

Part II

**Turkey's Relations with its
Transatlantic Partners:
the U.S. and the EU**

Chapter Six

Turkey-U.S. Relations: Strategic Ambivalence and an Enduring Partnership

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In recent decades, the relationship between Turkey and the U.S. has become extremely controversial, and since the end of the Cold War, bilateral relations have never been as rocky as they are today. Cold War dynamics established a strict security framework for the bilateral relationship, and following the Gulf War, ambivalence toward the international system and the shifting structure of Middle Eastern regional security architecture further destabilized relations. Since then, there have been significant ups and downs in bilateral ties and, especially since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, there have been numerous periods of significant tensions. While the first few years of the Obama administration brought an improvement to relations, a period of uncertainty and ambivalence followed the beginning of the Syrian crisis. The tactical divergence between the two countries led to an increasing strategic ambiguity. U.S. support for the People's Protection Units (YPG) complicated relations further. Turkey's concerns about the strengthening of the YPG and its possible impacts for the national security of the country were underestimated by the U.S. administration. The deterioration of relations between the leaders of the two countries further strained bilateral ties. Following the July 15 coup attempt in Turkey, the relationship entered a period of crisis.

With the election of Donald Trump, a sense of optimism emerged in Turkey and the broader Middle East. This was in part due to expectation that the new U.S. president would reverse the Obama-era foreign policy of disengaging from traditional U.S. allies in the Middle East and caving into Iran's assertiveness in the region with the administration's eagerness to achieve a nuclear deal. This priority in Obama's agenda was considered the primary reason for U.S. inaction in Syria and its "abandonment" of its traditional allies. President Obama's interview in the *Atlantic Monthly* convinced many U.S. allies in the Middle East that there had to be a

change in the administration in order to improve relations.¹ Ankara eagerly awaited the November 2016 elections with the hope of turning a new page in its relations with Washington.² Hence, Trump's election, despite bringing an unpredictable tone in foreign policy, was welcomed by governments in the region.

This optimism over a new administration was for many a *déjà vu* in bilateral relations. Initially, the Obama administration had been welcomed by Turkey (and the broader region) because of the Bush administration's legacy, despite President Obama's lack of experience in the Middle East. Donald Trump's election generated a similar sort of optimism. The first few months of the new administration showed Turkey's willingness to mend ties, which was welcomed by the new U.S. administration. The two leaders talked on the phone several times before meeting face-to-face in May 2017. Despite serious disagreements regarding U.S. policy on arming the YPG and the Raqqa operation, both leaders agreed to contain the crisis in a way that would prevent it from spilling over to other issues. Both sides were particularly optimistic about establishing a working relationship in the region once the Raqqa operation was completed. Both leaders underlined their commitment to the NATO Alliance and their partnership in the Global Coalition against ISIS. Rhetorically, this security framework of bilateral relations remains strong and persistent. However, despite optimism about possible areas of cooperation, there are also several issue areas that may continue to strain bilateral relations. Thus, the two countries may find once again that despite some degree of strategic convergence in the region, they may continue to diverge in tactical and operational realms. This would mean a different form of partnership and necessitate different mechanisms to provide a smooth working relationship. These issue areas will be discussed in the remaining parts of this chapter.

A Lack of Clarity in U.S. Foreign Policy

The general direction of U.S. foreign policy and orientation of U.S. relations with its allies need to be taken into consideration in order to

¹ Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>, Accessed: May 31, 2017.

² "Erdogan says Turkey may open new page with Trump administration," *Daily Sabah*, April 28, 2017, Accessed: May 31, 2017. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2017/04/28/erdogan-says-turkey-may-open-new-page-with-trump-administration>.

understand the more specific issue of U.S.-Turkey relations. Although bilateral relations in recent years have been affected by the crisis in Syria, there has been a larger, more structural, dimension of bilateral relations that has to do with the U.S.' role in the world and relations with its allies.

Since the beginning of the Obama administration, U.S. foreign policy strategy was aimed at maintaining a light footprint and leading from behind.³ Various scholars of U.S. foreign policy described this in a number of ways, referring to it as “retreat,”⁴ “recline,”⁵ and “retrenchment.”⁶ During this period, U.S. relations with its allies shifted. The idea of “burden sharing” became an important objective of the Obama administration, but generated serious concern among U.S. allies. Despite repeated rhetorical reassurances from the U.S. administration, there are too many questions and lack of clarity about the U.S.' commitment to the security of its allies. During the Obama administration, skepticism about U.S. policy impacted allies such as Poland, because of the missile defense system withdrawal in 2009;⁷ Japan, because of questions about the U.S.' commitment to Japanese security in regards to the Senkaku Island crisis with China; and Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries, and Israel, because of the nuclear deal with Iran.

Turkey was also impacted by this ambivalence in U.S. foreign policy. Following U.S. inaction in the aftermath of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime in 2013—despite President Obama's 2012 “red line” statement—the gap between rhetoric and action became an issue of particular concern for Turkey. Despite Turkey's support for a possible U.S. military operation in Syria, following the regime's chemical attack, President Obama's abrupt change of mind raised serious doubts about other commitments made by the U.S. administration. In the meantime, Turkey's foreign policymakers felt that the U.S. was apathetic and disinterested in the serious security risks and political and economic costs that Turkey was

³ Lizza, Ryan. “The Consequentialist.” *New Yorker Magazine*, May 2, 2011. Accessed: May 31, 2017. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/02/the-consequentialist>.

⁴ Stephens, Bret. “What Obama Gets Wrong.” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2015. Accessed: May 31, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/what-obama-gets-wrong>.

⁵ Arquilla, John. “America in Recline.” *Foreign Policy*, January 28, 2013. Accessed: May 31, 2017. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/28/america-in-recline/>.

⁶ Grass, Nick. “Former CIA Chief: Obama's ‘Retrenchment’ Like Trump's ‘America First.’” *Politico*, September 21, 2016. Accessed May 31, 2017. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/obama-trump-similarities-michael-hayden-228452>.

⁷ Harding, Luke and Traynor, Ian. “Obama abandons missile defence shield in Europe,” *The Guardian*, September 17, 2009. Accessed: May 31, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/17/missile-defence-shield-barack-obama>.

enduring due to Syrian crisis. Especially following the terrorist attacks by the PKK and ISIS, the Turkish public perceived statements by the U.S. administration as lacking genuine sympathy. In addition to this, the blunt and undiplomatic statements by the president and his advisers about Turkey further estranged Turkish policymakers.^{8,9} Press leaks of confidential negotiations were unacceptable for Turkey.¹⁰ In his last year in office, President Obama's statements about Turkey and its leaders raised serious questions about the nature of "strategic partnership" and "alliance" between the two countries. In these interviews, traditional U.S. allies were portrayed as "free riders."¹¹ Despite these criticisms, the Obama administration never clarified U.S. objectives, goals, and expectations. This vagueness generated serious question about U.S. objectives. Combined, these actions and statements were perceived as the beginning of a new era in U.S. foreign policy that would change the nature of relations between the U.S. and its allies. This led to serious trust issues in bilateral relations. The indifference to Turkey's concerns, a lack of urgency in responding to the serious crises in Turkey, and a lack of appreciation of the trauma in Turkey following the coup attempt reflected poorly on U.S. relations with other traditional allies. This was the result of a lack of orientation in U.S. foreign policy.

This structural crisis in bilateral relations is not unique to the U.S.-Turkey relationship. The trajectory of this crisis will mostly depend on the policies of the newly-elected Trump administration. If the Obama-era ambivalence about U.S. alliances continues, ties between Turkey and the U.S. may become further strained. As mentioned above, the most critical issue here is for the U.S. to clarify its objectives and future plans with its allies. Doing so can prevent the emergence of high expectations and contain a crisis between the U.S. and Turkey. The mutual distrust between the U.S. and its allies has largely developed as a result of an uncertainty

⁸ Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>, Accessed: 18 July 2017.

⁹ "Vice President Joe Biden Delivered Remarks on Foreign Policy | Institute of Politics," Harvard University, 03 October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dckVCtg5dxM>, Accessed: 18 July 2017.

¹⁰ Schmitt, Eric. "After Delicate Negotiations, U.S. Says It Will Pull Patriot Missiles from Turkey," *The New York Times*, 16 August 2015. Accessed: 18 July 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/world/europe/after-delicate-negotiations-us-says-it-will-pull-patriot-missiles-from-turkey.html?mcubz=1&_r=0,

¹¹ Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016. Accessed: 18 July 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>.

about the U.S.' objectives. The U.S. needs to provide a road map to its allies.

Strengthening the NATO Alliance and the security framework between the U.S. and Turkey is an important step towards establishing that road map. Although the current administration has been sending mixed signals about its perception of the future role of NATO, the Alliance will continue to play an important role in the future partnership between Turkey and the U.S. Similarly, the function and nature of the Global Coalition against ISIS needs to be defined and determined. Both of these frameworks will be important in shaping future relations with Turkey. If the U.S. envisions a future of more transactional partnerships and if its alignments and alliances will have a new definition and description, those changes should also be discussed and debated by the two partners.

The Regional Fallout: Tactical Divergences in Syria

The recent crisis in Syria greatly impacted U.S.-Turkey relations. Shortly after the beginning of the crisis in Syria, the two countries began to diverge in their approach on how to react to the increasing destabilization in the country and violence of the regime. This came after a period of relative convergence in the two countries' policies towards the Middle East and the beginning of the Arab Spring. Even in the early days of the Syrian crisis, the two countries coordinated their policies and waited until August 2011 to ask the Syrian regime to step down.¹² During this period, President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan communicated regularly. In a phone conversation, the two leaders agreed “on [...] an immediate halt” of violence and “monitor[ing] the actions [...] of the Syrian government.”¹³

However, this alignment between the two countries on Syria turned out to be short-lived. In 2012, as the crisis entered its second year, the two countries began to diverge in their approaches. Despite their participation in numerous international forum's established to find a diplomatic solution to the problem, the increasing violence of the regime precipitated massive

¹² “Statement by President Obama on the Situation in Syria,” *The White House*, August 18, 2011. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/18/statement-president-obama-situation-syria>.

¹³ “Readout of the President's Call with Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey,” *The White House*, August 11, 2011. Accessed: May 31, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/11/readout-presidents-call-prime-minister-erdogan-turkey>.

refugee flows from Syria to Turkey.¹⁴ The Turkish government repeatedly tried to raise the urgency of the situation and expected a more assertive approach from the U.S. As 2012 was a presidential election year in the U.S., Turkish authorities were more understanding of the inaction and indecisiveness of the Obama administration, but nevertheless expected a policy shift. The “red line” statement of President Obama convinced many in the region of possible future action by the U.S. administration.¹⁵ The use of chemical weapons was not only a concern of opposition forces and civilians in Syria, but also constituted a serious risk for the countries in the region.

Turkey’s optimism turned out to be misplaced. President Obama signaled his unwillingness to deal with the Syrian crisis at the beginning of his second term. While President Obama and President Erdoğan were unable to find a solution to their increasingly divergent strategies during a summit in May 2013, the chemical attack by the Syrian regime in August 2013 generated similar reactions from both sides.¹⁶ Turkish authorities had previously warned their U.S. counterparts about the use of chemical weapons by the regime and the attack did not surprise the Turkish government.¹⁷ Considering President Obama’s “red line” statement and the preparedness of U.S. forces for a military strike in Syria, Turkey, (like many other U.S. allies), offered its full support for a possible U.S. action.¹⁸ However, despite signals of an imminent attack, at the very last minute President Obama decided to seek the approval of the U.S. Congress to attack Syria, which he did not receive.¹⁹

¹⁴ “Final Communique Action Group for Syria,” United Nations Security Council, June 30, 2012. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>.

¹⁵ Landler, Mark. “Obama Threatens Force Against Syria,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 2012, Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/21/world/middleeast/obama-threatens-force-against-syria.html>.

¹⁶ “Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013,” United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, September 16, 2013. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.un.org/zh/focus/northafrica/cwinvestigation.pdf>.

¹⁷ “Turkey: Syria Used Chemical Weapons ‘Long Time Ago,’” Reuters via HuffPost, May 9, 2013. Accessed: June 1, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/09/turkey-syria-chemical-weapons_n_3247940.html.

¹⁸ Simsek, Ayhan. “Turkey weighs military options in Syria,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 28, 2013, <http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-weighs-military-options-in-syria/a-17050564>, Accessed: June 1, 2017.

¹⁹ Peter Baker and Jonathan Weisman, “Obama Seeks Approval by Congress for Strike in Syria,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2013. Accessed: May 31, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/world/middleeast/syria.html>.

The decision not to retaliate shocked Turkish policymakers. Despite the full support from the Turkish authorities, the Obama administration did not even notify Turkey (or its other allies) prior to the president's statement in the Rose Garden. Thus, U.S. allies learned about President Obama's decision from the media, rather than directly from the U.S. government. Additionally, many U.S. allies and the Syrian opposition saw President Obama's decision not as a desire to receive approval of Congress, but instead as an unwillingness to get involved in the conflict. From this moment, Turkey had lost all of its trust in the U.S. administration. Although the U.S. tried to define the nature of the partnership as a strategic convergence but a tactical divergence on the Syrian crisis, the increasing tactical divergence led to a strategic ambivalence in relations.

The already strained relations grew further apart in 2014. The perception in the region that the U.S. was yielding to Iran because of Iran's willingness to sign a nuclear program seriously hampered U.S.' ties with its traditional allies, including Turkey.²⁰ The rise of ISIS in mid-2014 led to another major divergence in approach between the two countries.

ISIS was, and continues to be, a serious threat for the security of both countries. Especially after the capture of Mosul and the rising threat of foreign terrorist fighters, the urgency of this threat rose significantly. However, the two countries' approaches to this fight diverged significantly, despite their agreement on the end goal. For the U.S., the defeat of ISIS became a primary objective in Syria following the beheading of several American hostages. For the U.S., its Syria strategy gradually turned into a fight against ISIS.²¹ However, for Turkey, the real problem was the presence of a failed state and suppressive regime in Syria. Thus, the growth of ISIS was a result of the current state of affairs in Syria that fostered instability, export of insecurity, and radicalization. In order to address the underlying cause of ISIS, Turkey suggested following a more comprehensive plan to deal with the Syrian crisis. Once the crisis was resolved, ISIS would also lose its power and influence in the country. This divergence in approach became more obvious with a declaration by the U.S. strategy

²⁰ Nakhoul, Samia. "The Middle East is angry and bewildered by US inaction in Syria," *Business Insider*, October 3, 2015. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-us-allies-short-on-options-as-russia-iran-flex-muscle-in-syria-2015-10>.

²¹ Landler, Mark and Sanger, David E. "Obama to Seek Congressional Backing for Military Campaign Against ISIS," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2014. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/06/world/middleeast/obama-to-seek-congressional-backing-for-military-campaign-against-isis.html?mcubz=1>.

to destroy ISIS.²² Yet, it failed to include anything about the future of the Syrian regime and possible ways to end the civil war in the country in this declared strategy.

A further deterioration in the relationship came in the aftermath of the emergence of tactical maneuvers of the U.S. to defeat ISIS on the ground. Starting with the Kobani crisis, the U.S. decided to support the People's Protection Unit's (YPG), a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) listed as a terrorist organization by both the U.S. and Turkey.²³ U.S. support for the YPG was viewed by Turkey as the empowerment of a terrorist organization. Turkey expressed its opposition for direct military assistance to the YPG, but the U.S. administration viewed the YPG as its only alternative to defeat ISIS.²⁴ Despite being disappointed, Turkey's expectation was that the U.S.-YPG partnership would end following the defeat of ISIS in Kobani. However, shortly after the siege ended, the relationship between the YPG and the U.S. grew stronger, and U.S. forces began training and arming YPG fighters in Northern Syria.²⁵ This was unacceptable for Turkey, who viewed the YPG as a threat to the region.

First, there is no doubt that the YPG was, and still is, a Syrian branch of the PKK. The organizational, ideological, and human overlap between the two groups clearly demonstrates that it is the same terrorist organization operating in two different countries.²⁶ U.S. support for the YPG played important role in the empowerment of the PKK, which at the time was about to become a partner in the resolution process in Turkey. Turkish authorities viewed the abrupt resurfacing of hostilities by the PKK as the result of the success and legitimacy of the YPG in Syria during this period.

²² "Statement by the President on ISIL," *The White House*, September 10, 2014. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>.

²³ Meuse, Alison. "Backed by U.S.-Led Coalition, Kurds Take Kobani From ISIS," *NPR*, January 26, 2015. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/01/26/381669720/u-s-led-coalition-takes-kobani-from-isis>.

²⁴ Solaker, Gulsen and Toksabay, Ece. "Turkey's Erdogan says U.S. weapons airdrop on Kobani was wrong," *Reuters*, October 22, 2014. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-erdogan-idUSKCN0IB1IX20141022>.

²⁵ Peter Baker, Helene Cooper, and David E. Sanger, "Obama Sense Special Operations Forces to Help Fight ISIS in Syria." *The New York Times*, October 30, 2015. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/31/world/obama-will-send-forces-to-syria-to-help-fight-the-islamic-state.html>.

²⁶ "Fighting ISIS: The Road to Raqqa and Beyond." *International Crisis Group*, April 28, 2017. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/east-mediterranean/syria/b053-fighting-isis-road-and-beyond-raqqa>.

In the same period, the PKK launched a major offensive against Turkey and organized multiple destructive terrorist attacks in Turkey. The increasing sophistication and frequency of the attacks were regarded as a direct result of the training and arming of the YPG groups in northern Syria. Thus, Turkey views U.S. assistance to the YPG as a serious problem for its national security.

Second, the rise of the YPG in the region and its actions against the local populations constitute a serious threat for the region as a whole. Because of its demographic dynamics, the rise of the YPG in northern Syria is particularly concerning for the stability of the region. U.S. military assistance continued after the Kobani crisis and led to an expansion of the territory of the YPG, though the YPG had a different agenda than the U.S. After the capture of these territories, YPG units launched a demographic engineering effort by forcing the local population to leave their land. This situation was widely reported by local and international human right groups, including Amnesty International.²⁷ Moreover, this policy generated huge refugee flows to Turkey.²⁸ For instance, following the capture of Tel Abyad by YPG forces, there was a huge wave of local people fleeing to Turkey to avoid the atrocities committed by these units. Turkey's fear was a threat of rising ethnic tensions in the region following YPG's actions; a conflict between local Sunni Arabs and Kurds could further destabilize the region. In addition, the YPG's expansion of its territory at the expense of the local population was leading to a belt of YPG-held territory at the border with Turkey. Considering the increasing number of terror attacks by the PKK, the control of the Turkish-Syrian border by a PKK's affiliated group constitutes a serious danger for the national security of Turkey. For Turkey, U.S. support for the YPG to defeat ISIS is seen as active support for a terrorist organization that endangers Turkey's national security.

At the height of this serious disagreement between Turkey and the U.S., Turkish authorities established their own "red lines" with regards to the actions of the YPG in the Northern Syria. An important "red line" was Turkey's absolute opposition to the YPG passing west of the Euphrates

²⁷ "Syria: US Ally's Razing of Villages Amounts to War Crimes," *Amnesty International*, October 13, 2015. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2015/10/syria-us-allys-razing-of-villages-amounts-to-war-crimes/>.

²⁸ Gutman, Roy. "Have the Syrian Kurds Committed War Crimes?," *The Nation*, February 7, 2017. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://www.thenation.com/article/have-the-syrian-kurds-committed-war-crimes/>.

River in order to bring its territories together.²⁹ Turkey was challenged when YPG units, supported by the international coalition, launched an offensive in the city of Manbij. Following the capture of Manbij, the U.S. administration promised Turkey to force the withdrawal of the YPG forces from the west of the Euphrates.³⁰ Despite the promises, this never happened. What is more, the U.S. signaled continued support and training for YPG fighters before the Raqqa operation, which resulted in a serious friction in bilateral relations.

In August of 2016, between the Manbij and Raqqa operations, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield in order to defeat ISIS along its borders and prevent the expansion of the YPG West of the Euphrates river.³¹ Along with units from the Free Syrian Army, Turkish forces took down ISIS forces in several cities, including Jarablus, al-Bab, and Dabiq. During the operation, Turkish security forces complained about not receiving sufficient support from the international coalition. The U.S. provided limited support to Turkish forces fighting against ISIS during the siege of al-Bab.³² For Turkey, the operation was a demonstration of the potential of the FSA forces if they were to receive sufficient support and assistance. Thus, before the operation in Raqqa, Turkey aimed to provide an alternative for the international coalition against ISIS. However, both the FSA as an alternative armed force and Turkey's offer to provide ground troops were neglected by the U.S. administration. In May of 2017, the U.S. began directly arming the YPG fighters in northern Syria.³³ A week before this decision was publicly announced, the Turkish air force bombed PKK

²⁹ "Turkey says it will not allow PYD to move west of Euphrates," TRTWorld, December 28, 2015. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.trtworld.com/mea/turkey-says-it-will-not-allow-pyd-to-move-west-of-euphrates-19452>.

³⁰ U.S. guarantees no PYD presence west of Euphrates after ops on ISIL: Turkish FM," Hurriyet Daily News, June 7, 2016. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-guarantees-no-pyd-presence-west-of-euphrates-after-ops-on-isil-turkish-fm.aspx?pageID=238&nID=100176&NewsCatID=510>.

³¹ Srivastava, Mehul and Solomon, Erika. "Turkish forces launch offensive in northern Syria against ISIS." *Financial Times*, August 24, 2016. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/0747004c-69c8-11e6-ae5b-a7ce5dd5a28c>.

³² Pamuk, Humeyra. "Turkey asks U.S.-led coalition for air support at Syria's al-Bab," *Reuters*, December 26, 2016. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-airforce-idUSKBN14F0KE>.

³³ Stewart, Phil. "U.S. to arm Syrian Kurds fighting Islamic State, despite Turkey's ire," *Reuters*, May 10, 2017. Accessed: June 1, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-usa-kurds-idUSKBN18525V>.

structures in northern Syria. This clearly demonstrated the extent of the tensions between the two countries over the conflict in Syria.³⁴

All of these problems demonstrated that their divergence in approach to the Syrian crisis began deeply impacting bilateral relations. Specifically, the problem has three dimensions. The first dimension is the question about the future of Syria. So far, the Trump administration has demonstrated its ability and willingness to strike Syria to deter the Assad regime from using chemical weapons, but there is still no clear policy on Syria yet. Thus, the two countries should try to find common ground in regards to the question on the future of Syria. The second dimension will be the fight against ISIS, which at this point is a priority for the U.S. The level and type of coordination between the U.S. and Turkey is not clear for the aftermath of the Raqqa operation. However, in the area of counterterrorism there is an already established framework of cooperation on issues such as the foreign terrorist fighters, border security, and terrorism financing. In this area, the two countries can improve their relations. Considering the necessity of a long-term perspective in the fight against ISIS, counterterrorism cooperation can be a positive step towards establishing a framework of cooperation in anti-ISIS operations. The third dimension of the Syrian crisis will include the disagreement between the two countries in regards to the U.S. arming and training YPG members in northern Syria. As mentioned previously, this situation generated one of the most critical period in bilateral relations. Turkey considers the approach of the U.S. in supporting one terrorist organization against another as extremely dangerous and counterproductive. Furthermore, Turkey considers the YPG to be a direct national security threat for the country. Under these circumstances, the U.S. decision to directly arm the YPG is a serious source of tension in bilateral relations. In order to prevent a total train wreck in relations, the U.S. could take some measures to reassure Turkey. These could include a roadmap of cooperation following the Raqqa operation and if possible, plans to disarm and control the YPG fighters. The importance and difficult nature of these various dimensions of the Syrian crisis demonstrate how it has become the biggest test in bilateral relations.

³⁴ Coles, Isabel and Davison, John. "Turkish jets strike Kurdish fighters in Syria, Iraq's Sinjar." *Reuters*, April 25. Accessed: June 1, 2017. 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-iraq-idUSKBN17R0D2>.

The Impact of Others: Russia, Iran, and Israel

The U.S.-Turkey relationship is largely developed in a bilateral setting and negotiations on key issues. Thus, other than in multilateral settings such as NATO, certain third countries can only indirectly affect ties between the U.S. and Turkey. One of the most apparent examples of this is the relationship with the State of Israel in the 1990s. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, a rather loose trilateral relationship was developed between Turkey, Israel, and the U.S. The trajectory of Turkish-Israeli relations during this period became important outside the variable in Turkish-American relations. Because of the problems that Turkish foreign policy was experiencing in adapting to the post-Cold War world, Ankara found it necessary to develop relations with Israel, which was expected to provide indirect support for Turkey's relations with the Western capitals. The Israel lobby in Washington, D.C. was considered an especially promising ally for Turkey in Congress and a possible facilitator of access to foreign policy-makers in D.C. Although some considered a trilateral engagement between the U.S., Turkey, and Israel to be a possible distraction from the Syria-Israel leg of the peace process in the Middle East, many welcomed a partnership between two U.S. allies in an unstable region.

In the current regional and international setting, Israel can continue to be a factor in bilateral relations between U.S. and Turkey. However, this time its role is much different than in the 1990s. Since the end of this temporary rapprochement between Turkey and Israel, Turkey and the U.S. established their relations in a more bilateral setting, with frequent summits between heads of state and other top foreign policy and security officials. Thus, Turkish foreign policymakers do not view relations with Israel with the objective of improving U.S.-Turkey relations. Instead, trilateral relations will improve in the case of an emergence of common interest among these countries. One of the most promising areas is in the development of the economy and security of the Eastern Mediterranean region. On the one hand, the large natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean will provide potential ground for cooperation and energy security for both Israel and Turkey and thus contribute to their economies. However, in addition to a Turkish-Israeli agreement, the problem between Turkey and Cyprus also needs to be resolved in order for all the countries in the region to benefit from this resource. The U.S. can play a key role in this endeavor both in terms of contributing to the energy agreement between Turkey and Israel, and in helping resolve the crisis in Cyprus.

The presence of the U.S. will also support the security dimension of such an agreement. Considering the rising instability in the Levant, (especially Syria's deterioration into a failed state), it will be important for all three countries to develop some form of cooperation and at least a working relationship in the region. Cooperation among these states will be particularly important to address the threat of terrorism in the region and different terrorist groups active there. Of course, this will be far from a comprehensive pact, considering the divergent interests and foreign policy priorities of these countries. The differing opinions about the conflict between Israel and Palestine can be the main destabilizer of such an engagement.

Another country that could have an impact on bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Turkey is Russia. The relations of both the U.S. and Turkey with Russia have been complicated. The Obama administration's so-called "reset" policy with Russia failed almost immediately. Since then, the two countries have been at odds over both the Syrian and the Ukrainian crisis. With the Edward Snowden issue and cyber-attack allegations, the state of the relationship has deteriorated in the last few years; reports about Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections further strained ties. Even though the Trump administration had initially planned to mend ties with Russia, due to domestic pressure it seems highly unlikely that the administration will reach this goal. On the other hand, Turkey has experienced sharp ruptures in relations with the Russian Federation.

Until recently, economic and social relations between Turkey and Russia have been among their best in history. Despite disagreements on issues in Syria and Ukraine, Turkey and Russia avoided engaging in political disputes and continued political dialogue while increasing their trade volume. This continued until the shooting down of a Russian jet by the Turkish military in November 2015. In the aftermath of this incident, relations dramatically deteriorated. The two countries ceased political dialogue and the Russian government began economic sanctions against various Turkish commodities.³⁵ The crisis was resolved within several months, and a period of normalization followed.³⁶ The fast improvement of relations between

³⁵ Jenkins, Lin. "Vladimir Putin announces Russian sanctions against Turkey." *The Guardian*, November 28, 2015. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/28/vladimir-putin-calls-for-greater-sanctions-against-turkey>.

³⁶ Hume, Tim. "Turkey's Erdogan, Russia's Putin reset relationship after jet shoot down." *CNN*, August 9, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/09/world/turkey-russia-erdogan-putin-meeting/>.

Turkey and Russia raised concerns among certain analysts in Washington, D.C., and the increasing level of diplomatic coordination and cooperation between the two states over the civil war in Syria raised some eyebrows. The Astana Summit in particular, (despite a diplomatic message from the U.S. welcoming all efforts for peace in Syria), was regarded as a sign of a possible Turko-Russia alignment. In addition, one of the most significant issues with direct impact on U.S.-Turkey relations is the debate about Turkey's purchase of S-400 missile systems. Turkey explained that the decision to buy missile defense systems from Russia was due to the unwillingness of U.S.-based companies to share technology with Turkey.³⁷ Critics argue that the purchasing of Russian missiles could lead to a shift of axis in Turkish foreign policy and generate problems in the NATO alliance. The unpredictability of the U.S. position on Russia further complicates the situation. Thus, the improvement of defense cooperation between Russia and Turkey may lead to further tension in bilateral relations between the U.S. and Turkey.

Finally, the U.S. policy on Iran could also have an impact on U.S.-Turkey relations. Even during his campaign, Donald Trump focused on Iran's policies in the Middle East. Although Trump's hardline attitude about the Iranian nuclear deal has softened since the election, the new administration is still hawkish about Iran's influence in the region. In his first visit abroad, which included Saudi Arabia and Israel, President Trump recognized the threat that the Iranian regime poses to the region.³⁸ Turkey, on the other hand, has developed a rather cautious attitude towards the Iranian role in the region. Although Turkey has strong economic ties with the state of Iran, it has expressed its dissatisfaction with Iran's destabilizing role in the region, especially considering its increasing role in the Syrian conflict.³⁹ Recently, Turkey's tone of disapproval increased with the rising aggressiveness of Iranian proxies in the region. Under these circumstances, both Turkey and the U.S. can curb the destabilizing influence of Iran in the region. However, the two nations need to fine-tune their approach

³⁷ Karadeniz, Tulay. "Turkey at 'final stage' with Russia over S-400 missile system: Defense minister," *Reuters*, April 21, 2017. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-defence-russia-idUSKBN17N0RE>.

³⁸ "Transcript of Trump's speech in Saudi Arabia," *CNN*, May 21, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/politics/trump-saudi-speech-transcript/>, Accessed: June 2, 2017.

³⁹ "Iran summons Turkish envoy over comments by president, foreign minister," *Reuters*, February 20, 2017. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-turkey-diplomacy-idUSKBN15Z1ZC?il=0>.

against Iran. Although Turkey is protesting Iran's policies in the region, it is not entirely on the same page as Israel and Saudi Arabia in their perception of this threat. Thus, a possible cooperation between Turkey and the U.S. against a growing Iranian influence in the region needs to include sensitivity to these differences and priorities. Any action that would further destabilize the region needs to be avoided, and the countries should instead opt for more deterrent policies to handle this issue.

The Coup and Gülen case

There are several other issue areas that need to be resolved, revived, or improved in order to develop a stable partnership between the United States and Turkey. A better dialogue and a more multi-layered diplomacy will be necessary in order to deal with these issues. Among those, one of the most complicated is the extradition of Fethullah Gülen to Turkey, which Turkey has been seeking for the past several years.⁴⁰ Shortly after the December 17, 2013 crisis, Turkey came to consider the Gülen movement a national security threat. For the Turkish security establishment, it became clear that the infiltration of the Gülenist network through a broad range of state institutions generated a major security risk. Following December 17, Turkey asked the U.S. on multiple occasions to curb the Gülen group in the United States and deport Fethullah Gülen from the U.S., where he currently resides.⁴¹ Nevertheless, U.S. authorities neglected these demands. Following further revelations of the influence of the group in the national security apparatus of Turkey, the group was declared a national security threat by the Turkish National Security Council, and was identified as a terrorist organization.⁴²

After the July 15 coup attempt, Turkey demanded the extradition of Gülen to Turkey and the halt of the group's activities in the United States.⁴³

⁴⁰ "Turkey seeks U.S.-based cleric's extradition but not for coup: State Dept.," *Reuters*, August 23, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-gulen-idUSKCN10Y24S>.

⁴¹ Solaker, Gulsen. "Turkey's Erdogan calls on U.S. to extradite rival Gulen," *Reuters*, April 29, 2014. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-erdogan-idUSBREA3S0A120140429>.

⁴² "Turkey officially designates Gulen religious group as terrorists," *Reuters*, May 31, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-gulen-idUSKCN0YM167>.

⁴³ Dewan, Angela. "Turkey formally requests extradition of cleric from U.S. as purge widens," *CNN*, July 19, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/19/turkey/failed-coup-attempt/index.html>.

A poll administered by Andy-Ar in Turkey in the immediate aftermath of the coup demonstrated that a large segment of the Turkish society - around 80 percent of respondents - desired Gülen's extradition, and believed that Gülenists constituted an existential threat to Turkey.⁴⁴ Moreover, it was announced on several platforms that 95 percent of the Turkish public found Gülen responsible for orchestrating the coup.⁴⁵ In Turkey, the U.S. administration was heavily criticized for its reaction to the coup attempt. In particular, the first statement by then-Secretary of State John Kerry, in which he underlined the need for continuity and stability in foreign policy, created a perception in Turkey of U.S. support for those responsible for the coup.⁴⁶ Although a following statement emphasized the support for the democratically elected government, this time the statement did not mention the word "coup," which many Turks interpreted as a "wait-and-see" policy.⁴⁷ Of course, this perception in Turkish public opinion has much to do with U.S. support for previous coups elsewhere. The unwillingness of the U.S. administration to use the "c" word to describe the coup in Egypt in 2013 and later statements that legitimized the coup in Egypt further contributed to this perception. Taking this into account, a negative perception of the U.S. emerged in Turkey.⁴⁸

Shortly after the coup attempt, Turkey sent multiple officials to Washington, D.C. in an effort to formally request the extradition of Gülen. Following the beginning of the process between officials of the Turkish and U.S. Justice Department, Turkey also raised the issue of limiting the activities of Gülen against Turkey.⁴⁹ However, Turkey's demands have not

⁴⁴ "Turks believe cleric Gulen was behind coup attempt: survey," *Reuters*, July 26, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-survey-idUSKCN1060P1>.

⁴⁵ Demirtas, Serkan. "95 percent of Turkish people believe Gulen behind coup: Energy Minister," *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 28, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/95-percent-of-turkish-people-believe-gulen-behind-coup-energy-minister.aspx?pageID=238&nID=102159&NewsCatID=338>.

⁴⁶ "Kerry says hopes for peace and stability in Turkey," *Reuters*, July 15, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-russia-idUSKCN0ZV2NQ>.

⁴⁷ "Readout of the President's Call with Secretary John Kerry," *The White House*, July 15, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/15/readout-presidents-call-secretary-john-kerry>.

⁴⁸ Arango, Tim and Yeginsu, Ceylan. "Turks Can Agree on One Thing: U.S. Was Behind Failed Coup." *The New York Times*, August 2, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/03/world/europe/turkey-coup-erdogan-fethullah-gulen-united-states.html?mcubz=1>.

⁴⁹ Srivastava, Mehul. "Turkey demands extradition of US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen," *Financial Times*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/7287c982-4da2-11e6-88c5-db83e98a590a>, Accessed: June 2, 2017.

been met so far. Considering the reaction to the coup attempt and the widespread belief among Turkish society about the responsibility of the Gülenist group for the coup, the Turkish public remains aggravated. In a recent meeting between President Erdoğan and President Trump, this issue was again brought to the agenda.⁵⁰ President Erdoğan expressed the Turkish government's frustrations on this issue by stating that "According to the [1981] extradition treaty with the U.S., we'd expect Gülen to be detained, however he still roams freely."⁵¹ Until more steps are taken, this issue will continue to increase tensions between Turkey and the U.S.

Conclusion

As discussed in this chapter, U.S.-Turkey relations entered one of the most complicated periods of their history. There are issues related to the structure of the international system as well as the regional transformation in the Middle East. The role of the United States and its approach to its traditional allies has impacted U.S. relations with Turkey as well. In the absence of setting clear expectations from its allies, the U.S. will continue to experience problems with its alliances. Regional transformation and conflicts in the Middle East have influenced U.S. relations with Turkey, and as a result, the two countries have difficulty aligning their foreign policy approaches. The U.S. and Turkey diverged in their perspective on the conflict in Syria and the coup in Egypt. Especially in Syria, their differences led to a serious disjuncture in bilateral relations. The YPG and its *de facto* designation as a U.S. proxy force against ISIS strained relations between the two countries. The U.S. decision to directly arm the YPG will certainly have further implications for bilateral ties. Finally, Gülen's status will likely have a strenuous impact on the relationship.

Despite the above-mentioned issues, there are still areas where the two countries can strengthen their alliance and partnership. The increasing instability and conflict in the Middle East makes Turkey an important factor in the future of the region. In order to curb the failed and fragile states of the region from exporting insecurity to the international system, a more

⁵⁰ Dewan, Angela. "Erdoğan meets Trump: 3 key issues topping the agenda," *CNN*, May 16, 2017. Accessed: June 2, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/16/politics/erdogan-trump-turkey-us-meeting/index.html>.

⁵¹ Daily Sabah, August 24, 2016. Accessed: June 2, 2017. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/dailysabah/status/768505364987936769>.

comprehensive security partnership between Turkey and the U.S. will be needed. The U.S. defense industry's responses to Turkey's need to improve its defense capabilities will be a key aspect. The Turkish-American partnership will play an important role in the fight against terrorism. In addition, as mentioned above, the partnership will be vital in curbing destabilizing actions from other countries in the region. For many years, economic cooperation has been the weakest link in bilateral relations. Although the two countries have repeatedly vowed to improve their economic ties, thus far they have not been successful. An improvement in economic relations, which would include cooperation in energy development, would provide important opportunities for the strengthening of bilateral ties, and help contain potential crises.