, it is within our grasp and we have that opportunity to have that success that Presidents across both Republican and Democratic leaderships have sought for decades.

Mr. KEATING. The importance of global media?

Ms. WALLANDER. The importance of?

Mr. KEATING. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty?

Ms. WALLANDER. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty are respected as credible and important sources of alternative information across the globe, I mean as resources, but especially given the cold war history. Even in countries that have free media, it is an alternative source of information. It is a source about America. But it has to be credible. It has to be about free media, and it is a huge asset in making the American case and building that trust that enables us to have access in Europe. That is so important for our global security.

Mr. KEATING. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Ranking Member.

I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I want to take 4 minutes on this next question. We have danced around S-400's and F-35s.

So, starting with you, Dr. Schanzer, Greece, Israel, Turkiye seem to me to be the players in this, as well as NATO as a whole, of course. Would you just outline the issue for us? Because this is a major issue for NATO in my mind.

Mr. SCHANZER. It is, and I thank you for raising it, Chairman Self.

We spoke about this before the hearing. There are, of course, different variants of the F-35, and I think Israel would have a superior one to whatever Turkiye might acquire and I'm sure it is superior to whatever Greece has.

I am concerned, however, about giving this platform in any form to this government in Turkiye. I think that it will be used to further Turkiye's aggressive posture in the region. I would fear clashes between Greece and Turkiye and would not want to put both Greek and Turkish F-35s in the sky, as they battle over Alexandroupolis or other key areas, as tensions rise in the Eastern Med.

I know the Israelis are steadfastly opposed right now to this government, the government of Turkiye, which has called for a Pan-Islamic war against Israel, giving them, rewarding them with the F-35. Now, they were removed from this program because of their acquisition of the Russian S-400 system. We should not put them back on.

I would argue that, even if they relinquish the S-400, there should be a cooling-off period, probably several years, before we begin to consider furnishing them with an F-35 because there needs to be a price to pay when our allies disobey clear directives, as we gave the Turks. We said, "Do not buy that S-400." They did so anyway. They should pay a steep price. They should be made an example of, I think, right now for all of our other allies to see.

Mr. SELF. Either of the other two doctors?

Ms. WALLANDER. I will speak to this.

Mr. SELF. Dr. Wallander?

Ms. WALLANDER. I have a somewhat different view. I believe that Turkiye should—I believe the right decision was made to remove Turkiye from the F-35 program, to not deliver the aircraft that it has already paid for because of its acquisition of the S-400 system, and to impose sanctions as a consequence of that choice.

I, however, believe that, because the United States is a member of NATO, and because the American people are only as secure as the alliance is strong, it is in our interest for NATO allies to have advanced military capabilities. And NATO is moving toward the F-35 as a core capability, and interoperability across the alliance is extremely important.

If Turkiye were to undo that mistake in a verifiable, irreversible way, to move forward, to move Turkiye, under the right circumstances with the right provisions and security for that decision, is something that would be in the American national interest and is something that should be advanced with all due caution, with a period of time to ensure that it is in American interests going forward.

Mr. SELF. Dr. Borschanskaya?

Ms. BORSCHEVSKAYA. Yes, and I would add to that, when we sanctioned Turkiye for the purchase of the S-400, and when we removed Turkiye as a co-producer of the F-35, we did say that, if Turkiye were to relinquish the S-400, Turkiye would be brought back into this program. And I agree with Celeste's comments to that end. Not only is this issue important because of NATO cohesion, because Turkiye is a NATO ally, but the question is, what leverage do we have with Turkiye to relinquish the S-400, if not

bring it back into the program, again, with an appropriate cooling-off period?

Mr. SELF. Thank you.

Well, this is a complex topic, and I think we all recognize that Turkiye has one foot in Europe and one foot in the Middle East and they try to focus on both, and I don't think they can.

So, for the purview, for the portfolio of this committee, I think the NATO military alliance is all important as we address Turkiye. And I think that Turkiye needs to return to its traditional, historic role as anchoring that southeast corner of the NATO treaty alliance. Because this is a treaty. It is a treaty that carries dramatic consequences if Article 5 is invoked.

So, this is an extremely important topic to me, as chairman, and I know to this committee, because I have heard all of these comments. And I appreciate it.

I thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the members for their questions.

The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing.

Mr. SELF. Pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record, subject to the length limitations.

Mr. SELF. Without objection, the committee stands adjourned. Thank you so much.

[Whereupon, at 3:38 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

## **APPENDIX**

---

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on Europe  
Keith Self (R-TX), Chairman**

February 26, 2025

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe at 2:00 p.m. in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

**DATE:** Wednesday, March 5, 2025  
**TIME:** 2:00 p.m.  
**LOCATION:** 2172 RHOB  
**SUBJECT:** Bridging the Gap: Turkey Between East and West  
**WITNESSES:** Dr. Anna Borschanskaya  
 Harold Grinspoon Senior Fellow  
 Washington Institute for Near East Policy  
 Dr. Jonathan Schanzer  
 Executive Director  
 Foundation for Defense of Democracies  
 The Honorable Celeste Wallander  
 Adjunct Senior Fellow  
 Center for a New American Security

\*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

**By Direction of the Chair**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date March 5, 2025 Room 2172 RHOB

Starting Time 14:00 Ending Time 15:38

Recesses  (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_) 
---

Presiding Member(s)

*Chairman Self*

---

*Check all of the following that apply:*

Open Session   
Executive (closed) Session   
Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)   
Stenographic Record

---

**TITLE OF HEARING:**

*Bridging the Gap: Turkey Between East and West*

---

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*Attached*

---

**NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*Attached*

---

**HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No**   
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

---

**STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)**

*Attached*

---

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_  
or  
TIME ADJOURNED 15:38

*Meg Wagner*  
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Europe  
119<sup>th</sup> Congress

## ATTENDANCE

## Meeting on: Bridging the Gap: Turkey Between East and West

Date: 3.5.25

