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A New Status Quo: The West's Transactional Relationship with Turkey

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Contents

The rise and fall of the relationship	4
Finding the right balance in managing the “Turkey Issue”	7
High vs low: human rights and Western transactionalism	11
The new reality: options for the future	13

A New Status Quo: The West's Transactional Relationship with Turkey

The rise and fall of the relationship

The United States and the Republic of Turkey have been Treaty allies since 1952 and shared antipathy of the Soviet Union bound the two countries together during the Cold War. Historically, Washington has prioritized its security relationship with Ankara and relied upon the European Union to advocate more forcefully for Turkish democratization and to respect human rights. The Biden administration has flipped that paradigm and, as relations with Turkey have crumbled over the past decade, has sought to change how Washington deals with Ankara. This article explores the current state of U.S-Turkish relations, areas of divergence and convergence, the role of Europe, and how best to adapt to the mutual embrace of a transactional relationship. The Biden administration's policy has upended Turkish assumptions about the relationship with the United States and undermined key points of leverage Ankara would use to wrest concessions from previous U.S. administrations. This approach has opened a pathway for the United States to work more closely with the European Union (EU) on issues like human rights and democratization, without worrying too much about the second-order challenges any such policy could pose to U.S. security interests.

The United States and Europe do have different relationships with Turkey, given the realities of geography, trade, migration, and security considerations. Yet, despite these divergences, both Washington and Brussels have sought to cooperate with Turkey where possible, but have also signaled that Ankara's embrace of authoritarian governance and the decline of the rule of law complicates relations. This new status quo, while rife with nuance and caveats, has locked both sides of the Atlantic into a new, more transactional policy towards Turkey.

After the collapse of the USSR, Washington and Turkey have struggled to define the reasons for the alliance and, since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, have diverged. The bilateral relationship was placed under further strain after the start of the Syrian civil war, and the American decision to partner with the Syrian Kurds to fight the Islamic State. The main American partner force, the Peoples' Protection Units (YPG), is the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) Syrian affiliate. The PKK is a designated terrorist group that has fought an insurgency inside Turkey since 1984. The Syrian civil war also destabilized Turkey and

battles between the YPG and the self-declared Islamic State (IS) spilled over the border, leading to unrest in Turkey's southeast and a breakdown in a tenuous peace process and ceasefire that the Turkish government and the PKK had agreed to in 2013.¹ The collapse of the ceasefire has coincided with a sharp rise in nationalist politics in Turkey and a severe decline in the government's adherence to the rule of law and respect for basic human rights.

The breakdown of human rights inside Turkey and the clear bilateral fissure over security interests have raised a series of questions in Washington about the so-called "Turkey issue". These questions revolve around how to engage with Turkey in a way that does not benefit Washington's adversaries, but also does not reward Turkey for provocative behavior and actions that undermine U.S. and European security. These concerns have grown more acute since Turkish-Russian cooperation increased in Syria and, stemming from that increased leader-to-leader engagement, Ankara and Moscow reached agreement on the sale of the S-400 missile system.² Turkey's decision to deepen cooperation with Moscow coincided with renewed Western concerns about Russian foreign policy following the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbass in 2014, and its intervention in Syria in September 2015. Turkey and Russia are not allies. The two countries back different actors in Syria, as well as in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, where both Moscow and Ankara have deployed troops. However, Moscow and Ankara have managed to compartmentalize their relationship and maintain high-level dialogue, despite obvious disagreement about regional events.

This cooperative relationship stems from the close relationship Presidents Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin have created since tensions spiked in November 2015, following Turkey's shutdown of a Russian bomber on the Turkish-Syrian border. Following Ankara's June 2016 apology, Presidents Putin and Erdogan have created a top-down diplomatic mechanism, whereby the two leaders will often speak directly to defuse tensions and manage disagreement. Ankara has sought to leverage its relationship with Moscow to its advantage and, at times, to play the United States off against the Russian Federation to win favorable concessions from both countries.

Turkey has sought to use its outreach to Moscow to its diplomatic advantage and to attempt to play the U.S. and Russia off against one another. This strategy has not always led to ideal outcomes for Ankara. Turkey's purchase of the S-400, for example, has led the United States to remove Turkey from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program and to impose sanctions on Turkey's military procurement ministry, the Savunma Sanayi Baskanligi

1 Constanze Letsch, "Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan declares ceasefire with Turkey," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/21/pkk-leader-ocalan-declares-ceasefire>.

2 Aaron Stein, "The Missile that could end the U.S.-Turkish Relationship," *War on the Rocks*, March 12, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/03/the-russian-missile-that-could-end-the-u-s-turkish-alliance/>

(SSB).³ Ankara has managed to use the threat of further deepening relations with Russia to sow doubt in Washington and Brussels about the efficacy of coercive action and whether sanctions could prompt Turkey to further rely on Russia.

In tandem, Turkey has also sought to coerce the west and upend the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴ The Turkish government used its military and political support for the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding that established a maritime border equidistant from each country's coast in the Mediterranean Sea.⁵ The agreement encroached on Greek and Cypriot territorial claims in Crete and Cyprus. The Memorandum of Understanding has galvanized intra-European military bandwagoning to deter Turkish actions between Greece, Cyprus, and France and kicked off a debate about the best mechanism to handle the Turkey problem. These same countries have advocated for the EU to use financial sanctions to punish Turkey for its maritime actions. A second bloc of countries, led by Germany, has argued against such action, citing the need to co-opt Turkish leaders through sustained engagement, but signaling that sanctions could be imposed if Turkey resumes destabilizing actions in the Eastern Mediterranean, or the human rights situation in Turkey deteriorates further.⁶ This debate continues, in parallel with the American decision to sanction Turkey for the S-400 purchase and to remove Ankara from the F-35 consortium.

Turkish policy has remained remarkably consistent throughout all these intra-European and American debates about how to engage with Ankara. The AKP does, however, modulate its actions in support of its foreign policy goals, a tactic that allows for Ankara to play each camp off against the other to blunt the full effect of coercive actions. In the Mediterranean, for example, Turkey has halted its seismic exploration efforts in contested waters, but insists that its MoU with the GNA remains in force. Ankara has signaled to the Biden Administration that it would like to reset badly frayed relations, but has maintained that it will retain the S-400 and will deploy it if threatened. To resolve the issue, Ankara insists on a technical working group that side-steps the system's risk to the S-400 and the defense relationship Turkey is now enmeshed in with the Russian Federation. The fundamental issues that divide Turkey from its western allies, therefore, remain unresolved.

3 Lara Jakes, "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Turkey Over 2017 Purchase of Russian Missile Defenses," *The New York Times*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/14/us/politics/trump-turkey-missile-defense-sanctions.html>.

4 See: "The East Mediterranean and Regional Security: A Transatlantic Dialogue," Foreign Policy Research Institute and the Heinrich Boll Foundation, December 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/research/nationalsecurity/the-east-mediterranean-and-regional-security-a-transatlantic-dialogue/>.

5 Daren Butler and Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Turkey signs maritime boundaries deal with Libya amid exploration row," *Reuters*, November 28, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya/turkey-signs-maritime-boundaries-deal-with-libya-amid-exploration-row-idUSKBN1Y213I>.

6 Sabine Siebold, "EU sanctions remain on the table, Germany warns Turkey ahead of EU summit," *Reuters*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-foreign-turkey-maas/eu-sanctions-remain-on-the-table-germany-warns-turkey-ahead-of-eu-summit-idUSKBN2BE11L>.

However, Ankara's softening tone has exacerbated splits amongst these countries, leading to a decrease in pressure on Turkey and a return to dialogue to manage tensions.

Finding the right balance in managing the "Turkey Issue"

The United States and the EU each have a strategic relationship with Ankara, albeit in different ways. For Washington, Ankara's importance is linked to its geography and U.S. access to bases in Turkey to project power in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. For Brussels, the relationship is much more multifaceted, and revolves around Ankara's accession process with the EU, the large Turkish diaspora in different European countries, and the close economic relationship. After the start of the Syrian civil war, the EU-Turkish relationship has also been consumed by the issue of migration, and efforts to prevent the mass movement of people from Syria via Turkey to the EU.⁷ The differences in how the United States and the EU interact with Turkey has been mutually beneficial for the Atlantic allies.

Brussels free rides on the back of the American security guarantee to Ankara and can hide behind Washington on issues of defense. The S-400 dispute is one such example. The F-35 fighter is slated to be the backbone of European airpower for the next few decades. Turkey had intended to join its NATO allies in operating the jet. However, its purchase of the S-400 threatened to undermine information security about the jet and give Russia advantages that it would not have had, had a NATO member not purchased a system that could collect intelligence about the jet.⁸ However, rather than European F-35 members to take up the issue with Ankara, each operator benefitted from the United States taking the lead in trying to end Turkish cooperation with Russia and, then, placing sanctions on Turkish entities.

Ankara, in turn, has sought to play Washington and Brussels off against each other, traditionally relying on the United States to be an advocate for Turkey within the EU and to prioritize national security ties during times of tension with Brussels over human rights.

⁷ Berkay Mandiraci, "Sharing the Burden: Revisiting the EU-Turkey Migration Deal," International Crisis Group, March 13, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/sharing-burden-revisiting-eu-turkey-migration-deal>.

⁸ Kyle Rempfer, "Here's how F-35 technology would be compromised if Turkey also had the S-400 anti-aircraft system," *Air Force Times*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/05/heres-how-f-35-technology-would-be-compromised-if-turkey-also-had-the-s-400-anti-aircraft-system/>.

Similarly, Ankara has sought to split the bloc between its different constituencies and, during times of tension with Washington over security issues, to split Washington and Brussels by pushing for closer cooperation with the EU.

In 2019, Ankara pursued this strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Trump administration sought to appease Turkey because national security elites viewed Turkish antipathy towards Washington as directly linked to U.S. decision-making in Syria and the decision to partner with the Syrian Kurds. Ankara's legitimate concerns about the YPG, some in Washington argue, has driven Turkey to partner more closely with Russia and to adopt a more militant foreign policy, including in the Eastern Mediterranean. This reasoning explained Ankara's decision to explore for natural gas in Cypriot waters and for the country's national security elites to feel as if the Western powers were conspiring against them to undermine the country's interests. Thus, the best way to deal with Ankara was to try and reach agreement over the Syrian issue and to tightly bind Ankara into a shared security framework, as a means to coax Turkish elites to disentangle itself from Russia. The use of sanctions, as mandated by CAATSA, a U.S. law passed in August 2017. The law imposed sanctions on Russia for its meddling in the 2016 U.S. election and outlined a set of secondary sanctions for countries that agreed to a "significant transaction" with Russian entities linked to the Ministry of Defense or Interior.⁹ The law was never intended to sanction Turkey, but Ankara tripped the secondary sanction threshold when it purchased the S-400 because the manufacturer has links to the Russian Ministry of Defense. The Trump administration viewed the law as a challenge to the president's constitutional authority¹⁰ and resisted sanctioning Turkey. Instead, Trump and key congressional allies tried to reach a *modus vivendi* with Turkey on the missiles to forego the use of economic pressure.¹¹

The EU, in contrast, was divided over how best to handle the Turkish actions and, ultimately, adopted sanctions against Turkish individuals linked to the country's oil and gas sector.¹² At the same time, Washington was debating the imposition of CAATSA sanctions because Turkey had tested¹³ the S-400 missile, defying a gentleman's agreement to keep the system

9 U.S. Congress, H.R.3364 - Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, 115th Congress, August 2, 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3364>.

10 Peter Baker and Sophia Kishkovsky, "Trump Signs Russian Sanctions Into Law, With Caveats," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/world/europe/trump-russia-sanctions.html>.

11 Katie Bo Williams, "Graham: I Told Turkey They Can Avoid Sanctions If They Don't Activate Russian Radar," *Defense One*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2019/07/graham-trump-asked-me-call-turkey-s-400-deal/158706/>.

12 Patrick Wintour, "EU leaders approve sanctions on Turkish officials over gas drilling," *The Guardian*, 11 December 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/11/eu-leaders-sanctions-turkey-gas-drilling>.

13 "Turkey reportedly test-fires S-400 air defense system," *Associated Press*, 16 October 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/training-sim/2020/10/16/turkey-reportedly-test-fires-s-400-air-defense-system/>.

in storage to avoid the imposition of any U.S. sanctions.¹⁴ As it would turn out, Turkey was unable to strike the right balance and, in December 2020, it was sanctioned by both the EU and the United States.¹⁵ The sanctions came during a period of economic upheaval in Turkey, owing to President Erdogan's sustained economic mis-management. The collapse of the Turkish economy prompted a shift in Turkish foreign policy. This shift stemmed from a series of updated Turkish assumptions about its national interests. The first was Ankara's inability to prevent both the EU and the United States from imposing sanctions for the S-400 purchase and actions in the Eastern Mediterranean. The second stemmed from Turkey's understanding that the incoming Biden administration was certain to prioritize human rights and democracy, and therefore be less amenable to cooperation with Ankara. The third, and perhaps most salient factor, was that Turkey's actions had reached a point of diminished returns. The costs of Ankara's actions, both for diplomatic prestige and for the country's beleaguered economy, outweighed any notional geopolitical benefit that Ankara believed it had achieved.

Ankara's change in policy resulted in the so-called "Turkish charm offensive," which led to a halt in Turkish seismic operations in the Eastern Mediterranean, a more pleasant tone in bilateral meetings with EU officials, and real changes made to Turkish positions inside NATO.¹⁶ Turkey's relations with the EU have stabilized and discussions about further sanctions have ceased, and dialogue has resumed. Inside NATO, Ankara agreed with Greece on a deconfliction mechanism to prevent incidents at sea, and has expressed support for dialogue about maritime issues.¹⁷ The chasm between Turkey and Greece remains wide, but the resumption of dialogue and the deconfliction protocols have eased tensions and shifted discussions within the EU about how to support this constructive atmosphere.

The Biden administration has adopted a different course of action. From the outset of his election, President Biden has held back from engaging with Turkey directly, and has left bilateral dialogue to the National Security Advisor, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense. The Biden administration's goals in pursuing this strategy are twofold. First, the U.S.-Turkish relationship had become dependent on leader-to-leader diplomacy, beginning with President Bush and continuing ever since. These phone calls would often come after months of difficult, bureaucratic led negotiations over issues ranging from air and missile defense to the S-400 to Syria policy. The Turkish government had grown accustomed to

14 Katie Bo Williams, "Graham: I Told Turkey They Can Avoid Sanctions If They Don't Activate Russian Radar," *Defense One*, 25 July 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2019/07/graham-trump-asked-me-call-turkey-s-400-deal/158706/>.

15 Lara Jakes, "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Turkey Over 2017 Purchase of Russian Missile Defenses," *The New York Times*, 14 December 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/14/us/politics/trump-turkey-missile-defense-sanctions.html>.

16 Author Interview with European Security Official, April 2021.

17 "Military de-confliction mechanism between Greece and Turkey established at NATO," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, October 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_178523.htm.

using this process to pressure the United States. In public, Erdogan would increase his hostile rhetoric, threatening to upend U.S. goals. As tensions would increase, the Turks would then quietly request a phone call, where Erdogan would then off the U.S. an off-ramp, which would often lead to inconclusive working group talks, and then starting the process all over again.

The second goal is linked to the broader theme of the Biden administration's foreign policy. After four-years of chaotic governance in Washington, the Biden team has sought to promote democratic virtues abroad, arguing that the battle for 21st century influence revolves around a competition between the democratic and authoritarian model of governance. As Turkey has devolved from flawed democracy to majoritarian rule, the trajectory of the country's governance model has run afoul of the renewed focus on the need to support democratic norms. The tensions with Turkey have also caused a significant discussion in Washington about the nature of the alliance (the same is true in Ankara) and the sharp disagreements over Syria and the S-400 purchase have led many to downgrade Ankara's importance to core U.S. security interests around the world. These twin factors -- renewed focus on democratic governance and the acceptance that Ankara is less relevant for U.S. security interests -- have allowed for the Biden administration to adopt a very transactional policy towards Ankara.

On human rights, the first such example of this new reality was President Biden's decision to recognize the Armenian Genocide.¹⁸ The history about this issue is not really in doubt, but many American presidents have withheld using the term genocide for fear of "losing Turkey" and undermining U.S security interests, including the loss of basing access in Turkey or risk Ankara undermining U.S. interests in NATO. The Biden team made the decision at the outset of its Turkey review to recognize the genocide; a decision that was made easier by the tensions in the bilateral relationship. The Biden administration had also assumed that Ankara is not willing to risk its own relationship with Washington. Thus, any harsh Turkish reaction would be limited to rhetoric, rather than any major disruption to the bilateral relationship.

Turkey's unilateral actions in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean have demonstrated how Washington can "work around" Turkey, rather than depend on Ankara for regional operations. Instead, access to Turkey for non-NATO security contingencies, such as Operation Inherent Resolve to defeat Islamic State is considered a luxury, but not absolutely vital. This reality has naturally segmented the American-Turkish security relationship. For NATO operations, the United States retains basing access to Incirlik Air Force base, as well as other Turkish air bases, and seeks to integrate Turkey into planning for shared defense.¹⁹

18 Grace Segers, "Biden recognizes mass killing of Armenians as genocide," *CBS News*, April 25, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/biden-recognizes-massacre-armenians-genocide/>.

19 "Government Accountability Office, "The Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement: U.S. Interests and Turkish Needs," May 7, 1982, <https://www.gao.gov/products/id-82-31>.

For non-NATO missions, where Turkish parliamentary approval is needed to authorize non-Turkish operations, the United States has built-up a myriad of options to work around Turkey. The other reality is that with the winding down of both Operation Inherent Resolve in Syria and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, operations from Incirlik Air Force base are likely to slow down. This airbase hosted coalition assets for the war against Islamic State and was a transit point for U.S. troops ferrying to and from Afghanistan. Absent these operations, the amount of U.S. forces at the base are likely to decrease and the base will be less active.

High vs low: human rights and Western transactionalism

The divergence in security interests between the United States and Turkey has flipped the discussion in Washington about how best to manage relations with Ankara. Traditionally, Washington relies on two tracks to address human rights issues in Turkey, dubbed the high-low model. This model compartmentalizes high-level security ties and places them in a bubble, and then attaches to these talks an aspirational tone that signals a desire to bolster the alliance and to encourage Turkish democratization.

The Trump administration, however, pursued a different approach. President Trump prioritized the economic relationship with Turkey and was committed, however naively, to improving the perpetual trade deficit with Ankara. For this reason, he was wedded to efforts to finalize the long-stalled Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, as a means to increase U.S. access to the Turkish market. President Trump was also eager to sell Turkey the F-35 fighter, not ever truly grasping that Ankara was a member of the broader consortium that produced the aircraft. For this reason, Trump sought to protect the aircraft agreement from congressional pressure, resisting calls to sanction Turkey under CAATSA and trying to insulate arms purchases from the broader deterioration in the bilateral relationship.²⁰

The decline in bilateral relations, combined with Biden's identification of human rights as an important foreign policy issue, has changed this dynamic. The U.S.-Turkish relationship is no longer aspirational; instead it is far more transactional and centered around interests. This change has allowed for the Biden team to be more bold in its criticism of Turkey for human rights concerns, which is more closely aligned with the views in Brussels.

20 Jeff Mason and Phil Stewart, "Trump says 'not fair' that U.S. can't sell F-35s to Turkey," Reuters, July 16, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-turkey-trump/trump-says-not-fair-that-u-s-cant-sell-f-35s-to-turkey-idUSKCN1UB27J>.

The “high-low” strategy is dependent on the work of non-governmental organizations that are focused on human rights and democracy, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These groups produce annual reports on the human rights situation in Turkey, giving the State Department the means to amplify their findings and to underscore concerns about obvious declines in democratic governance. This strategy is also paired with the State Department’s own report on human rights, which is released annually.²¹ This “name and shame” approach may not yield concrete outcomes in Turkey, but they do place Ankara on the same rhetorical level as other serial human rights abusers and does not allow Turkey’s NATO membership to protect it from western criticism.

The other component to this is that Turkey’s accession to the EU has stalled. While both Ankara and Brussels maintain the fiction that Turkish membership in the EU remains an important policy goal, both sides understand that it is unlikely to happen. Both Washington and Brussels now consult more closely on Turkey policy and are *de-facto* aligned on a purely transactional policy with Turkey, wherein sanctions will be imposed in response to Turkish actions. Nevertheless, the preference is for compartmentalizing the relationship and finding areas to cooperate.²² The United States and Europe do have a different type of bilateral relationship with Ankara. The EU is far more multifaceted, revolving around deep trade ties, a shared border, and a large Turkish diaspora population inside the bloc. The United States, in contrast, is still moored to a policy built around security interests. These differences help explain why the EU and the United States do not have the same subset of interests that drive bilateral interaction. However, both sides of the Atlantic are now more closely allied on a top line policy of pursuing a nakedly transactional foreign policy with Ankara that does not rule out cooperation on areas of strategic interest with Turkey, but that also signals negative consequences if Ankara returns to a destabilizing foreign policy.

This new reality allows for a shift in American policy making vis-a-vis Turkey and enables Washington to focus more on human rights and Ankara’s authoritarian governance. The most useful way to pursue such a policy is to continue with the “name and shame” approach and use tools at the disposal of the State Department and the White House to continue to chastise Ankara for its illiberal rule. This approach should be synchronized with actions in Brussels, but be cognizant that the approaches may not always align. However, at the macro-level, both Washington and Brussels now seek to compartmentalize the relationship, offering to cooperate on issues like migration and on shared security concerns, but not holding back on criticizing Ankara for illiberal governance. For example, U.S. officials have criticized Turkey for bombing a refugee camp in Iraq (which the Turkish govern-

21 U.S. Department of State, “2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,” March 30, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>

22 Michael Peel and Laura Pitel, “EU plans new sanctions on Turkey over Mediterranean dispute,” *Financial Times*, December 9, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/9edf14e1-db2e-4cba-845d-ef11a6f5d680>.

ment claims is PKK safe haven)²³, while also engaging with Ankara on security concerns in Afghanistan.²⁴

The new reality: options for the future

The transactional policy is the most logical way to grapple with the challenges Turkish foreign policy poses to the Western alliance. The trajectory of Turkish decision-making suggests that Ankara is likely to continue to use foreign policy as a tool to try and extract concessions from its Western allies. This approach does not preclude pursuing a charm offensive where prudent, but also holds back the ability to turn up the heat again if Turkish elites decide it is in their best interest. In the Eastern Mediterranean, for example, Ankara has not made any concessions (nor has Greece), and its only agreement is a non-binding deconfliction mechanism that does not actually restrict Turkish action. Instead, Turkey decided to refrain from seismic exploration, in return for the EU foregoing sanctions. On the one hand, sanctions are designed to be lifted, in exchange for a change in policy, and so this course of action is a diplomatic win for Brussels. However, the change in Turkish actions does not actually represent compromise on its core demands, and therefore Turkey has the option to escalate again if its leadership decides that the risk of sanctions is less than the benefits of coercive action. This decision will get easier for Turkey if its own economic situation improves, but if there is a further deterioration in the national economy, perhaps the status quo will continue.

For the United States, a transactional foreign policy does not seriously alter its regional security planning. The downturn in relations with Ankara has not resulted in Turkey altering its basing arrangements with Washington. For NATO operations, the U.S. continues to have basing and overflight access to Turkish airbases and airspace. The tensions over access are linked to non-NATO contingencies, such as the recent U.S. led war against IS in Syria. To compensate for Turkish hesitancy to bandwagon with Washington on non-NATO operations, the United States has other bases in the region it could utilize, such as in the Gulf Arab countries, Jordan, and potential use of the British airbase in Cyprus. These op-

23 Selcan Hacaoglu, "Turkish Attack Near Iraqi Refugee Camp Brings U.S. Rebuke," *Bloomberg*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-07/turkish-attack-near-iraqi-refugee-camp-brings-u-s-rebuke>.

24 Orhan Coskun and Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Turkey offers to run Kabul airport after NATO's Afghan withdrawal -officials," *Reuters*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/turkey-offers-run-kabul-airport-after-natos-afghan-withdrawal-officials-2021-06-08/>.

tions suggest that the United States can continue to be more forward leaning and emphasize human rights, as a core principle in ties with Turkey, without being overly concerned with U.S. security issues.

Moving forward, the United States and the EU share an interest in closing the gap that once existed between them and focus more on a coordinated effort to pressure Turkey to improve its human rights record. As a prerequisite to improved relations, both Washington and Brussels should insist on Turkey freeing political prisoners, abiding by rulings from the European Court of Human rights, and improving the rule of law. The United States Congress has, just this past year, renewed legislative efforts to use more domestic U.S. laws to sanction Turkey if the human rights situation there does not improve. This effort would use Global Magnitsky sanctions to punish Ankara, but it is unclear if there is support for such action in the Biden administration. However, there have been efforts in Congress to pass stand-alone sanctions on Ankara for its violation of human rights, but it is unclear if Congress is truly interested in taking up these isolated human rights bills in committee and to pass them on to a floor vote, or even to include them in omnibus legislation like appropriation bills.

The sanctions tool could be an effective way to pressure Ankara and would be more effective if similar action was proposed in Brussels. However, as with all sanctions, the goal should be to create clear benchmarks to forgo their use in the first place, and if used, then to have clear guidelines to lift them. The goal should never be to use sanctions at all, but instead to use the threat of economic harm to change the risk calculus in the targeted state.

To make transactionalism more effective, the United States needs to accept that its basing access for NATO operations is unlikely to be seriously affected by bilateral tensions. Ankara has tools it can use against the United States, should it decide to punish Washington for policies Turkish elites deem as hostile. Ankara can force U.S. personnel to leave the country, or revoke permissions for certain operations. However, the core function of the U.S.-Turkish alliance is wrapped up in the two countries' membership in NATO. Thus, if Ankara were to push all U.S. forces out, it would be forcing out U.S. personnel that are deployed in Turkey to support a NATO mission. This action would be tantamount to altering Ankara's status within the Alliance, which Turkish elites still view as important for Turkish security.²⁵

To offset any bilateral disruptions to U.S. security interests, the United States has an interest in further developing infrastructure and basing agreements in other NATO countries, so that Turkey cannot use its territory to try and coerce Washington to compromise on its own interests. The most obvious examples for alternative basing arrangements would

25 Fahrettin Altun, "Turkey's vision for NATO in an era of global challenges," *Al Jazeera English*, June 13, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/6/13/turkeys-vision-for-nato-in-an-era-of-global-challenges>.

be in Eastern Europe or the Eastern Mediterranean. For operations in the Middle East, the United States has ample options, but for operations in the Levant, the British base in Cyprus and Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan could be used, if agreements were to be reached, and the circumstances warrant. This flexibility would make the United States less dependent on Turkish bases for certain regional missions, thereby increasing its leverage over Ankara during times of tension.

This approach requires updating critical assumptions about Turkish decision-making. Ankara is almost certain to remain a member of NATO and its location and agreements with Europe economically bind Turkey to the EU. Turkish elite may make tactical decisions to lessen tensions with the EU or the United States, as well as other states in the Middle East, but such actions do not necessarily entail any major concession on key, self-identified national security issues. Instead, Ankara remains committed to using its own leverage to try and wrest concessions from its allies, embracing the transactional model that many in the West have been hesitant to fully accept. A clear, more transactional policy that strips out aspiration as a driver of Western policy may actually help to stabilize relations. While the two sides may never have warm relations, a clear and functional relationship, built around a mutually shared understanding of the other sides' red lines could make cooperation on issues easier to pursue. Turkish foreign policy has changed. Ankara's foreign policy elites have made clear that they view Turkey's place in the world as more independent than during the Cold War. It is time for the West to follow suit, promote its own ideals, and carve out a more effective Turkey policy that is no longer hindered by self-restraint.

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