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Status of the U.S. Relationship with the Republic of Turkey

Department of Defense
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

Unclassified Executive Summary

Turkey, in its unique geostrategic position on NATO's southeastern flank – at the confluence of Europe, Russia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus – shares key regional interests with the United States. Turkey is a critical NATO ally, possessing the second largest military in NATO, as well as the willingness to use that military to advance NATO's interests. Turkey has a credible plan to reach two percent of GDP in defense spending by 2024. It is also a critical player in the long-term strategic competition with revisionist powers, sustained efforts to deter and counter rogue regimes, and the ongoing campaign to defeat ISIS and other transnational terrorist groups.

Despite bilateral tensions, Turkey remains a productive military partner in many areas, particularly for basing and access, as well as a key contributor to NATO missions. Turkey permits U.S. military operations and logistical supply through the Turkish straits, over its skies, and from its bases and ports. Over 2,000 U.S. troops and dozens of air and radar assets in Turkey support various U.S. European Command, U.S. Central Command, and NATO priorities, including Defeat-ISIS operations in Syria and Iraq. The U.S. Mission in Turkey features personnel representing over 20 U.S. agencies at facilities in Ankara, Istanbul, Adana, Gaziantep, and Izmir.

Turkey shares key regional interests with the United States, although Turkey's cooperation with Russia and Iran, illiberal domestic trajectory, and unjust detention of U.S. citizens and locally employed Turkish staff have been key bilateral irritants. From the Turkish perspective, U.S. support for the Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) in Syria and perceived inaction in response to its request to extradite Fethullah Gulen have undermined U.S.-Turkey relations. Turkey perceives growing regional security threats from aircraft and ballistic missiles, and is frustrated with its protracted, decade-long search for an air and missile defense system. It is in the context of these tensions that Turkey first announced an agreement to procure the S-400 surface-to-air missile system from Russia in July 2017.

Impact of Turkey's S-400 Acquisition

The Turkish Government has repeatedly and publicly stated that it has concluded an agreement to procure the S-400. The initial delivery date will reportedly occur as early as July 2019. In response, the U.S. Government has made clear to the Turkish Government that purchasing the S-400 would have unavoidable negative consequences for U.S.-Turkey bilateral relations, as well as Turkey's role in NATO, including:

- potential sanctions under Section 231 of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA);
- risk to Turkish participation in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program (both aircraft acquisition and industrial workshare);

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- risk to other potential future U.S. arms transfers to Turkey, and risk of losing broader bilateral defense industrial cooperation;
- reduction in NATO interoperability; and
- introduction of new vulnerabilities from Turkey's increased dependence on Russia, including sanctioned Russian defense entities, for sophisticated military equipment.

CAATSA Section 231 requires the President to impose sanctions on any individuals or entities that engage in a significant transaction with the Russian intelligence or defense sector. The specific effects of the sanctions would depend on the entities targeted and the exact type of sanctions imposed. However, any sanctions would likely further complicate U.S.-Turkey bilateral relations, including U.S.-Turkey cooperative defense programs, and the supply to the United States and its partners of Turkish-made defense parts and components. Turkish acquisition programs that could be affected include but are not limited to the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, PATRIOT Air and Missile Defense System, CH-47F Chinook heavy lift helicopter, UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopter, and the F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft.

Turkey's Participation in the F-35 JSF Program

Turkey has been an important program partner nation since it joined the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program in 2002. Turkey has invested more than \$1.25 billion towards the JSF Program, with a planned procurement of 100 F-35As. Turkey is also a significant industrial participant under the multilateral Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Production, Sustainment, and Follow-On Development of the Joint Strike Fighter. Turkey is established as a national-level F135 Engine Final Assembly and Check Out provider and has been selected as a Regional F135 Maintenance, Repair, Overhaul, and Upgrade Facility. Turkish industry manufactures various aircraft parts for all F-35 variants and customers. The Administration will reassess Turkey's continued participation as one of eight partner nations should they continue with their purchase of the S-400.

U.S. Alternative to the S-400

The Administration has developed an alternative package to provide Turkey with a strong, capable, NATO-interoperable air and missile defense system that meets all of Turkey's defense requirements. Parts of the package require Congressional Notification. Congressional support for Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales to Turkey is essential to provide a real alternative that would encourage Turkey to walk away from a damaging S-400 acquisition.

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