



**THE EXTENT TO WHICH AMERICA'S SUPPORT FOR KURDISH  
GROUPS THAT THREATEN THE TURKISH BORDERS  
AFFECTED THE U.S.-TURKISH RELATIONS**

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## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### **Tension between the United States of America and Turkey**

U.S.'s support to Kurdish groups which threaten the borders and security of Turkey has negatively impacted the relationship between U.S. and Turkey. As a result, Turkey has generally been seeking more independence which resulted in further tension with the U.S.. Trends show the changes in relationship between the USA and Turkey with regards to strategy and orientation (Barlas & Şuhnaz, 2016; Özcan, 2012). Turkey has been spreading its wings to embrace more power within the region and command more respect in this multipolar system. Turkey is not as invested in foreign policy as it was over 50 years ago (Sandole, 2009). When Turkey joined NATO in 1952, the government of Turkey was keen to follow suit existing foreign policies that are promoted by the global West (Fuller & Lesser. 1993; Przeworski, 1991).

Turkish leaders have been keen in shrinking their dependence to the West by changing its supplier for firearms and other defence equipment. Turkish leadership has also discouraged the influence from the West by ensuring local policies and politics are private and free of Western influence (Zanotti, 2011). As a result, Turkey has been actively coordinating with Russia to purchase defence systems. Despite the recent interests to purchase surface to air defence systems, Turkey has outstanding differences with Russia. Russia and Turkey uphold different expectations on the political outcomes of the Nagorno- Karabakh regions, Syria and Libya (Belge, 2011).

Turkey's military involvement in the Middle East, Caucasus and the Eastern Mediterranean has impacted on the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey. The USA has openly supported the activities and partnerships of its allies which seek to counteract Turkish activities. However, the Turkish and USA officials uphold bilateral cooperation. Leaders from both countries accept that bilateral relations are important in upholding security issues across the

globe and regionally. In June 2016, the U.S. and Turkish leadership jointly agreed to secure the Kabul airport (Parris, 2020). As part of the agreement, Turkish military forces were deployed in Afghanistan, a region that had been heavily occupied by NATO's military for over twenty years.

The agreement to release U.S. military in Afghanistan was dropped by Turkey after Taliban took over Afghanistan. The Turkish officials cited the need to first reconsider Taliban's requests and the need for support before making any long term plans, which reiterated Turkey's need to be independent of Western influence. Turkey is keen in compartmentalizing rivals and partners with countries based on the situation. The country's strategy is to have leverage on different actors which reduces the country's political dependence in the name of leadership.

Turkey relies on trade and investments from the EU from the late 1990s to date (Bolukbasi, 2001; Kittfield, 2010). Additionally, it relies on NATO and the USA for defence and security cooperation. Iran and Russia are the country's major source of energy imports as the country lacks major natural resources and is unable to project its power needs (Bank & Karadag, 2013). The current economic struggles faced by Turkey show the extent of risks that could destroy the countries ties with its major allies.

Turkey's ability to compartmentalize its relationships reflects the president's efforts to keep control domestic and reduce outside influence. AKP, an Islamic friendly party, holds majority of parliamentary seats and enjoys a strong Partnership with MHP, a nationalist party. AKP's goal of retaining the support of important constituencies has the potential of influencing Turkish policies in a more nationalistic manner. The policies of Turkey show the need for a national political action and the restoration of Turkey's prestige (Ahmet, 2015). The Turkish government has had little restraint in deploying low cost strategies to fight its battles. The

country focuses on using proxy forces and armed drone aircraft which results in many casualties leading in the disregard of human rights and the rule of law.

Turkey's orientation is a major concern for the USA. President Biden's administration strongly disapproves of the actions undertaken by the Turkish government. The genocide against Armenians during world war 1 is regarded as a threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Barkey, 2010; Michael & Eric, 2017). However, Biden's administration has openly praised how Turkey hosts refugees. Approximately 3 million refugees are hosted in Turkey, most of whom are from Syria and Afghanistan.

Turkey's decision to acquire the Russian S-400 surface to air defence system resulted in sanctions from the U.S. which deteriorated the relationship between Turkey and the U.S.. President Trump's administration discontinued Turkey's membership in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program, an action which pointed towards potential adversities. The U.S. administration explained that Turkey's decision to acquire the S-400 system could jeopardize the capacities and security of the F-35 program due to proximity between the two systems.

Turkey has been keen in sharing technology and co-producing its defence systems, a demand that has been rejected by U.S. government. The inability of the U.S. and Turkish government to reach an agreement on sharing defence technology resulted in Turkey considering other EU and non EU partners in equipping the country's defence systems. Some U.S. aircrafts were used in the 2016 attempts, making the president consider diversifying their foreign arms resources (Sali, 2021). The U.S. origin arms which were used by a faction of the Turkish military, during the failed coup, resulted in president Erdogan's interests in defending the country against U.S. aircraft.

U.S.'s sanctions against Turkey have not stopped the country from acquiring more firearms from Russia, with the country expecting a second S-400 system next year. The Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) does not necessarily stop Turkey from transacting military equipment directly with the U.S.. However, the sanctions handicap Turkish partnerships which limit its ability to make weapons platforms with other member states of the EU. Since Turkey needs to update its fleet of F 16 aircraft, it is required to forego the use of the Russian technology. Failure to forego the use of the S 400 technology will result in the upholding of the sanctions making it impossible for Turkey to be supported by EU member states and the USA. However, Turkish officials are keen to acquire the Sun 35 aircraft, an appropriate upgrade for the S 16 aircraft.

### **The United States of America and NATO Military Presence in Turkey**

Turkey's geopolitical location is near global hot spots making it an ideal location for the territory stationing and transportation of personnel, arms and cargo owned by NATO and the U.S.. The Incirlik air base located in Adana, the early warning missile defence radar in the east side of turkey and Izmir, the ground forces command of NATO is some of the strategic locations of operations run by NATO and the U.S. (Parris, 2020). NATO has the goal of mitigating Turkey's concern about the entry of neighbours into Turkey. The Soviet Union had aggressively postured itself in Turkey after the second world war hence starting conversation about intrusions (Kayaoğlu, 2009; Gunes & Zeydanlioğlu, 2014; Marcus, 2007). Russian involvement in issues affecting Libya, Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh has motivated Turkish military to frustrate Russian efforts to curb encroachment.

Growing tension between Turkey and the West has sparked conversations about the safety of the U.S. and NATO assets within the county. Some analysts advocate for the setup of

alternative bases in the regions to guarantee the safety of the assets. Some of the alternative locations are Cyprus, Jordan and Greece (Michael & Eric, 2017). The Turkish opposition of the interests of the U.S. and its allies within the eastern Mediterranean has resulted in the encouragement of cooperation amongst friends and partners of the U.S. to act against Turkey. In 2020, the U.S. government waived sanctions and restrictions imposed on Cyprus enabling the republic to import non-lethal defence services which resulted in criticism especially among the Turkish leaders.

Turkey influences the European countries near Russia and the black sea littoral area making it an important part of the U.S. interests. Turkey is currently cooperating with countries such as Poland, Azerbaijan and Ukraine to sell arms which brings about an opportunity to have a common agenda with the U.S. (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2007; Heshmati, Dilani & Baban, 2014). However, the opportunity could eliminate Turkey's dependence on both Russia and the USA which goes against the individual interests of both countries.

### **Specific Issues for the United States of America's Policy**

Future relations between the U.S. and Turkey depend on how both countries choose to proceed with regards to different issues. The decision made by Turkey to fully utilize the S 400 system and buy more Russian arms could influence U.S.'s policy hence affecting its relationship with Turkey (Economic Outlook, ISPAT, 2011; Fraser, 2015). The regional crises in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Mediterranean, Libya and Syria will determine the relationship between Turkey and U.S. and its allies. The ability of turkey to amicably handle to crises will improve its relationship with china, the EU, Iran, Russia, Israel, the united states and Arab states that abide by Sunni.

Turkey can develop an area of influence around economic growth and military cooperation. Therefore, the U.S. needs to revise its policies around defence materials and exports to allow for the growth of the Turkish population (Wadhams, Saleha, Stephanie & Jennifer, 2019). President Erdogan's ability to control the country during economic downturns and uphold human rights is a topic of discussion. However, the U.S. needs to respect the country's leadership without seeing the need to control Turkey and its operations.

The actions undertaken by the Congress and the U.S. administration impact on the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Turkey and as such, they should have clear political and economic goals. The congressional and administrative actions need to protect the financial and strategic wellbeing of the Turkish population. Therefore, the U.S. should review its decision to impose CAATSA sanctions on Turkey, relax their conditions on the sale of arms, balance the interests of turkey and its global and regional rivals as well as assess their options in setting up alternative bases (Parris, 2020). Re-evaluating and reassessing decisions is important as it eliminates mistakes in the decision making process. India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are some of U.S. allies that have procured weapons from Russia, besides Turkey. As such, policies seeking to punish turkey for buying S 400 from Russia should be just as tough on the other nations to avoid unnecessary tension and violence.

The U.S. government needs to be careful about engaging president Erdogan. His legitimacy, likelihood of staying in power and the ability of his successor to rise to power are important factors that should shape the policy formulation process (Sali, 2021). Geopolitical, economic and historic factors may result in a possibility of changing policies to promote the agenda of U.S.. The U.S. government needs to work with president Erdogan to influence the

religion, social status, gender and ethnicity of people during Development and the implementation of projects.

### **Strategic and Political Partnership Assessment**

Turkey and the U.S. have had the longest strategic alliance, mostly because of their shared membership to NATO. However, currently, the two countries are not close allies, majorly because of changes in their individual interests. Turkey has the potential of being a strong ally to NATO despite its poor relationship with the U.S. (Amanda, 2019). The relationship between the U.S. and Turkey cannot be defined by power asymmetry caused by partnerships in security and the military. The differences between Washington and Ankara show the lack of dependence of Turkey on the U.S.. The changes in geopolitical politics, global economic changes, Turkey's need for independence and its inability to embrace democracy has resulted in the change in the relationship between the two countries since the cold war.

President Biden's reaction shows the country's readiness to disagree on values that are contrary to them and agree on similar agenda and values. The USA acknowledges the existence of unbridged differences between Turkey and the USA and seeks to work with the country to promote agenda that matter to both of them. The USA has shown no willingness to adjust its stand to Turkish acquisition of the S 400, pointing to its readiness to lose us on the military partnership with Ankara. Despite the Turkish government demanding a reassessment of the support offered to PYD and YPG, the U.S. shows no reaction towards the demand, a pointer to U.S.'s decision to accept and manage different opinions and interests.

The approach used by the U.S. will fail because of the lack of separation of interests. It is unrealistic to term Turkey as not an adversary yet it has sanctions from the USA. The nature of relationship between the USA and Turkey will slow down the collaboration between the two



countries hence limited trust and partnerships. Bilateral relations that lack solidarity and trust will not survive long periods of time hence they will fail spectacularly (Amanda, 2019). As such, Turkish leaders are keen to discuss and reach an acceptable bargain for their areas of concern, as a way of overcoming their differences. Both parties must be ready to compromise to reach a win solution.

Gradual actions that seek to rebuild trust may be more appropriate than a grand bargain in the restoration of the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey. Both parties could be heavily invested in the ending of unrest in Libya, leading the negotiations in Iran and supporting the reconstruction of Syria. By Turkish government could put the stabilization of Afghanistan at the fore front as opposed to the need to control the Kabul airport (Sali, 2021). The change in priority is a show of good faith, an action that could potentially enhance the relationship between the two countries. The gradual actions would resolve differences gradually preparing the parties for a conversation that would hopefully help to settle the more serious disagreements between the U.S. and Turkey.

The gradual rapprochement method has the potential of setting a new and constructive Partnership between the USA and Turkey. The two countries lost trust and as such, conversations may not be fruitful. The process will soften the two countries and bring them to the table for a clear road map on how to resolve arising issues. Once trust has been rebuilt, the two nations will easily put in place steps to address shared grievances with the goal of having a conducive environment that supports collaboration and shared interests. The stepwise efforts will bring about constrictive partnerships which are built on trust and solidarity.



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