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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policymakers in the United States and European Union are struggling with how to manage their relations with Turkey. What makes the country such a conundrum is that its problematic leadership faces real threats. Turkey is confronting challenges from the aftermath of the July 2016 coup attempt and the destabilizing effects of the Syrian war. Yet the country's president is growing more authoritarian, using virulent anti-Western rhetoric, and making foreign policy choices contrary to the interests of the trans-Atlantic alliance. The policy goal is navigating this gray zone today to preserve the possibility of better relations in the future.

The paper begins by examining the main domestic and regional challenges facing Turkey, as well as how these issues impact the country's relations with its Western allies. It then outlines three possible policy responses for the United States and Europe: abandonment, transactionalism, and engagement. The paper makes the case for taking a long view, as the current period before Turkey's parliamentary and presidential elections (due sometime before November 2019) will remain difficult. The degree of political, security, socio-economic, and cultural integration between Turkey and the West requires a nuanced and supple style of relationship management. Specifically, the paper advocates for constructive and principled engagement. This entails widening the aperture of government outreach to more officials on a broader range of shared interests; using the prospect of deeper trade and investment links to encourage better governance; expanding people-to-people ties and supporting civil society; and staying true to Western values by speaking out about rule of law and human rights abuses.

INTRODUCTION

On July 15, 2016, Turkey was rocked by an attempted coup. Tanks blocked bridges connecting Istanbul's shores while sonic booms from F-16s cracked windows across the city. Fighter jets bombed parliament and the presidential palace in Ankara. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was reportedly within minutes of being captured or killed. As coup plotters communicated via text message, Erdoğan rallied his supporters to the street in FaceTime interviews with news anchors. 265 people were killed and over 1,400 were wounded. An Islamic cleric living in Pennsylvania, Fethullah Gülen, was immediately blamed.

Since the attempted coup, policymakers in the United States and European Union (EU) have increasingly struggled with how to handle Turkey. There were high hopes when Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, raising expectations about progress on democratic governance, minority rights, and economic reform. The United States and EU long recognized Turkey's strategic importance and economic potential, and they sought ways to bring this predominantly Muslim nation with seemingly more pro-Western leadership closer to the trans-Atlantic fold. In October 2005, the EU launched accession negotiations with Turkey. In April 2009, President Barack Obama made Turkey the second bilateral visit of his presidency (after Canada) and cited the potential for a "model partnership." Yet despite early reforms, Turkey's domestic politics have become increasingly authoritarian over time. The government has narrowed space for civil society and free media, arrested political opponents, purged thousands of public servants after the putsch, degraded rule of law, and weakened checks and balances through constitutional reform. With mistrust growing on both sides, Turkey's relations with the West are under significant strain.

This paper examines domestic and regional challenges facing Turkey, with a focus on the aftermath of the coup attempt and the destabilizing effects of the Syrian war. It discusses how these issues affect Ankara's interaction with its trans-Atlantic allies. The paper then outlines three possible policy responses to guide American and European relations with Turkey: abandonment, transactionalism, and engagement. It makes the case for engagement as a means of preserving the longer-term potential of the relationship during this turbulent period. In particular, it advocates widening the aperture of government outreach to more officials on a broader range of shared interests; using the prospect of deeper trade and investment links to encourage better governance; expanding people-to-people ties and supporting civil society; and staying true to Western values by speaking out about rule of law and human rights abuses.

TURKEY'S DOMESTIC CHALLENGES

Prior to the coup attempt, there was growing Western concern about the Turkish government's crackdown on civil society and authoritarian drift. These actions stemmed in part from Erdoğan's battle with his former ally, Fethullah Gülen.¹ An Islamic cleric and scholar, Gülen is seen as the spiritual leader of a transnational religious movement known as "Hizmet" (translated from Turkish as "service"). After the AKP came to power, Gülen and Erdoğan worked together to rid the government and military of the Kemalists and

1 Asli Aydintaşbaş wrote an accessible primer on Gülen and his movement. See Asli Aydintaşbaş, "The good, the bad and the Gülenists," (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, September 23, 2016), http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_good_the_bad_and_the_gulenists7131. Dexter Filkins, who interviewed Gülen, also provided a helpful overview. See Dexter Filkins, "Turkey's Thirty Year Coup," *The New Yorker*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/17/turkeys-thirty-year-coup>.

secularists whom they believed operated a “deep state” within Turkey;² this process was aided by placing Gülenists in senior positions across the Turkish bureaucracy to bolster internal support for their agenda.

A power struggle commenced once the men no longer had a shared enemy. In 2011, Erdoğan refused to include dozens of Gülenists on AKP lists for parliamentary elections. In 2012, Gülenists opposed Erdoğan’s peace talks with the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, a designated terrorist organization engaged in armed conflict with the Turkish state). In November 2013, Erdoğan shut down Gülenist prep schools; in addition to preparing students for higher exams, the schools were used for fundraising and recruitment. A month later, a number of Turkish police and prosecutors (widely believed to be Gülenists) launched corruption investigations that implicated four government ministers and several of Erdoğan’s family members.³ In an effort to cleanse government and society of Gülenist influence, the government closed Gülenist newspapers and television stations, seized companies belonging to Gülen’s supporters, and purged hundreds of government officials. In May 2016, the government designated the movement a terrorist organization (and created the acronym FETÖ, Fethullah Terrorist Organization). The military was expected to purge Gülenists from its senior ranks during the annual rotation in August 2016; the coup attempt occurred several weeks prior.

There was rare unity among Turks after the putsch, with the vast majority initially supporting the government’s response. Despite some unhappiness with Erdoğan’s leadership, there was widespread agreement that a military overthrow was not the solution. On July 16, parliament held an extraordinary session where all four political parties issued a joint declaration condemning the coup attempt and expressing solidarity against threats to democracy.⁴ There was recognition that the government would need to take security measures and bring coup plotters to justice. As Asli Aydintaşbaş reports: “No one in Turkey doubts that there are Gülenist fingerprints on the 15 July coup, even though non-Gülenist generals were also involved.”⁵ There was also concern about the threat to future stability posed by Gülenists burrowed in state institutions, including military, judicial, and law enforcement positions.

Despite some unhappiness with Erdoğan’s leadership, there was widespread agreement that a military overthrow was not the solution.



2 The modern Turkish state was founded in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the first president. Kemalism involved political, social, cultural, and religious reforms designed to transition from a multi-religious and multi-ethnic empire to a secular and unitary state. Its key tenets included republicanism, populism, nationalism, secularism, statism, and reformism. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth underscoring the importance of Islam in Turkey as well as the societal impact of the AKP’s rise and concurrent erosion of the Kemalist establishment’s influence. For example, see Ali Çarkoğlu and Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, *The Rising Tide of Conservatism in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); William Hale and Ergün Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2013); Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

3 For an example of reporting at the time on the power struggle between Erdoğan and Gülen, see Umat Uras, “Turkish probe marks AKP-Gülen power struggle,” *Al Jazeera*, December 24, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/12/turkish-probe-marks-akp-gulen-power-struggle-2013122473646994231.html>. Some of these corruption charges were cited in the December 2017 trial in New York against Halkbank executive Hakan Atilla, who was accused of conspiring with Turkish-Iranian gold trader Reza Zarrab (who testified for the prosecution) to evade U.S. sanctions on Iran. For more background, see Amanda Sloat, “Why Turkey Cares about the Trial of Reza Zarrab,” *Lawfare*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/why-turkey-cares-about-trial-reza-zarrab>.

4 “Turkey’s political parties in solidarity after coup attempt,” *Hürriyet*, July 16, 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-political-parties-in-solidarity-after-coup-attempt-101698>.

5 Aydintaşbaş, “The good, the bad and the Gülenists,” p. 7.

Yet the government's actions to protect a vulnerable state apparatus soon began to weaken the democracy it claimed to protect. Initial efforts to arrest suspected coup plotters morphed into a maximalist purge of affiliated Gülenists and an apparent witch hunt against all political opponents.⁶ Although the government established mechanisms for those who believe they were wrongfully purged, they are under-staffed and slow-moving; meanwhile, accused individuals have been stripped of passports and are unable to find work.⁷ The number of Turkish citizens impacted is extraordinary:

- Within a week of the coup, over 58,000 people were affected. In the security sector, 7,500 soldiers were detained; 8,000 police officers were removed from their posts; and 3,000 judiciary members were suspended (with 1,000 arrested). In the education field, 15,200 Education Ministry officials were fired and 21,000 private school teachers had their licenses suspended.⁸
- TurkeyPurge.com reports that (as of January 9, 2018) the Turkish government has issued 30 decrees since the coup attempt. These resulted in the dismissal of 151,967 public servants and academics; detention of 131,995; and arrest of 63,974. It reports the government has shut down 3,003 schools and universities; dismissed 5,822 academics and 4,463 judges and prosecutors; closed 189 media outlets; and arrested 317 journalists.⁹ (These figures do not indicate how many people were later released.)

The crackdown has created an atmosphere of paranoia in Turkish society. Turkey declared a state of emergency on July 20, 2016, which has been extended repeatedly in three-month intervals (most recently in January 2018). Its provision to allow individuals to be held in pre-trial detention for 30 days without charge has had a chilling effect on public opposition. Relatedly, the government's elastic definition of what constitutes "terrorism" has altered the bounds of what is politically permissible (e.g., acceptable actions one day are deemed unacceptable on a future day with retroactive consequences). These measures have narrowed space for dissent, shrunk press freedom, and diminished confidence in state institutions.

6 For example, in November 2016, the government detained the co-leaders of Turkey's pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) and 10 MPs for crimes linked to "terrorist propaganda." HDP, the third largest party in parliament, was accused of links to the PKK. Also that week, the government issued arrest warrants for editors and staff of *Cumhuriyet*, the main opposition newspaper.

7 For more information about the current state of human rights and the effects of the post-coup crackdown, see U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Turkey 2016 Human Rights Report," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2016), <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265694.pdf>.

8 There was extensive reporting on the coup and its aftermath. For example, see Paul Kirby, "Turkey Coup Attempt: Who's the Target of Erdogan's Purge?" *BBC*, July 20, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36835340>. For a comparison of the scale in American numbers, see Josh Keller, Iaryna Mykhyalyshyn, and Safak Timur, "The Scale of Turkey's Purge is nearly unprecedented," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/02/world/europe/turkey-purge-erdogan-scale.html>.

9 This adds to an already high population of imprisoned journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Turkey retained the dubious distinction of being the world's top jailer of journalists in 2016 and 2017, with 73 journalists behind bars, dozens more facing trial, and continuing arrests. See Elena Beiser, "Record Number of Journalists Jailed as Turkey, China, Egypt Pay Scant Price for Repression," Committee to Protect Journalists, December 13, 2017, <https://cpj.org/reports/2017/12/journalists-prison-jail-record-number-turkey-china-egypt.php>. Turkey has also imposed restrictions on social media. According to the Twitter Transparency Report, of the 33,593 Twitter accounts reported in 2016, over 23,000 were by the Turkish government—more than all other countries combined. In the first half of 2017, there was a decrease in the overall number of Turkish requests. However, Turkey continued to submit the most requests, accounting for 45 percent of the global total; 90 percent of the total volume originated from France, Germany, Russia, and Turkey. See "Removal Requests Include Worldwide Legal Request we have Received from Governments and other Authorized Reporters to Remove or Withhold Content," Twitter, <https://transparency.twitter.com/en/removal-requests.html>.

The Western response to the coup attempt strained already difficult relations with Turkey. The United States and the EU were slow in condemning the putsch—a deeply traumatic event described as “Turkey’s 9/11”¹⁰—and expressing support for the country’s democratically elected leader.¹¹ Vice President Joe Biden visited Turkey in late August 2016, acknowledging “how some of your countrymen feel the world didn’t respond ... rapidly enough or with the appropriate amount of solidarity and empathy.”¹² A week later, European Parliament President Martin Schulz went to Turkey, followed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. In contrast, Russia was seen to condemn the coup swiftly and President Vladimir Putin hosted Erdoğan’s first post-coup trip abroad on August 9.

In addition, the United States and the EU were seen as condemning more strongly the government’s response to the coup than the coup itself. For example, Secretary of State John Kerry warned in an address to EU foreign ministers in Brussels days after the attempted putsch: “NATO also has a requirement with respect to democracy, and NATO will indeed measure very carefully what is happening.”¹³ There was also a perceived double standard in Western criticism of Turkey for imposing a state of emergency and temporarily suspending the European Convention on Human Rights, whereas similar measures taken by France after the November 2015 attacks in Paris were largely accepted.¹⁴

Erdoğan hurt his cause by describing the putsch as a “gift from god” that would enable him to “cleanse the army,” as well as by accusing the United States of complicity.¹⁵

10 Vice President Biden used this phrase when he visited Ankara, while Turkish officials have also used it. For a comparative analysis of U.S. and Turkish experiences, see Mustafa Akyol, “Turkey is in its own post-9/11 fury,” *Al-Monitor*, August 25, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/turkey-coup-attempt-risk-of-overreaction.html>.

11 The first American comments came from Secretary of State John Kerry. At a news conference in Moscow following Syria discussions, he cautiously called for “stability and peace and continuity within Turkey.” Several hours later, the White House released a statement in the unusual form of a call readout between Kerry and President Obama. It said they agreed “all parties in Turkey should support the democratically-elected government of Turkey, show restraint, and avoid any violence or bloodshed.” For coverage of the American response, see Massimo Calbresi, “How John Kerry Handled Turkey’s Coup,” *TIME*, July 19, 2016, <http://time.com/4412495/turkey-coup-john-kerry/>. For an overview of global responses, see “Turkey Coup Attempt: Reaction from Around the World,” *Al Jazeera*, July 16, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-reaction-world-160715215141043.html>.

12 A junior minister in Britain’s Foreign Office, Alan Duncan, traveled to Ankara less than a week after the coup attempt (which occurred on his first day in the job) to express solidarity. In a later interview, he said Europe was slow to appreciate the traumatic nature of the coup and should seek to understand the challenges facing the country. See “Europe ‘slow to react’ to Turkey coup bid: UK Minister,” *World Bulletin*, February 18, 2017, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/media/185008/europe-slow-to-react-to-turkey-coup-bid-uk-minister>. Council of Europe Secretary-General Thorbjørn Jagland was the first senior European official to visit on August 3, 2016. He noted “too little understanding from Europe over what challenges this has caused to the democratic and state institutions of Turkey,” but added that Turkish actions must conform to European law and human rights standards. See “Council of Europe chief says Europe understood Turkey ‘too little’,” *Hürriyet*, August 3, 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/council-of-europe-chief-says-europe-understood-turkey-too-little-102449>.

13 James Kanter, “EU and US Urge Erdogan to Show Restraint after Coup Attempt in Turkey,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/19/world/europe/eu-turkey-coup-erdogan.html>.

14 France extended its state of emergency six times after the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris, lifting it in November 2017 after parliament passed sweeping new counterterrorism legislation. See Samuel Osborne, “France Declares End of State of Emergency Almost Two Years after Paris Terror Attacks,” *The Independent*, October 31, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/france-state-of-emergency-end-terror-attacks-paris-isis-terrorism-alerts-warning-risk-reduced-a8029311.html>. Human rights group such as Amnesty International documented some abuses during this period, including banning demonstrations on vague grounds. See “France: Unchecked Clampdown on Protests under guise of Fighting Terrorism,” *Amnesty International*, May 31, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/05/france-unchecked-clampdown-on-protests-under-guise-of-fighting-terrorism/>.

15 Patrick Kingsley, “Turkey Detains 6,000 over Coup Attempt as Erdoğan vows to ‘clean state of virus,’” *The Guardian*, July 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/17/us-turkey-coup-attempt-fethullah-gulen>.

Western concerns about an excessive response also proved well-founded. Yet as Sweden's former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Carl Bildt warned in an August 2, 2016 opinion piece: "Europe risks losing its moral authority if it does not appear particularly engaged in dealing with the coup itself." Noting the seriousness of the threat and Europe's initially weak response, he concluded the EU would be far better positioned if its leaders had immediately visited Turkey to condemn the attack and discuss with the government "how to collectively ensure a democratic and European path for Turkey."¹⁶



Bilateral tensions have been exacerbated by the Turkish government's pursuit of known and suspected Gülenists abroad.

Bilateral tensions have been exacerbated by the Turkish government's pursuit of known and suspected Gülenists abroad. While the Turks have taken a political approach (friends don't harbor friends' terror suspects), Western governments have taken a legal approach (show us the evidence). The Turkish government has

repeatedly asked the United States to extradite Gülen, who has been living in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999.¹⁷ Ankara has provided the U.S. government with more than 85 boxes of documents, which the Department of Justice has been reviewing to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to persuade a federal judge of probable cause; it has also sent lawyers to Ankara to help the Turkish government develop its case.¹⁸ In the EU, hundreds of Turkish citizens—including suspected Gülenists, activists, diplomats, and military officers—have sought asylum in Germany, Greece, Britain, and elsewhere.¹⁹ Like the United States, these countries have legal requirements for extradition. This issue will continue to have a corrosive effect on Turkey's relationships, as Ankara's struggle to develop lawful cases does not diminish the movement's threat to political stability.

Relations have been further strained by Turkish arrests of American and European nationals on spurious terrorism charges. Of the 12 Americans jailed in Turkey after the failed coup, the highest profile case is Andrew Brunson, a pastor charged in October 2016 with supporting Gülen.²⁰ In 2017, two Turkish employees of U.S. consulates were arrested, with one in Istanbul accused of Gülenist ties and one in Adana of aiding the

16 Carl Bildt, "Europe, Stand Up for Erdoğan," *Politico*, August 11, 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-stand-up-for-erdogan-brussels-greece-coup-european-union/>.

17 Gülen left Turkey in 1999 to avoid political prosecution, with Turkish courts later acquitting him of all charges. Since then, he has lived in self-imposed exile in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. The United States granted him permanent legal resident status in 2008.

18 When Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jonathan Cohen spoke at the Middle East Institute on December 4, 2017, he said: "The Department of Justice has allocated unprecedented resources to the review of Turkey's Gülen-related requests and is continuing to review material that's been provided by Turkey. I'm told by my colleagues at the Department of Justice that they have allocated more resources to this extradition request than any other extradition request they've dealt with since the Shah of Iran." See Middle East Institute, "8th Annual Conference on Turkey: Panel III," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPL8kIG7ETU&feature=youtu.be&list=PLbZsVFe00MEaUrUKvivPf7wA3HUfgmBx1>.

19 See, for example, "Around 450 Turkish Diplomats, Military Officers seek Asylum in Germany: Report," *Hürriyet*, May 6, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/around-450-turkish-diplomats-military-officers-seek-asylum-in-germany-report-112800>. In addition, the post-coup crackdown is contributing to a brain drain from Turkey as intellectuals and secularists are leaving the country. For example, see Mark Lowen, "Turkey Brain Drain: Crackdown Pushes Intellectuals Out," *BBC*, December 28, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42433668>.

20 Carlotta Gall, "Americans Jailed after Failed Coup in Turkey are Hostages to Politics," *The New York Times*, October 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/07/world/europe/turkey-american-detainees.html>.

PKK.²¹ Eleven German citizens—including a prominent journalist and a human rights activist—were arrested on evolving charges; six were released by mid-December 2017.²² The Spanish government acted on Turkish arrest warrants, detaining a German writer, a Turkish-Swedish reporter, and a Turkish writer for alleged terrorism; all were eventually released. Ankara appears to be engaging in “hostage diplomacy,” viewing prisoners like Brunson as useful bargaining chips. Erdoğan stated this publicly after President Donald Trump requested Brunson’s release in a September phone call, saying he would hand over one cleric if he got the other in return (swap Brunson for Gülen).²³ An emergency decree issued in August 2017 gave the Turkish president power to initiate such swaps when warranted by national security considerations.²⁴

Turkey’s domestic politics are unlikely to improve in the near future. Citizens voted in a constitutional referendum on April 16, 2017 for a package of measures that formally shifts Turkey’s political system from a parliamentary to a presidential one.²⁵ The vote was surprisingly close, with official figures showing 51 percent of voters in favor of the changes; this reflects the deep polarization within Turkish society. There were allegations of fraud, with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) citing an “unlevel playing field” during the campaign and “late changes in counting procedures.”²⁶ European institutions expressed concern about the new measures,²⁷ as

21 Hamza Uluçay was arrested in Adana in March 2017. See “US Consulate Employee in Turkey’s Adana Arrested over PKK Links,” *Hürriyet*, March 7, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-consulate-employee-in-turkeys-adana-arrested-over-pkk-links-110524>. Metin Topuz was arrested in Istanbul in October 2017. See Karen DeYoung and Kareem Fahim, “U.S.-Turkey tensions boil over after arrest of consulate employee,” *The Washington Post*, October 9, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-summons-another-us-consulate-employee-as-crisis-deepens/2017/10/09/5fbaecf6-ac7b-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?utm_term=.e770d4b2e601. In response to these arrests, the United States suspended issuance of non-immigrant visas for Turkish citizens; Turkey immediately took reciprocal action. While Ankara viewed this as a visa dispute, the U.S. administration characterized it as a question of the Turkish government’s commitment to the security of American facilities and personnel. In late December 2017, the U.S. embassy announced the resumption of visa services following high-level assurances that no additional local employees were under investigation, staff would not be arrested for performing official duties, and advance notice would be given before any future arrests. See “Statement from the U.S. Mission to Turkey on the Full Resumption of Visa Services,” U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Turkey, December 28, 2017, <https://tr.usembassy.gov/statement-u-s-mission-turkey-full-resumption-visa-services/>. The Turkish government has publicly denied providing such assurances and the staffers remain in prison.

22 “Germany hopes for improvement in Turkey ties after new prisoner release,” *Reuters*, December 22, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-turkey/germany-hopes-for-improvement-in-turkey-ties-after-new-prisoner-release-idUSKBN1EG0UN>.

23 Bill Chappell, “Turkey’s Erdogan Suggests Swap: Jailed U.S. Pastor for Turkish Cleric,” *National Public Radio*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/09/29/554451339/turkeys-erdogan-suggests-swap-jailed-u-s-pastor-for-turkish-cleric>.

24 Abdullah Ayasun, “New Decree Allows Turkish President To Engage In Prisoner Swap,” *The Globe Post*, August 25, 2017, <http://www.theglobepost.com/2017/08/25/us-pastor-prisoner-swap-turkey/>.

25 A military government wrote the Turkish constitution after the 1980 coup. Constitutional reform has been on the agenda since the late 1990s, as many believed a civilian-drafted constitution could help the country recover from the coup’s stigma and remove more authoritarian components. Numerous revisions have been made as part of the EU accession process. The shift from a parliamentary to a presidential system is not inherently problematic, but critics expressed concerns about insufficient checks and balances in the reforms; these changes are more concerning amid the crackdown on political opponents and journalists that has limited space for dissent. Turkey may face difficulties implementing some changes, as the reforms do not create a new system but graft presidential provisions on a parliamentary-designed constitution.

26 OSCE fielded an observation mission, which produced a report on the conduct of the referendum. See OSCE, “Republic of Turkey: Constitutional Referendum,” (Warsaw: OSCE, June 22, 2017), p. 1, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/324816?download=true>.

27 The Council of Europe reopened the monitoring procedure on Turkey until “serious concerns” about respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law “are addressed in a satisfactory manner.” See “PACE Reopens Monitoring Procedure in Respect of Turkey,” Council of Europe, April 25, 2017, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6603&lang=2>. In July 2017, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling for the suspension of negotiations if the constitutional reforms were implemented unchanged. In early 2017, the Venice Commission produced a detailed assessment of the reforms. See Venice Commission, “On the Amendments

the concentration of power in the presidency means Erdoğan can operate with even fewer checks and balances amid limited parliamentary oversight and weakened judicial independence. The State Department noted election irregularities and encouraged the government to respect the basic rights of citizens, while Trump called Erdoğan to congratulate him on the referendum win.²⁸

The Turkish government dragged Europe into the referendum campaign, further souring relations. Turkey's EU candidacy became electoral fodder, with Erdoğan promising it would be on the table after the poll. His pledge to reinstate capital punishment, which was abolished in 2002 as part of the country's accession bid,²⁹ led German and French leaders to warn this step would end negotiations. As Erdoğan courted diaspora voters across Europe, he picked fights with capitals to rally nationalist support.³⁰ He accused Germany of "Nazi practices" and called the Netherlands "Nazi remnants" after both governments prevented his officials from holding pro-referendum rallies in their countries. The Turkish government blocked the Dutch ambassador to Turkey, who was on vacation at the time of the spat in March 2017, from returning to his embassy.³¹ The diaspora in Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands voted in support of the constitutional reforms. On Europe Day (May 9) 2017, Erdoğan released a conciliatory statement expressing his desire to continue EU negotiations on a "win-win" basis and engage on mutual interests.³²

Preparations for parliamentary and presidential elections—which must be held by November 2019 but could occur sooner—will dominate domestic politics until then. Erdoğan has acknowledged the contests will be "difficult,"³³ as the referendum results highlight the stark divide between his supporters and opponents. Notably, his losses in the country's three largest commercial centers—Istanbul (where he began his political career as mayor), Ankara, and Izmir—suggest he could be vulnerable in a fair race, especially against an opponent who effectively unites the opposition. There is also disenchantment (even within his base) about the excessive post-coup purges, a

to the Constitution Adopted by the Grand National Assembly on 21 January 2017 and to Be Submitted to a National Referendum on 16 April 2017," (Venice: Venice Commission, March 13, 2017), [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2017\)005-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2017)005-e).

28 Carlo Morello, "Trump calls Erdogan to congratulate him on contested referendum, Turkey says," *The Washington Post*, April 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-calls-turkeys-erdogan-to-congratulate-him-on-contested-referendum/2017/04/17/f997d306-2397-11e7-a1b3-faff0034e2de_story.html?utm_term=.8e5df1ca637e.

29 A moratorium on capital punishment has been in place since 1984. In 2002, Turkey abolished the death penalty in peacetime as part of the Third Package for Harmonization with the European Union. In 2004, it was abolished in all circumstances. See "Turkey agrees death penalty ban," *BBC*, January 9, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3384667.stm>.

30 The diaspora includes nearly 3 million people with Turkish origins in Germany, close to a million in France, half a million each in Austria, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, a quarter million in Belgium, and close to 200,000 in Sweden. Svante Cornell argues that the Turkish government has systematically mobilized this diaspora to benefit Erdoğan's regime as voters in Turkish elections, a pressure group in the politics of their countries of residence, and as informants and bullies against his opponents. See Svante Cornell, "'Weaponizing' the Diaspora: Erdoğan and the Turks in Europe," *The Turkey Analyst*, April 5, 2017, <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/579-weaponizing-the-diaspora-erdo%C4%9Fan-and-the-turks-in-europe.html>. See also "How Recep Tayyip Erdogan seduces Turkish migrants in Europe," *The Economist*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21727921-big-diaspora-complicates-european-relations-turkey-how-recep-tayyip-erdogan-seduces>.

31 The Dutch Foreign Ministry formally withdrew the ambassador in early February 2018 after a lack of progress in talks to normalize bilateral relations.

32 "Turkey wants to carry on its EU membership bid on win-win basis," *Hürriyet*, May 9, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-wants-to-carry-on-its-eu-membership-bid-on-win-win-basis-112912>.

33 Murat Yetkin, "Erdoğan admits 'difficulty' in 2019 elections," *Hürriyet*, August 8, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/murat-yetkin/erdogan-admits-difficulty-in-2019-elections-116458>.

weakening economy, and claims of government corruption. In response to referendum losses in 17 of Turkey's 30 largest cities, Erdoğan has been shaking up local party branches, firing hundreds of officials, and forcing democratically elected mayors to resign.³⁴ Foreign policy decisions will be shaped by his need to maintain nationalist support, with the United States and EU serving as easy rhetorical targets.

Although elections still matter in Turkey, opposition parties have struggled to provide a compelling alternative. The leader of the social democratic People's Republican Party (CHP), Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, rallied support in summer 2017 when he led a 280-mile "march for justice" from Ankara to Istanbul; however, he has failed to mobilize a meaningful base. The pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) is hamstrung, as its co-leaders (Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ), 10 parliamentarians, and dozens of elected mayors are imprisoned on specious terrorism charges. The leader of the ultra-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, announced in early January 2018 that his party would unconditionally support Erdoğan in the next presidential election. All eyes are on Meral Akşener,³⁵ who recently launched the İyi Parti (Good Party). She broke with the MHP following a failed bid to replace Bahçeli after he threw his party's support behind the constitutional referendum. It is questionable whether Akşener can unite the disparate groups of Erdoğan opponents (including Kemalists, Kurds, and liberals) to mount a successful challenge. Her party has proposed a pact between opposition parties to back a single candidate in the second round of balloting.³⁶

In the meantime, systematic dismantling of rule of law continues. The government has issued 30 decrees since the coup. Some are banal, such as a provision regulating the use of winter tires. Opposition leader Kılıçdaroğlu questioned this order's link to the state of emergency and accused the president of using the failed putsch to lead his own "civilian coup" via emergency powers.³⁷ Of greater concern was a decree issued on Christmas Day 2017 that grants immunity to civilians who acted against terrorism or attempts to overthrow the government, including the failed putsch or anything viewed as its continuation. This has caused apprehension, including from former president and AKP co-founder Abdullah Gül, about the mobilization of thugs and vigilante violence.³⁸ Notably, Freedom House classified Turkey as "not free" in its "Freedom in the World 2018" report, the first time since the series began in 1999. It cites "a deeply flawed constitutional referendum that centralized power in the presidency, the mass replacement of elected mayors with government appointees, arbitrary prosecutions of rights activists and other perceived enemies of the state, and continued purges of state employees, all of which have left citizens hesitant to express their views on sensitive topics."³⁹

34 Carlotta Gall, "Erdoğan Trains His Broom on a Sweep of Turkey's Governing Party," *The New York Times*, December 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/23/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-mayors.html>.

35 For profiles of Akşener, see *The Economist*, "A Challenge to Turkey's Erdoğan," November 16, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21731408-does-meral-aksener-have-chance-challenge-turkeys-erdogan>, and Carlotta Gall, "A Rival Steps Up to Challenge Turkey's President Erdoğan," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/05/world/europe/turkey-aksener-erdogan.html>.

36 Under new rules following the referendum on constitutional reform, the president requires 50 percent plus one to be elected; if no candidate wins in the first round, those with the most votes compete in a second round.

37 Suzan Fraser, "Turkey to Extend State of Emergency amid Freedom Concerns," *The Seattle Times*, January 19, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/turkey-set-to-extend-state-of-emergency-again-amid-concerns/>.

38 Onur Ant, "Erdoğan Law Stirs Fears of Legalized Extra-Judicial Violence," *Bloomberg*, December 25, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-25/erdogan-decree-stokes-fears-of-legalized-extra-judicial-violence>.

39 "Freedom in the World 2018: Turkey," Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/turkey>.

The aftermath of the coup, deteriorating relations with the West, and several terrorist attacks have taken a toll on the Turkish economy. The country's economic health will remain a domestic challenge in advance of elections, particularly as a degree of Erdoğan's support stems from pocketbook politics. The ruling AKP, which initially ran on a platform of economic reform, oversaw a financial boom and received credit for improving infrastructure, healthcare, and social services. Yet there have been struggles in recent years.⁴⁰ Inflation reached a 14-year high of nearly 13 percent in November 2017 (well above the country's 5 percent target), while the Turkish lira lost 11 percent of its value last fall amid a visa dispute with the United States. State-owned HalkBank may be subject to U.S. Treasury Department fines in spring 2018 following the guilty verdict in the sanctions evasion trial of Hakan Atilla; depending on the size of the fine, there could be reverberations in the Turkish economy.

Turkish leaders note the economy achieved 11.1 percent GDP growth during the third quarter of 2017 (far surpassing the government's 4.4 percent projection). However, this impressive figure belies structural weaknesses—including high inflation, a weakened currency, and unemployment averaging around 11 percent—that may portend future trouble.⁴¹ In particular, the Turkish economy has been sustained by cheap credit that boosts consumption, government spending, and reliance on the construction sector. It is also heavily dependent on trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), primarily from the EU.⁴² Government figures show a 19 percent drop in foreign



Erdoğan attacks Europe rhetorically to rally his nationalist base, yet such vitriol turns off the investors needed to fuel the country's economic success.

investment in 2017 compared to the previous year,⁴³ which illustrates Erdoğan's dilemma: he attacks Europe rhetorically to rally his nationalist base, yet such vitriol turns off the investors whose financing is needed to fuel the country's economic success.

In addition, some potential investors have been dissuaded by declining rule of law (including weakened due process and judicial independence), the indefinite state of emergency, and unpredictable political environment. The Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSIAD), among others, has become increasingly vocal about

40 When the AKP took office, it inherited an economic reform agenda from the previous coalition government (including International Monetary Fund-led reforms) and implemented policies that achieved macroeconomic stability attractive to foreign investors. The country averaged 7.2 percent annual economic growth during the AKP's first term in office (2002-06) and saw infrastructure improvements. The country has weathered several economic storms: it was affected by the global financial crisis (with its economy shrinking five percent in 2009), listed in 2013 by Morgan Stanley as one of the "Fragile Five" emerging economies most at risk of a downturn, and experienced an economic contraction after the coup attempt.

41 For discussions of 2018 challenges, see Zia Weise, "Erdoğanomics risks overheating Turkey," *Politico*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-gdp-boom-risks-overheating-recep-tayyip-erdogan/>, and Mustafa Sonmez, "2018 fraught with uncertainties for Turkish economy," *Al-Monitor*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/12/turkey-2018-is-fraught-with-uncertainties-for-economy.html>.

42 According to the European Commission, Turkey is the EU's fourth largest export market and fifth largest provider of imports. The EU is by far Turkey's number one partner for imports (38 percent, followed by China, Russia, and the United States) and export partner (44.5 percent, followed by Iraq and the United States). See "Countries and Regions: Turkey," European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/turkey/>. In terms of FDI, EU investment in Turkey increased from \$3.8 billion in 2016 to \$4.5 billion in 2017; there was a decrease in American FDI from \$338 million in 2016 to \$162 million in 2017. See "Balance of Payment Statistics," Balance of Payment Division, Statistics Department, Central Bank of Turkey (TCMB), November 2017.

43 "Foreign investment in Turkey drops 19 pct in 2017," *Hürriyet*, November 24, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/foreign-investment-in-turkey-drops-19-pct-in-2017-122994>.

these challenges.⁴⁴ At the association's annual board meeting in mid-January 2018, high advisory council head Tuncay Özilhan called for the state of emergency to be lifted "as soon as possible" because it is dissuading investors, the "restoration of democratic rule" because fair competition is the main precondition of a robust economy, and structural reforms to maintain investor confidence. He also noted that when Turkey was progressing toward EU membership, the country had an independent judicial system, freedom of expression, and rule of law coupled with record economic growth and foreign direct investment. He concluded: "The greater steps Turkey ... takes to maintain the rule of law, the higher FDI inflows and growth rates it will enjoy."⁴⁵

TURKEY'S REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Domestic challenges aside, Turkey sits in a turbulent neighborhood. It has been particularly affected by the civil war and battle against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria. These conflicts flooded Turkey with more than 3 million refugees, complicated relations with Russia and Iran, contributed to several large terrorist attacks on Turkish soil, and inflamed the Kurdish issue.

Different priorities in Syria contributed to tension in U.S.-Turkey relations. Ankara initially focused on removing Syrian President Bashar Assad from power, turning a blind eye as foreign fighters (who at least claimed their goal was Assad's ouster) took advantage of lax border controls. The Obama administration was reluctant to engage in the civil war, but it took concerted measures to counter the Islamic State. Turkey felt less threatened by ISIS in its early days, so it refrained from acting against the group and turned a blind eye to activity within its borders.⁴⁶ That view changed after an attack by a suicide bomber with suspected ISIS links in July 2015. Weeks later, Ankara opened Incirlik air base to U.S. and coalition forces conducting counter-ISIS missions. Turkey's more aggressive posture arguably increased its vulnerability, as Ankara was attacked in October 2015 and Istanbul twice in 2016.

The biggest point of contention concerned support for ground forces in the counter-ISIS campaign. The United States and Turkey negotiated for months about possible joint military action in Syria, which faltered over Turkish insistence on the creation of a no-fly zone along its border and disagreements about the affiliation and availability of local forces. American efforts to train and equip moderate Syrian opposition forces also failed, due in part to fighters' desire to combat the regime rather than ISIS. In surveying available options, U.S. special operators found a faction of Syrian Kurds—the YPG (People's Protection Units)—to be effective fighters who were willing to focus their attacks on ISIS. Starting with the October 2014 operation to defend the Kurdish town of Kobane from ISIS, the United States has provided logistical and air support to the YPG.

44 TÜSIAD is a donor to the Brookings Institution.

45 "Turkey's emergency rule should be ended as soon as possible, TÜSIAD urges," *Hürriyet*, January 18, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-emergency-rule-should-be-ended-as-soon-as-possible-tusiad-urges-125968>.

46 Rukmini Callimachi, "Turkey, a Conduit for Fighters Joining ISIS, Begins to Feel Its Wrath," *The New York Times*, June 29, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/30/world/middleeast/turkey-a-conduit-for-fighters-joining-isis-begins-to-feel-its-wrath.html?_r=0.

Turkey has consistently and vehemently objected to American support for the YPG because of its ties to the PKK.⁴⁷ The U.S. government has distinguished between the groups by noting the YPG, unlike the PKK, is not a designated terrorist organization. Although legally accurate, this is largely a distinction without a difference given clear signs of linkages between the groups.⁴⁸ Turkey's top priority in Syria became preventing the YPG from achieving its broader political objective: the connection of three northern Syrian cantons into a single autonomous Kurdish region, which Ankara feared could result in an independence bid or be used as a staging area for attacks on Turkey. Their fears of violence are not unfounded: in 2016 alone, far more Turks were killed in mass casualty attacks by the PKK (and its affiliates) than by ISIS.⁴⁹ Syria-related conflict also contributed to the breakdown of Turkey's two-and-a-half-year ceasefire with the PKK.⁵⁰

Despite his fiery rhetoric, Erdoğan has largely tolerated American support for the YPG in the counter-ISIS campaign—with two red lines. First, he opposed any direct arming of the YPG. The U.S. military addressed this by providing mission-specific supplies to the YPG's Syrian Arab partners in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).⁵¹ This policy changed under the Trump administration, which implemented an Obama-era plan to

47 For more background, see Amanda Sloat, "In Syria, Trump Faces a Tough Balancing Act between Turks and Kurds," *Foreign Policy*, February 6, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/06/in-syria-trump-faces-a-tough-balancing-act-between-turks-and-kurds/>.

48 In April 2016, Defense Secretary Ash Carter testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. When Senator Lindsay Graham asked if the YPG was aligned with the PKK, Carter replied "yes." See "US defense chief admits links among PYD, YPG, PKK," *Hürriyet*, April 29, 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-defense-chief-admits-links-among-pyd-ypg-pkk-98499>. For historical perspective, see International Crisis Group, "The PKK's Fateful Choice in Northern Syria," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, May 4, 2017), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/176-pkk-s-fateful-choice-northern-syria>. Another ICG report cites "little prospect for [the YPG's] organic link with the mother party to change in the foreseeable future." Despite the Syrian face to the YPG, it says "the reality of who wields power is evident to those living there and should be to external observers as well." See International Crisis Group, "Fighting ISIS: The Road to and beyond Raqqa," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 28, 2017), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/b053-fighting-isis-road-and-beyond-raqqa>. YPG fighters have been photographed wearing patches of Abdullah Öcalan—the founder and leader of the PKK, who has been jailed in Turkey since 1999—while some celebrated their Raqqa victory by dancing in front of his enlarged photo. Turks were incensed when American special operators donned YPG patches in solidarity with their fellow fighters. See Liz Sly, "Pentagon does about-face on U.S. troops wearing Kurdish militia patches in Syria," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-us-military-does-an-about-face-on-us-troops-wearing-kurdish-patches/2016/05/27/d11e934c-2438-11e6-b944-52f7b1793dae_story.html?utm_term=.803a202b11b2.

49 For a graphic timeline of bombings, see "Timeline of Attacks in Turkey," *Al Jazeera*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2016/06/timeline-attacks-turkey-160628223800183.html>. An International Crisis Group report notes the deaths of nearly 3,000 Turks on both sides of the conflict in the two years since the ceasefire broke down. See Berkay Mandıracı, "Turkey's PKK Conflict Kills almost 3,000 in Two Years," *International Crisis Group*, July 20, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkeys-pkk-conflict-kills-almost-3000-two-years>.

50 Erdoğan initiated a peace process with the PKK that achieved some success. The ceasefire broke down in July 2015 after an attack by an ISIS suicide bomber on Kurdish activists in southern Turkey. The PKK blamed the Turkish government and assassinated several police officers. The government responded with a heavy-handed operation in Kurdish towns, and the cycle of violence resumed. The breakdown was also affected by electoral politics. In June 2015 elections, the HDP surpassed the 10 percent threshold required to enter parliament for the first time ever, denying the AKP a parliamentary majority for the first time in 13 years. Dragging its feet on coalition formation, the government re-ran elections several months later. Amid the spike in violence, the HDP's vote percentage declined (though they still met the threshold) and the AKP regained a governing majority. In November 2015, the government imprisoned several HDP MPs on dubious charges of "terrorist propaganda"; they were absent from the April 2016 parliamentary vote that authorized a referendum on constitutional reform.

51 The SDF, which consists of YPG fighters along with a smaller number of Syrian Arab forces, is largely a creation of the U.S. military. General Raymond Thomas, head of Special Operations Command, has explained how he told the YPG to change its brand given its linkage to the PKK. See "U.S. general told Syria's YPG: 'You have got to change your brand,'" *Reuters*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-usa-ypg/u-s-general-told-syrias-ypg-you-have-got-to-change-your-brand-idUSKBN1A62SS>.

arm the YPG for the battle to retake Raqqa.⁵² Second, Erdoğan said YPG forces should not move west of the Euphrates River, given concern that the group would connect the cantons. Turkey showed its willingness to use military force to endorse this red line through its seven-month Euphrates Shield operation (August 2016 to March 2017), which cleared ISIS from its border and blocked YPG movement. Given Russian control of the airspace, this operation required rapprochement with Moscow—a delicate proposition after the Turkish air force downed a Russian jet that violated Turkish airspace in November 2015.⁵³ In October 2017, Erdoğan sent forces into Syria as part of a joint mission with Russia and Iran, ostensibly aimed at the Islamic State but with implications for the YPG.

The Gordian knot created by the YPG's now dominant presence in northern Syria will remain a challenge, as difficult decisions must be made about post-ISIS security and governance arrangements. (In addition to the Turkey-related questions discussed here, Syrian Arabs living

The Gordian knot created by the YPG's now dominant presence in northern Syria will remain a challenge.



in this area must be consulted about their preferences.) Untangling this knot is further complicated by disagreements within the U.S. administration about the way forward: Trump told Erdoğan the United States would stop arming the YPG;⁵⁴ State Department officials describe the relationship as “temporary, transactional and tactical;”⁵⁵ and the Defense Department envisions continued cooperation.

U.S.-Turkey tensions rose in January 2018 when American military officials announced plans to train a 30,000 strong “border security force” with a significant YPG component to be deployed along the Turkish border.⁵⁶ The State Department scrambled to assuage predictable Turkish fury. After a meeting with Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said “some people misspoke” and clarified that the United States intends only “to ensure that local elements are providing security to liberated areas.”⁵⁷ On January 18, Tillerson delivered a speech outlining the administration's Syria policy. He described an enduring U.S. military presence to prevent the re-emergence of ISIS, counter Iran, and “help pave the way for legitimate

52 Although the Obama administration prepared this plan, it refrained from implementing the decision during its waning days in office, given political implications. The new policy was communicated to the Turkish government days before Erdoğan's May 2017 visit to Washington.

53 Erdoğan made a rare apology to Putin, who had slapped Turkey with economic sanctions after the jet incident. The price for allowing Euphrates Shield seemed to be Turkish silence in the face of Russian and regime attacks on Aleppo.

54 In a November 24, 2017 phone call between presidents, according to Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu, Trump told Erdoğan that the United States would stop providing weapons to the YPG. The Pentagon clarified it was “reviewing pending adjustments.” See Carol Morello and Erin Cunningham, “Trump tells Turkish president U.S. will stop arming Kurds in Syria,” *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-tells-turkish-president-us-will-stop-arming-kurds-in-syria/2017/11/24/61548936-d148-11e7-a1a3-0d1e45a6de3d_story.html?utm_term=.cd78f6bddc63.

55 Remarks by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jonathan Cohen on a panel at the Middle East Institute on May 17, 2017. See Cansu Çamlıbel, “US: Relations with YPG temporary, transactional, tactical,” *Hürriyet*, May 19, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-relations-with-ypg-temporary-transactional-tactical-113277>.

56 Tom Perry and Orhan Coskun, “U.S.-led coalition helps to build new Syrian force, angering Turkey,” *Reuters*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-sdf/u-s-led-coalition-helps-to-build-new-syrian-force-angering-turkey-idUSKBN1F300A>.

57 “US has no intention to build YPG army at Syria's border with Turkey: Tillerson,” *Hürriyet*, January 18, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-has-no-intention-to-build-ypg-army-at-syrias-border-with-turkey-tillerson-125912>.

local civil authorities to exercise responsible governance of their liberated areas.”⁵⁸ Ankara interpreted these plans as American security guarantees for a YPG-controlled region. On January 20, the Turkish military launched Operation Olive Branch, with Moscow’s acquiescence, against Russian-supported YPG forces in the Afrin region of northwestern Syria.⁵⁹ Its stated objectives include safeguarding Turkey’s border, countering U.S. support for a terrorist organization, blocking the YPG from reaching the eastern Mediterranean and cutting off Turkey’s geographical contact with the Arab world, and ensuring the Turkish-supported Syrian opposition controls a 10,000 square kilometer area.⁶⁰ The Turkish government has threatened to expand this operation 100 kilometers east to Manbij,⁶¹ which risks direct conflict with American soldiers and U.S.-backed YPG fighters there. A protracted operation could also detract attention from the final stages of the counter-ISIS campaign. This battle brings to the forefront a long-festering bilateral disagreement and contradiction in U.S. policy; resolving the Turkey-Kurd conflict remains a key piece of the larger Syria puzzle.

Although some European countries are playing military roles in Syria, they have not been implicated in the YPG debate. However, Turks have a separate complaint with them on Kurdish issues: namely, the failure to stop PKK financing activities. While some European officials will privately acknowledge the problem, they cite insufficient evidence to take greater action. There have been recent moves to address Turkish concerns, including a statement by the German Interior Ministry in September 2017 to expand its list of banned symbols related to the PKK and a decision by the European Parliament in November to ban entry to its premises by individuals or groups sympathetic to the PKK.⁶² Germany is also increasing investigations into PKK activities in the country.⁶³

More generally, the Syrian conflict illustrates the West’s often contradictory approach to Turkey. In addition to supporting a group that threatens Turkish security, it has sent mixed signals about the desirability of Turkish military action—both as part of the alliance and in its own defense. For example, there was outrage after Turkish tanks failed to cross the border and save Kobane from ISIS attack. Yet such critics forget

58 Rex Tillerson, “Remarks on the Way Forward for the United States Regarding Syria,” (speech, Hoover Institute at Stanford University, Stanford, CA, January 17, 2018), <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/01/277493.htm>.

59 For more details, see Amanda Sloat, “Turkey Wants to Crush U.S. Allies in Syria. That Shouldn’t Surprise Anybody,” *Foreign Policy*, January 23, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/23/turkey-wants-to-crush-u-s-allies-in-syria-that-shouldnt-surprise-anybody/>. For analysis and helpful recommendations, see Noah Bonsey, “No Winners in Turkey’s New Offensive into Syria,” *International Crisis Group*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/no-winners-turkeys-new-offensive-syria>.

60 “Turkey’s Operation Olive Branch ‘aims to bring 10,000 km2 of Afrin under control,’” *Hürriyet*, January 21, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-operation-olive-branch-aims-to-bring-10-000-km2-of-afrin-under-control-126058>.

61 When the United States supported the SDF crossing the Euphrates River in August 2016 to clear ISIS fighters from Manbij, the Turks acquiesced with the understanding that the YPG would withdraw after the city was cleared and let the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army take over. When the YPG failed to leave and began to march west toward the Syrian town of al-Bab, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield. The continued presence of YPG fighters in Manbij, who retain control via local partners, has fueled Erdoğan’s pledge to expand Operation Olive Branch there after Afrin.

62 Ben Knight, “German government accused of toeing Turkish line over Kurdish PKK images,” *DW*, September 20, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/german-government-accused-of-toeing-turkish-line-over-kurdish-pkk-images/a-40609132>.

63 According to press reports, the Federal Prosecutor’s Office opened 130 investigations against PKK activities in 2017. This is an increase from 40 investigations in 2016 and 20 investigations in 2015. See “Turkey, Germany kick off two-day security dialogue to counter Gülen, PKK,” *Hürriyet*, January 18, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-germany-kick-off-two-day-security-dialogue-to-counter-gulen-pkk-125959>.

months of worry about and alliance warnings against unilateral Turkish intervention in Syria, lest NATO be dragged into an unwanted cross-border conflict.⁶⁴ Similarly, there was concern in Brussels when Turkey downed a Russian warplane in November 2015. Although arguably a disproportionate response, NATO had warned Moscow six weeks earlier to stay away from the border after Russian warplanes violated Turkish airspace the preceding two days.⁶⁵ A month before the jet incident, the alliance began withdrawing Patriot missile batteries from Turkey's southern border. Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States had deployed the systems in 2012 after a Turkish jet was shot down by Syrian air defenses and Turkish civilians were killed by Syrian shellfire.⁶⁶ While the Patriots were aimed at ballistic missiles rather than hostile aircraft, the withdrawal of most batteries raised questions about solidarity on NATO's southern flank (especially compared to the alliance's robust response to Russian aggression on the eastern flank) and fueled Turkey's desire to enhance domestic defense abilities. In December 2015, the alliance agreed to take additional measures to enhance its air and maritime presence along the border and prevent future incidents.⁶⁷

In this context, it is not entirely surprising that Turkey would seek to strengthen its relations with other neighbors—including Russia. The countries have a long and complicated political and economic history, including 18th and 19th century military battles between the Ottoman and Russian empires, considerable trade and energy ties (including ongoing Gazprom construction of the TurkStream pipeline), and authoritarian leaders who distrust Western policies.⁶⁸ There is concern among Western observers about closer ties between Ankara and Moscow, which seem to herald a shift away from the trans-Atlantic alliance. Yet it seems more likely that recent overtures are driven by Erdoğan's near-term concerns with domestic security and Syria, as well as his diplomatic isolation. Putin is taking advantage of this outreach to gain leverage over Ankara and exacerbate its widening rift with the West.

One example is Turkey's announcement in late December 2017 of a signed agreement to purchase an S-400 missile defense system from Russia, which NATO has long warned would not be inter-operable with alliance systems.⁶⁹ (This is the same system Russia deployed to its base in Syria after the jet incident.) Gönül Tol and Nilsu Goren

64 See, for example, Doug Bandow, "Will NATO Intervene in Syria?" *The National Interest*, October 9, 2012, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/will-nato-intervene-syria-7567>.

65 "Statement by the North Atlantic Council on incursions into Turkey's airspace by Russian aircraft," NATO, October 5, 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_123392.htm?selectedLocale=en.

66 In January 2013, NATO deployed six Patriot batteries—two each from Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States—to protect Turkey's border with Syria. In September 2014, the Dutch systems were replaced with Spanish ones. In August 2015, Germany announced plans to end its deployment. A few days later, the United States said it would remove its systems in October. Spain and Italy deployed one Patriot battery and one Aster SAMP/T battery each. See NATO, "Batteries Deployment Locations," (Brussels: NATO, January 2017), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_01/20170113_1701-factsheet-patriot_en.pdf.

67 Robin Emmott, "Exclusive: NATO agrees Turkey air defense package, seeks 'predictability,'" *Reuters*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-nato-exclusive/exclusive-nato-agrees-turkey-air-defense-package-seeks-predictability-idUSKBN0U123520151218>.

68 For a good overview of Turkey-Russia relations, see Pavel K. Baev and Kemal Kirişçi, "An ambiguous partnership: The serpentine trajectory of Turkish-Russian relations in the era of Erdoğan and Putin," (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, September 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/pavel-and-kirisci-turkey-and-russia.pdf>.

69 On December 29, 2017, Turkish defense officials announced plans to buy at least one S-400 surface-to-air missile battery with the option of purchasing a second. The delivery of the first battery was scheduled for the first quarter of 2020. The statement said the project would be funded in part by a Russian loan. See "Turkey Completes Deal to Buy Antimissile System from Russia," *Associated Press*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/29/world/europe/turkey-russia-arms-deal.html>.

argue this military purchase should not be seen as an intentional snub to NATO or a sign of strengthening bilateral relations with Russia.⁷⁰ Rather, they suggest Russian aggression in the region has heightened Turkey's desire to develop its own defense capabilities.⁷¹ Given perceived foot dragging by NATO allies on military procurement, Ankara has looked elsewhere.⁷² The end result, however, is a rift with NATO coupled with increased vulnerability to Russian influence. This purchase could make Turkey subject to U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which requires the administration to sanction foreign entities that engage in significant transactions with Russia's defense and intelligence sectors.⁷³ While Congress will push for compliance, the administration could waive sanctions as a means of preserving military cooperation and support for Turkey's fight against the PKK.

The second example is Syria. While Turkey has used ISIS, YPG, and refugee-related issues to fuel anti-Western sentiment domestically, it has portrayed Russian involvement there (including its partnership with YPG forces in Afrin) in a more benign light. This partly relates to Turkey's vulnerability to Russia's Kurdish policy,⁷⁴ as well as the practical fact that Russia's military dominance in northern Syria gives it significant sway over post-ISIS security and governance plans. As seen in the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations, Ankara needs at least tacit agreement from Moscow for military operations. Yet Russian proposals for a federal constitution would reward the YPG's military success by empowering a Kurdish region, which directly counters Turkey's primary objective.⁷⁵

While Ankara feuded with Washington over military options in Syria, the refugee crisis prompted Turkey to collaborate with the EU. Erdoğan described migration cooperation in his Europe Day statement as the "most concrete and up-to-date example" of Turkey's European aspirations. Syrian refugees spilled for years into Turkey as well as neighboring

70 Gönül Tol and Nilsu Goren, "Turkey's Quest for Air Defense: Is the S-400 Deal a Pivot to Russia?" (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, December 2017), https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF5_TolGoren_Turkey_0.pdf.

71 There is also an argument that Erdoğan is seeking to defend himself and his palace against an air force that tried to kill him. See Boris Zilberman, "The S-400: Erdoğan's Fail-safe," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, November 3, 2017, <http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/boris-zilberman-the-s-400-erdogans-fail-safe/>.

72 Congress sometimes uses restrictions on arms sales as a means of conveying policy disapproval, in addition to principled concern about how such weapons will be used. From a Turkish perspective, such decisions can appear politically motivated and make the United States seem like an unreliable defense supplier that forces Ankara to seek alternative sources. In early November 2017, Turkey's Defense Ministry signed a letter of intent to strengthen joint defense cooperation with France and Italy, including the purchase of a SAMP-T missile system. See "Turkey, France and Italy to strengthen cooperation on missile defense: sources," *Reuters*, November 8, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-defence/turkey-france-and-italy-to-strengthen-cooperation-on-missile-defense-sources-idUSKBN1D829I>. Further discussions occurred during Erdoğan's January 2018 meetings in Paris. While Turks considered purchasing Patriots from American-owned Raytheon, there were disagreements over price and degree of technology transfer.

73 Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act, Pub. L. No. 115-44, 131 Stat. 886 (2017), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3364/text>.

74 As Gönül Tol explains: "Turkey has no leverage to steer Russia away from cooperating with its archenemy. Ankara might hope Moscow will drop the Kurds as the campaign against ISIL begins to draw to a close. But Russo-Kurdish partnership has deep roots that stretch back to the turn of the last century and might last longer than Turkey would like. As American power in the region is perceptibly in retreat, Russia is trying to fill the vacuum. In Moscow's regional calculations, the Kurds might prove to be more than great fighters. They could provide the Kremlin with further leverage." See Gönül Tol, "Why Is Turkey Silent on Russia's Cooperation with the Syrian Kurds?" *War on the Rocks*, December 19, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/why-is-turkey-silent-on-russias-cooperation-with-the-syrian-kurds/>.

75 See, for example, Aaron Stein, "Ankara's Look East: How Turkey's Warming Ties with Russia Threaten Its Place in the Transatlantic Community," *War on the Rocks*, December 27, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/ankaras-look-east-how-turkeys-warming-ties-with-russia-threaten-its-place-in-the-transatlantic-community/>.

Jordan and Lebanon, with Ankara failing to receive sufficient credit for managing an influx of more than 3 million people. In 2015, refugees began to flood onto Europe's shores. In a desperate bid to manage the flows, German Chancellor Angela Merkel negotiated a deal in March 2016 with Turkey's then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. In the Joint Action Plan adopted later that month at a EU-Turkey summit, Ankara agreed that Greece could return irregular migrants who reached its islands from Turkey. In exchange, the EU would increase resettlement of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey and provide 3 billion euros in financial support for Turkey's refugee population in 2016-17. Ankara also extracted promises from Brussels to accelerate visa liberalization and open a new accession chapter.⁷⁶

The deal has largely succeeded in breaking the business model of smugglers, who were transporting refugees in rubber dinghies several miles across the sea from the Turkish mainland to Greek islands.⁷⁷ Although Erdoğan periodically threatens to let refugees flood Europe again,⁷⁸ Ankara has upheld its end of the bargain by increasing border controls and taking back refugees from Greece. However, the return of refugees remains low, which the EU blames on a processing backlog in Greece. The EU has called for an increase in refugee resettlement to “demonstrate that an alternative legal route to the EU remains open for Syrian refugees in Turkey.”⁷⁹ There are separate challenges with the EU's internal relocation of refugees.⁸⁰ The EU has delivered promised funds to Ankara.⁸¹ However, the Turkish government complains about the standard EU procedure of earmarking money for specific projects and NGOs, as it would prefer to receive a bilateral cash transfer without strings attached. The EU plans to provide an additional 3 billion euros during the next financial period (2018-19) to support livelihoods and education for refugees.

76 European Commission, “Managing the Refugee Crisis—EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan: Implementation Report,” (Brussels, European Commission, 2016), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/managing_the_refugee_crisis_-_eu-turkey_join_action_plan_implementation_report_20160210_en.pdf.

77 The U.N. and humanitarian groups criticized the deal for failing to protect refugees and comply with international law. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi told the European Parliament he was “deeply concerned about any arrangement that would involve the blanket return of anyone from one country to another without spelling out the refugee protection safeguards under international law.” Amnesty International described the mass return of migrants as a “death blow to the right to seek asylum.” See Stephanie Nebehay and Gabriela Baczynska, “U.N., rights groups say EU-Turkey migrant deal may be illegal,” *Reuters*, March 8, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants/u-n-rights-groups-say-eu-turkey-migrant-deal-may-be-illegal-idUSKCNOWA1D4>.

78 See, for example, Safak Timur and Rod Nordland, “Erdoğan Threatens to Let Migrant Flood into Europe Resume,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/25/world/europe/turkey-receptayyip-erdogan-migrants-european-union.html>.

79 The EU's September 2017 progress report on implementation of the agreement notes that the return of refugees from Greek islands to Turkey has not improved, with the number of returns “much lower” than the number of arrivals. It blames an accumulated backlog of claims on the islands and insufficient pre-return processing and detention capacity. See European Commission, “Seventh Report on the Progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement,” (Brussels: European Commission, November 6, 2017), p. 5, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20170906_seventh_report_on_the_progress_in_the_implementation_of_the_eu-turkey_statement_en.pdf.

80 Tens of thousands of migrants became stuck in Greece as the first point of entry, while other European countries closed land borders to stop the flows. To alleviate the pressure on Greece, the EU revised rules requiring refugees to apply for asylum in the member state where they first landed and sought to distribute asylum-seekers across the union through a relocation program. By the time it ended in September 2017, a *Time* report found that only 21,531 asylum-seekers were relocated—although 63,000 spaces were promised through the quota system. See Aryn Baker, “These Syrian Refugees Made It to Europe. But There Still Isn't an Answer to the Crisis,” *Time*, December 18, 2017, <http://time.com/5068549/finding-home-crisis/>.

81 As of December 22, 2017, the European Commission reports that 72 projects have been contracted worth more than 2.75 billion euros, with more than 1.78 billion euros disbursed. See “The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey,” European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/migration_en.

The agreement has not succeeded in advancing Turkey's EU bid. Only one chapter on financial and budgetary provisions was opened as part of the deal.⁸² Turkey wanted five other chapters to be opened, all of which are blocked by Cyprus; these include two chapters on rule of law matters, which would give the EU more leverage to address Turkey's governance challenges. The biggest point of contention remains visa liberalization, as Turkish citizens are frustrated by their inability to travel freely to Europe. The EU insists Ankara must meet seven benchmarks, including revisions to its anti-terrorism law and data protection standards, judicial cooperation with all members (including Cyprus), an agreement with Europol, and anti-corruption measures.⁸³ Ankara has made some progress but owes Brussels information on remaining steps.⁸⁴

THREE POLICY OPTIONS

Given Turkey's deteriorating rule of law and questionable foreign policy decisions, this is an appropriate moment to reassess and recalibrate the relationship. As Johannes Hahn, European commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and enlargement negotiations, said in the summer of 2017, it is time to "discuss the strategic implications of [Turkey's] behaviour. Shrugging your shoulders is not a political strategy in the long run."⁸⁵ Government officials across Europe and in Washington are undertaking internal

policy reviews, while Turkey watchers on both sides of the Atlantic are debating viable options.



What makes Turkey such a policy conundrum is that its problematic leadership faces real threats, a fact that often seems lost on the West.

What makes Turkey such a policy conundrum is that its problematic leadership faces real threats, a fact that often seems lost on the West. Turkey has genuine concerns about

the political instability caused by Gülenists and the security risks posed by the PKK and YPG. Turkey also has grounds to question whether NATO prioritizes its border security and whether the EU wants it as a member.⁸⁶ A stark illustration of double standards is the West's response to terrorist attacks in alliance countries. There were three bombings in Istanbul alone in 2016, with the December attack killing 38 and wounding 166. Yet there was never a "je suis Istanbul" moment. At the same time,

82 "Accession conference with Turkey: Talks opened on Chapter 33 - Financial and budgetary provisions," *European Commission*, June 30, 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/06/30/turkey-accession-conference/>.

83 The EU Commission's September 2017 report on implementation of the agreement discusses the seven benchmarks. See European Commission, "Seventh Report on the Progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement," (Brussels: European Commission, November 6, 2017), p. 10 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20170906_seventh_report_on_the_progress_in_the_implementation_of_the_eu-turkey_statement_en.pdf.

84 The foreign minister planned to present a roadmap on remaining steps to EU officials in mid-December 2017, but his travel plans changed as Turkey focused on regional diplomacy following Trump's announcement recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

85 Daniel Brössler, "EU-Kommissar fordert neue Türkei-Politik," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 21, 2017, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/exklusiv-eu-kommissar-fordert-neue-tuerkei-politik-1.3634941>.

86 Although there has long been suspicion in Turkey about the United States, the current sentiment is particularly negative. In the 2017 Pew Global Survey, U.S. power and influence ranked as the top threat in only one country: Turkey (72 percent). This concern was eight points higher than the second-greatest concern, refugee displacement from countries like Iraq and Syria. See Dorothy Manevich and Hanyu Chwe, "Globally, more people see U.S. power and influence as a major threat," *Pew Research Center*, August 1, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/01/u-s-power-and-influence-increasingly-seen-as-threat-in-other-countries>.

Turkey's leadership is growing more authoritarian and moving the country away from democratic standards. In addition, Erdoğan's anti-Western rhetoric and objectionable international moves have led some in the United States and Europe to question whether he takes seriously the trans-Atlantic alliance.

The final section of this paper assesses policy options under consideration in the United States and Europe. While acknowledging that political realities often transcend simple classification, the main approaches can be described in three broad categories: abandonment, transactionalism, and engagement. In reviewing these options, the paper notes the limited tools available to multilateral institutions in managing errant members. A further difficulty is the growing disparity between the policy agenda of elites, the bureaucracies they manage, and the publics they represent. The paper makes the case for taking a long view in relations with Turkey, as this pre-election period will remain difficult, by remaining engaged in an effort to help preserve democracy and prospects for a better relationship in the future.

Abandonment

One school of thought recommends declaring Turkey a lost cause and cutting ties, a sentiment that has been applied to Turkey's current membership in NATO and its aspiring membership in the EU. While both organizations hold applicants to democratic standards, neither has an effective means of dealing with backsliding after countries join.

This approach is most extreme in relation to NATO, which Turkey joined in 1952 as part of the alliance's first expansion. Its geography has always been a compelling attribute, both because of its common border with the Soviet Union (now Russia) and its proximity to the Middle East. Turkey fields NATO's second largest army and is its third most populous member. While no senior politician or official has called for Turkey's expulsion from NATO, some analysts (especially on the right) make the argument when tensions spike.⁸⁷ Critics cite the alliance's founding treaty, which requires every member state to "safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law."⁸⁸ Yet NATO was created to deal with external threats and has no mechanism for expelling members. Over the course of its history, some member states have experienced coups and democratic backsliding; it is therefore unclear what criteria would determine rule of law adherence.

If NATO were to abandon Turkey, Ankara would be forced to redouble its efforts to align with other allies. In fact, perceived hedging by the West has likely contributed to Turkey's expanded regional engagements. Defense procurement negotiations with Moscow and Beijing, as well as its Syria diplomacy with Moscow and Tehran, demonstrate Ankara's openness to other options and its pragmatic approach to achieving its security objectives. Yet there are real risks to the alliance from a failed relationship. Although Turkey's strategic geography creates vulnerabilities for the West,

87 See, for example, French public intellectual Bernard-Henri Levy and Jonathan Schanzer of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (Semih Idiz, "No chance Turkey will be 'kicked out of NATO,'" *Al-Monitor*, November 11, 2014, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/11/turkey-syria-diplomats-nato.html>), Cato Institute senior fellows (Doug Bandow, "Turkey Should Be Thrown Out Of NATO," *Newsweek*, August 13, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/turkey-should-be-thrown-out-nato-489591> and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Is It Time to Expel Turkey from NATO?" *The National Interest*, December 4, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/it-time-expel-turkey-nato-14518>.)

88 "The North Atlantic Treaty," NATO, April 4, 1949, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

it also provides a bulwark against greater instability beyond its borders—including the fight against ISIS (as well as future radical groups that grow in unstable environments) and management of refugee flows into Europe. Russia, which is fomenting division across Europe and already taking advantage of Ankara's fractious relations within the trans-Atlantic alliance, would capitalize on a rupture.

The abandonment argument has gained more traction regarding Turkey's EU accession, as proponents note Turkey does not—and will not in the foreseeable future—meet the democratic criteria for membership.⁸⁹ However, there is a divide between political and bureaucratic assessments. Politicians have been most vocal in calls to end talks. In November 2016, the European Parliament passed a non-binding resolution calling for a “temporary freeze” (i.e., not opening new chapters).⁹⁰ In July 2017, it passed another non-binding resolution calling for the suspension of negotiations “if the constitutional reform package is implemented unchanged.”⁹¹ In contrast, civil servants are generally more supportive of preserving the process. The European Commission, which produces annual assessment reports on applicant countries, has never recommended ending talks. Its next report, due to be published in April 2018, is expected to be very tough but unlikely to advocate stopping the process.

The mood has grown dark in several Western European governments, particularly where Turkey has become a domestic political issue, with increasing talk of “partnership” arrangements instead of membership. Turkey featured in Germany's fall 2017 election campaign amid increasingly contentious bilateral relations.⁹² Social Democrat Martin Schulz pledged to end talks, which prompted Chancellor Angela Merkel to acknowledge talks should be paused and promise to seek a common position with EU counterparts.⁹³ Amid coalition negotiations, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel mused in late December 2017 about “alternative forms of closer cooperation” if membership is no longer an option and suggested the U.K.'s post-Brexit deal as a possible model.⁹⁴ When French President Emmanuel Macron hosted Erdoğan in Paris in early January 2018, he said: “it is clear that recent developments and choices do not allow any progression of the process in which we are engaged.” He proposed “a partnership” short of EU membership that would maintain relations with Ankara and anchor the Turkish people

89 See, for example, Steven Blockmans and Sinem Yilmaz, “Why the EU should terminate accession negotiations with Turkey,” *Centre for European Policy Studies*, April 19, 2017, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/why-eu-should-terminate-accession-negotiations-turkey>.

90 “Freeze EU accession talks with Turkey until it halts repression, urge MEPs,” *European Parliament*, November 24, 2016, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20161117IPR51549/freeze-eu-accession-talks-with-turkey-until-it-halts-repression-urge-meps>.

91 Barin Kayaoglu, “EU parliament votes to halt accession talks with Turkey,” *Al-Monitor*, July 6, 2017, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/eu-parliament-votes-end-turkey-negotiations.html>.

92 German frustration with Turkey grew last year amid deteriorating relations. Ankara reacted negatively to a June 2016 parliamentary resolution referring to the Armenian “genocide,” employed hateful rhetoric during its April 2017 referendum campaign, and refused to allow a parliamentary delegation (containing a pro-Kurdish member) to visit troops at Incirlik air base in spring 2017. The last straw was Turkey's arrest of a German NGO worker, which prompted the German government to conduct a policy review. Berlin updated its travel advice to warn German nationals of the risk of arbitrary detention and its limited capacity to help; announced a review of German state guarantees for financing exports to Turkey and said it could no longer guarantee German corporate exports; and withdrew its support for a near-term upgrade of the EU-Turkey customs union.

93 This marked a shift in party perspective, as the SPD has historically supported EU membership, whereas Merkel's CDU has long preferred a “privileged partnership.”

94 Saim Saeed, “Sigmar Gabriel: Post-Brexit Britain can be model for Turkey and Ukraine,” *Politico*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/sigmar-gabriel-post-brexit-britain-can-be-model-for-turkey-and-ukraine/>.

in Europe.⁹⁵ Similarly, the new Dutch coalition—a four-party bloc seven months in the making in an effort to stave off far-right challenges—cited “no prospect of agreement” on Turkish accession given human rights and rule of law developments. Noting that the EU decided against terminating negotiations, it plans to “seek an alternative form of cooperation with Turkey.”⁹⁶ The new coalition in Austria between conservative and far-right parties has also taken a hard line, stating it will seek EU allies to cancel Turkey’s EU accession negotiations.

The United States has been a vocal proponent of Turkish accession to the EU since the 1990s. It saw the transformative power of the EU on applicants’ domestic politics, recognized Turkey’s strategic utility within the union, and stood to benefit from a stable European border with a turbulent Middle East. During President Obama’s first summit with EU leaders in April 2009, he noted the importance of partnering with Muslims in fighting intolerance. He said: “Moving forward toward Turkish membership in the EU would be an important signal of your commitment to this agenda and ensure that we continue to anchor Turkey firmly in Europe.”⁹⁷ For years, the United States contributed to Turkey’s membership cause through active efforts to resolve one of the obstacles: the Cyprus conflict. However, the pro-accession talking point has been noticeably absent from American scripts in recent years amid its own deteriorating relations and the receding prospect of membership.

Arguably, it may be more intellectually honest to end the current charade of Turkish accession. At best, membership is a distant prospect given the state of Turkey’s democracy. At worst, it is questionable whether some member states ever intended to invite a populous, Muslim-majority country to

join the club. The EU made some poor decisions over the years that impeded the process when Turkey was a more interested and serious candidate.⁹⁸ It is also debatable whether Erdoğan was genuinely prepared to implement reforms, given their political requirements. Yet neither side wants to be the first to walk away from the altar. There would be a political and economic cost to both sides for ending the accession process; there

Neither side wants to be the first to walk away from the altar. There would be a cost to both sides for ending the EU accession process; there is no cost to keeping it.



95 “Macron tells Erdogan: No chance of Turkey joining EU,” *BBC*, January 5, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42586108>.

96 Government of the Netherlands, “Coalition Agreement ‘Confidence in the Future,’” (Amsterdam: Government of the Netherlands, October 10, 2017), <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2017/10/10/coalition-agreement-confidence-in-the-future>.

97 French and German leaders on the center-right, who preferred a partnership model, were not persuaded. See Kerstin Gemlich and Mark John, “Paris, Berlin bristle as Obama backs Turkey for EU,” *Reuters*, April 5, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-obama-europe-turkey-sb/paris-berlin-bristle-as-obama-backs-turkey-for-eu-idUSTRE53421U20090405>.

98 In her helpful report on the challenges facing EU-Turkey relations, Laura Batalla—secretary general of the European Parliament’s Turkey Forum—details missteps. She cites advocacy by Angela Merkel’s CDU and Nicolas Sarkozy (then-French interior minister and prospective presidential candidate) for a privileged partnership with Turkey instead of full membership—before negotiations even began. When Sarkozy became president in 2007, he blocked the opening of five negotiating chapters. There are also challenges related to Cyprus, which joined the EU in May 2004; one week earlier, referenda were held in both communities on reunification proposals, which Turkish Cypriots supported and Greek Cypriots opposed. The European Council blocked eight chapters in 2006 stemming from Turkey’s failure to recognize the Republic of Cyprus, then Cyprus blocked six more chapters in December 2009. The lack of a credible process removed Turkish incentive for reform. See Laura Batalla, “Turkey and EU at a Crossroads: How to Fix a Wrecked Relationship,” *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, July 7, 2017, <https://eu.boell.org/en/2017/07/07/turkey-and-eu-crossroads-how-fix-wrecked-relationship>.

is no cost to keeping it. Erdoğan is loath to acknowledge Turkey is unwanted in its current state, telling party leaders in October 2017: “Europe continues to stall, but we remain patient. You will be the ones to leave the table, not us. If you are honest, make your statement and let’s finish this.”⁹⁹ In turn, the EU recognizes the political capital Erdoğan would gain domestically if it were the one to terminate the process.

EU accession provides a useful framework for efforts to keep Turkey anchored in a Euro-Atlantic community based on shared values, even if Ankara doesn’t always live up to them. It also provides an agreed set of benchmarks for judging Turkey’s performance—a tool that helps not just the EU, but Turkish democrats as well. European leaders frame critiques of Ankara’s domestic politics in accession terms; for example, European Commission leaders said the constitutional reforms would be assessed in light of Turkey’s obligations as an EU candidate country.¹⁰⁰ This helps explain why Greece, one of the EU members with the most challenging relationship with Turkey, has defended the process. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, in response to Germany’s election debate over accession, said stopping the talks would be a “tactical and strategic mistake.” He argued this would only benefit Erdoğan, as the process requires measures for “the needed democratization of the country.”¹⁰¹

In the near term, the EU seems unlikely to end the accession process. However, it is taking steps to signal its growing concern about domestic trends. In October 2017, the European Council discussed Turkey; it did not reach a decision on talks but agreed to review financial support. Council President Donald Tusk said “we want to keep the door open to Ankara, but the current reality in Turkey is making this difficult.”¹⁰² In late November, the EU adopted its 2018 budget that cut 105 million euros of Turkey’s pre-accession funding, given concerns over democracy, rule of law, human rights, and press freedom; it held in reserve an additional 70 million euros until Turkey makes “measurable sufficient improvements” in these areas.¹⁰³ (The EU committed 4.45 billion euros for Turkey from 2014-20.)¹⁰⁴

Transactionalism

A second approach prioritizes Western interests, accepting that Turkey may not be a reliable ally but recognizing that its geography makes it strategically important. Rather than attempting to undo Ankara’s authoritarian drift and promote adherence to Western values, this school argues that the United States and EU should instead focus on pragmatic exchanges that address immediate- and medium-term political, economic, and defense requirements. Transactionalism was the buzzword of 2017 think tank

99 Ayla Jean Yackley, “Turkey claims ‘no need’ for US, EU as Western ties deteriorate,” *Al-Monitor*, October 16, 2017, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/10/erdogan-turkey-does-not-need-united-states.html>.

100 “Statement on the referendum in Turkey,” *European Union External Action Service*, April 16, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/24709/Statement%20on%20the%20referendum%20in%20Turkey.

101 “Ending EU talks with Turkey would be a ‘mistake,’ says Greek PM,” *Ekathimerini*, September 10, 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/221540/article/ekathimerini/news/ending-eu-talks-with-turkey-would-be-a-mistake-says-greek-pm>.

102 Donald Tusk, “Remarks by President Donald Tusk on the European Council meetings and the Leaders’ Agenda,” (speech, Brussels, October 20, 2017), <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/10/20/tusk-final-remarks-european-council/>.

103 “2018 EU Budget Adopted,” *European Council*, November 30, 2017, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/11/30/2018-eu-budget-adopted/>.

104 For details of EU assistance, see “Turkey - financial assistance under IPA II,” European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/turkey_en.

reports on Turkey. For example, Aaron Stein argued: “The trajectory of the relationship suggests a need for the United States to get acquainted with ‘transactionalism,’ wherein the majority of the bilateral talks are simply aimed at managing a troubled but important relationship. ... The conclusion, of course, is the need to set aside the idea that the glue holding the alliance together is one of shared values, in favour of a narrow set of shared interests.”¹⁰⁵

Western leaders have several pressing agenda items with Turkey. The top priority for the EU remains managing the refugee crisis. The second issue of interest to Europe as well as the United States is transnational terrorism, including the lasting defeat of ISIS, the return of foreign fighters, and the potential emergence of new threats. Third, numerous regional challenges require Turkish cooperation. The most immediate is Syria, where Turkey (along with Russia and Iran) is overseeing the Astana peace process.¹⁰⁶ Resolution of Turkey’s domestic fight with the PKK would pay dividends in solving related problems in Syria and Iraq. Across the region, Turkey can play a role in addressing post-independence referendum Iraqi Kurdistan, Qatar’s dispute with its Gulf neighbors, and Iran’s regional activities, to name just a few. Within the Mediterranean, Turkey has the potential to become a regional energy hub and is key to resolving the Cyprus conflict. Finally, there are economic interests, given the volume of EU trade and investment as well as the potential for more American business.

To a certain extent, a transactional approach is already happening for pragmatic reasons. Irrespective of Erdoğan’s disregard for trans-Atlantic values, Western allies have an interest in maintaining regional security, resolving the Syria conflict, and addressing the refugee crisis. French President Emmanuel Macron said in September 2017 that Turkey had “worryingly overstepped the mark in ways that cannot be ignored,” yet he stressed the need to “avoid a split because it’s a vital partner in many crises we all face, notably the immigration challenge and the terrorist threat.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, this approach comes naturally to the Trump administration. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, in a May 2017 speech to State Department employees, distinguished American interests from values. Conditioning others to adopt our values, he said, “really creates obstacles to our ability to advance our national security interests, our economic interests.”¹⁰⁸

Yet there are limits to this approach, particularly when transactionalism is understood as the West either abandoning efforts to encourage its partners to practice good governance or ignoring rule of law constraints itself. For example, Western countries cannot hand over Gülen or accused Gülenists to Turkey without legally compelling evidence of wrongdoing or assurances of fair trials. Similarly, Turkey’s attempt at “hostage diplomacy” reinforces the need for discussions about judicial standards. Even some proponents of a transactional approach acknowledge the challenge of decoupling

105 Aaron Stein, “Turkey: Managing tensions and options to engage,” (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2017), <http://www.publications.atlanticcouncil.org/turkey-managing-options/>.

106 There are currently two tracks of Syria peace negotiations. The Geneva process is sponsored by the United Nations. It put forward a political settlement based on U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, which includes benchmarks such as the formation of a transitional government to replace Assad. It has been criticized as a top-down approach that fails to address the complexities on the ground. The Astana process is led by Russia, Iran, and Turkey—who each have significant battlefield interests. It seeks to devise interim solutions between the warring parties, with its most significant achievement being an agreement to establish four de-escalation zones in Syria.

107 John Irish, “France’s Macron urges continued EU ties with Turkey,” *Reuters*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-turkey/frances-macron-urges-continued-eu-ties-with-turkey-idUSKCN1BIOSQ>.

108 Rex Tillerson, “Remarks to U.S. Department of State Employees,” (speech, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, May 3, 2017), <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/05/270620.htm>.

values from interests. For example, Soner Cagaptay and former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey James Jeffrey argued in a policy brief for the incoming Trump administration that the United States “should adopt a transactional approach to Turkey focused on common security interests, while emphasizing, and to some degree negotiating to make progress on, democratic liberal values.”¹⁰⁹ Arguably, this caveat makes the approach less transactional.

Most critically, the United States and the EU should not refrain from defending their values—especially to an ally. Erdoğan may claim that Turkey no longer cares about Western critiques, ignore rebukes over its domestic politics, and accuse the West of hypocrisy and double standards. Rather than engaging in moral relativism, the United States and EU should point to pluralistic civic cultures that foster open debate and cite strong democratic institutions that enable oversight. Engaging in transactional politics can undercut Western credibility and reinforce the accusation of double standards.¹¹⁰

Engagement

A third approach is engagement. Turkey’s geography, size, identity as a Muslim-majority democracy, and status as a long-time NATO ally make it a unique partner in a turbulent region. Those who argue against engagement overlook the degree of political, security, economic, social, and cultural integration between Turkey and the West due to trade, tourism, immigration, and other exchanges; these connections require a more nuanced and supple style of relationship management. As governments do not manage these

relationships alone, an engagement approach encourages interaction with all levels of society. Stated most simply, bilateral relations are ultimately between countries and not their leaders.



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The starting point of engagement is recognition of Turkey’s security needs.

The United States and Europe cannot give Ankara everything it demands, but sustained discussion of its concerns builds trust and provides reassurance. The challenge is that Erdoğan’s authoritarianism and disrespect for the rule of law can undermine his case, even where there is a bona fide argument to be made about a threat.¹¹¹ It is appropriate for the Turkish government to ask the West for assistance in combating terrorism; it is not acceptable for the government to expect Western tolerance when it stifles legitimate opposition. The policy goal is negotiating the gray zone between those two extremes. This will remain difficult for the United States and EU on judicial matters related to Gülen,

109 James Jeffrey and Sonar Cagaptay, “U.S. Policy on Turkey,” (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2017), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/Transition2017-Turkey.pdf>.

110 Admittedly, such efforts are complicated when the White House gives the impression that it does not care about democracy and appears willing to explore extrajudicial means of resolving problems. Michael Flynn, former campaign adviser and briefly U.S. national security adviser under President Trump, was allegedly offered \$15 million by representatives of the Turkish government to return Gülen to Turkey from the United States. Special Counsel Robert Mueller is reportedly examining whether Flynn discussed ways of freeing Reza Zarrab, a Turkish-Iranian businessman accused of evading Iran sanctions, from court charges. See Carol E. Lee and Julia Ainsley, “Mueller Probing Possible Deal Between Turks, Flynn During Presidential Transition,” *NBC News*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/mueller-probing-possible-deal-between-turks-flynn-during-presidential-transition-n819616>.

111 Kemal Kirişçi’s new book argues that domestic and regional realities are edging Turkey toward improving its relations with the West, though it notes rising authoritarianism and anti-Western rhetoric remain challenges to re-engagement. See Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey and the West: Fault Lines in a Troubled Alliance* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

absent legally persuasive evidence. However, they should seek to understand Turkey's views of the threat, as it is not currently well understood beyond Turkish borders. The West should be unambiguous in encouraging the Turkish government to resume peace talks with the PKK; this fight is destructive to its domestic politics and hinders efforts to stabilize the wider region, as seen most recently in Afrin. This is easier said than done, as the pre-election environment appears to make Erdoğan more interested in exploiting the conflict to gain favor with his nationalist base. Yet Western policymakers wrestling with Syria should take a much more holistic approach that accounts for the crosscutting complexity of Kurdish issues.

There are limits to relationships rooted primarily in security cooperation, which is an unhealthy dynamic created by the consuming nature of the Syria conflict. The United States and Europe should recognize the multifaceted nature of their relationships with Turkey and widen the aperture of their engagements. At the political level, this should involve interaction across all levels of government.

- There are complications at the presidential level in the United States and Turkey. Erdoğan initially had high hopes for Trump, whom he expected to correct the perceived failings of his predecessor (e.g., extradite Gülen, cease YPG support, stop the Zarrab trial). Although Trump did not take these steps, he has been silent about Turkish domestic politics and seemingly admires Erdoğan's leadership style.¹¹² As Erdoğan is the decider, key messages must be conveyed directly to him; yet Trump instinctively assumes a transactional approach and is less likely to raise governance concerns.¹¹³ As a result, there is utility in engaging other political levels that are heavier on substance and lighter on legitimacy-endowing ceremony. For example, the November 2017 meeting between Vice President Mike Pence and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım was useful; its readout included the first White House comment on Turkish rule of law.¹¹⁴ Among Trump's cabinet members, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis seems particularly attuned to the importance of repairing ties, while Secretary of State Rex Tillerson communicates as needed with his Turkish counterpart.
- Within American, European, and Turkish bureaucracies, officials have recognized the importance of the relationships and worked to preserve channels of engagement amid the vagaries of politics. For example, the State Department has held numerous dialogues in recent years at the senior official level to discuss a range of issues with Turkish colleagues (i.e., the Balkans, energy, policy planning). Similarly, the European Commission has organized dialogues for senior Turkish and European officials on a range of sectoral matters (in December 2017 alone, meetings were

112 Although Erdoğan has largely refrained from criticizing the Trump administration's actions not specific to Turkey (such as the travel ban on citizens from several Muslim-majority countries), he strongly opposed the December 2017 announcement recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. He declared the issue "a red line for Muslims" and led a U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning the decision.

113 The White House readout of Trump's January 24, 2018 call with Erdoğan, which the Turkish side contested, marked Trump's first comments on Turkish rule of law: "President Trump also expressed concern about destructive and false rhetoric coming from Turkey, and about United States citizens and local employees detained under the prolonged State of Emergency in Turkey." See "Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey," White House, January 24, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/readout-president-donald-j-trumps-call-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-turkey-4/>.

114 "The Vice President expressed deep concern over the arrests of American citizens, Mission Turkey local staff, journalists, and members of civil society under the state of emergency and urged transparency and due process in the resolution of their cases." "Readout of the Vice President's Meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım," White House, November 9, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/readout-vice-presidents-meeting-turkish-prime-minister-binali-yildirim/>.

held on transportation, counterterrorism, and economics). In mid-January 2018, Germany and Turkey held two days of high-level meetings to discuss security and counterterrorism measures, including steps to address the PKK and Gülen.¹¹⁵

- In the United States and Europe, parliaments have effectively played the role of “bad cop” by making pointed critiques. This paper has cited recent European Parliament resolutions addressing negative developments.¹¹⁶ In the United States, Congress has adopted an increasingly critical stance with a recent focus on media freedom, the attack by Erdoğan’s bodyguards on protesters outside the Turkish ambassador’s residence in May 2017, and concern about the purchase of Russian military equipment. For example, 73 senators sent a letter to then-Secretary of State John Kerry in early 2015 that expressed concern about government suppression of free press.¹¹⁷ In June 2017, the House of Representatives passed a non-binding resolution condemning the bodyguards’ attack¹¹⁸ and Senators moved to block the sale of small arms to the bodyguard unit involved.¹¹⁹ Notably, there have not been calls to curtail relations; members have largely struck a balance between supporting the country and condemning abuses by its leadership.

Another strand of this approach involves expanded economic engagement. While this would benefit business on both sides of the Atlantic, economic drivers could also be used as a means of influencing governance. One of Erdoğan’s greatest political vulnerabilities and the West’s main point of leverage is the Turkish economy. The current domestic environment—including an indefinite state of emergency and increasingly politicized judicial system—is a significant drag on foreign investment, while Erdoğan’s anti-Western rhetoric discourages the trade needed to sustain his country’s growth. With a transactional approach, Turkey will pocket the positive aspects it likes and ignore the negative ones it dislikes. However, a rules-based approach to deeper trade and investment (which Turkey wants) would require political reforms (which the West wants).

There have long been calls to upgrade the EU-Turkey customs union. The existing agreement dates to 1995 and covers limited economic sectors (i.e., manufactured goods and processed agricultural products). Ankara was vocal during U.S.-EU negotiations over the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which would have disadvantaged Turkey by allowing the United States to export goods to Turkey via the EU without opening its markets to Turkish goods.¹²⁰ An upgraded customs union would extend the agreement’s scope to include service industries, agriculture more broadly,

115 “Turkey, Germany kick off two-day security dialogue to counter Gülen, PKK,” *Hürriyet*, January 18, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-germany-kick-off-two-day-security-dialogue-to-counter-gulen-pkk-125959>.

116 See footnotes 90 and 91.

117 “Schumer & 70+ senate colleagues call on State Dept. to address ongoing intimidation of media and censorship of the press in turkey under president Erdogan’s administration,” Charles E. Schumer, United States Senator for New York, March 18, 2015, <https://www.schumer.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/schumer-and-70-senate-colleagues-call-on-state-dept-to-address-ongoing-intimidation-of-media-and-censorship-of-the-press-in-turkey-under-president-erdogans-administration>.

118 “Condemning the violence against peaceful protesters outside the Turkish Ambassador’s residence on May 16, 2017, and calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice and measures to be taken to prevent similar incidents in the future, H.R. 354, 115th Cong. (2017), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-resolution/354/text>.

119 “US halts arms sales to Erdogan bodyguards: Congress,” *Agence France-Presse*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.defencetalk.com/us-halts-arms-sales-to-erdogan-bodyguards-congress-70485/>.

120 For more background on Turkey and TTIP, see Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkey and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership: Boosting the Model Partnership with the United States,” (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, September 2013), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Turkey-and-the-Transatlantic-Trade-and-Investment-Partnership.pdf>.

and public procurement. It would also require Turkish reforms in dispute resolution, state aid, procurement, and services regulation. These measures would improve Turkey's governance by requiring compliance with a regulatory framework supported by enforcement rules; developments on the economic front could lead to rule of law improvements in the political sphere. Rather than viewing a customs union upgrade as a reward for bad behavior, the EU could force Turkey to decide whether the benefits outweigh surrendering discretionary management of its economy. As Sinan Ülgen (a Carnegie scholar who helped negotiate the original customs union) argues, "The Customs Union is the only realistic rules-based framework that can underpin the EU's future engagement with Turkey."¹²¹

European officials have advocated this approach, with the Commission submitting a mandate for trade negotiations to the Council in December 2016. However, as this paper has noted, the political climate makes enhanced relations a dubious prospect in the near term. Germany expressed opposition in the fall of 2017 amid its bilateral dispute with Turkey,¹²² although Foreign Minister Gabriel suggested in December 2017 that the EU could consider "a new, closer form of the customs union" instead of membership.¹²³ The February 2018 coalition agreement between the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party ruled out opening new chapters or closing existing ones, given backsliding on democracy and rule of law; it also said progress on visa liberalization and updates to the customs union will only be possible after Turkey has met the necessary requirements.¹²⁴

The United States has periodically attempted to strengthen its economic ties with Turkey, which remains an under-developed component of the bilateral relationship. Obama sought to expand links early in his administration but the effort never gained traction.¹²⁵ Trump, by nature supportive of investment opportunities for American business, noted discussions to "reinvigorate" trade and commercial ties during his May 2017 meeting with Erdoğan.¹²⁶ Although the United States lacks the rules-based component that makes Europe's economic engagement a potential driver of political change, there is still a role for U.S. firms and organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce to play in keeping rule of law on the agenda.

121 Sinan Ülgen, "Trade As Turkey's EU Anchor," *Carnegie Europe*, December 13, 2017, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/12/13/trade-as-turkey-s-eu-anchor-pub-75002>. Nathalie Tocci, director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali and special adviser to EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, has also been a vocal advocate of this approach.

122 Ankara's decision to lodge a complaint with Interpol about 681 German companies having links to terrorists, as well as a separate complaint to German police alleging 68 German businesses were affiliated with Gülen, was not helpful in this regard. See Jörg Diehl and Matthias Gebauer, "Erdoğan zieht Terrorliste zurück," *Der Spiegel*, July 24, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/tuerkei-recep-tayyip-erdogan-zieht-terrorliste-gegen-daimler-und-basf-zurueck-a-1159404.html>.

123 Saim Saeed, "Sigmar Gabriel: Post-Brexit Britain can be model for Turkey and Ukraine," *Politico*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/sigmar-gabriel-post-brexit-britain-can-be-model-for-turkey-and-ukraine/>.

124 Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD, "Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa. Eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland. Ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land," February 7, 2018, p. 150, <https://www.cdu.de/koalitionsvertrag-2018>.

125 The White House outlined proposed areas of cooperation. See "Fact Sheet: U.S.-Turkey Economic Partnership," Obama White House, May 16, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/16/fact-sheet-us-turkey-economic-partnership>.

126 "Remarks by President Trump and President Erdoğan of Turkey in Joint Statement," White House, May 16, 2017, <https://tr.usembassy.gov/remarks-president-trump-president-erdogan-turkey-joint-statement/>.

Finally, the United States and EU should continue engaging Turkish civil society. It has been weakened by recent crackdowns, with activists weighing the risks of action as some colleagues are jailed, but it remains unbroken.¹²⁷ In June 2017, hundreds of thousands of protesters marched on the streets of Istanbul to demand justice and accountability in the largest demonstration since the 2013 Gezi Park protests.¹²⁸ Earlier that month, the government withdrew a proposal to allow developers to build industrial facilities in olive groves following public opposition; this was a small but not insignificant legislative victory, showing that the government is still responsive to civic pressure.

Amid fractious political relations, it is particularly important to preserve people-to-people ties. The United States and the EU should continue backing international, European, and regional mechanisms with established programs in Turkey. As a joint think tank report notes: “broadening engagement to include issues that are both normative and pertinent to Turkey’s economic situation—such as rule of law, educational reform, and women’s participation—could be productive.”¹²⁹ In addition, cultural and educational exchange programs should be expanded to bring Turkish citizens—ranging from youth and entrepreneurs to activists and parliamentarians—outside the country to engage their Western counterparts on shared interests.



Western governments should retain a sense of humility and realism about democracy promotion efforts.

Western governments should retain a sense of humility and realism about democracy promotion efforts. The provision of financial support is challenging under the watchful eye of the Turkish government. There is also suspicion within Turkish society about the effectiveness of and motivation behind

foreign aid. For example, Bilge Yabancı notes: “Government-dependent [civil society organizations] are not interested in Western donors’ democracy promotion agendas. And the transformation of autonomous civil society under selective repression into loosely organized, ad hoc and issue-specific organizations limits its ability to offer an effective site for political and civic dissent in Turkey.”¹³⁰ Turkish citizens must ultimately wage the fight for the future of their own democracy.

That said, Western political leaders can best support the work of democracy activists by consistently addressing Turkish behavior that is incompatible with trans-Atlantic values and stressing its negative impact on cooperation. Governments never like to be criticized publicly by foreign powers, but Erdoğan has effectively used external reprimand to foment

127 Özge Zihnioğlu argues the protests of 2017 demonstrate civic activists’ continued ability to mobilize and withstand, to a degree, unfavorable conditions. See Özge Zihnioğlu, “Resuming Civic Activism in Turkey,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 13, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/12/13/resuming-civic-activism-in-turkey-pub-74987>.

128 In May 2013, protesters took to the streets to oppose the proposed demolition of Gezi Park in Istanbul to build a shopping center. The heavy-handed police response prompted hundreds of thousands to join the demonstration, with protests spreading across the country. What began as a peaceful sit-in by environmentalists became a statement against growing authoritarianism.

129 Center for American Progress, the Istanbul Policy Center, and the Istituto Affari Internazionali, “Trends in Turkish Civil Society,” July 10, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2017/07/10/435475/trends-turkish-civil-society/>.

130 See Bilge Yabancı, “Turkey is getting more authoritarian. Here’s why funding nongovernmental organizations won’t help democracy,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/12/21/turkey-is-getting-more-authoritarian-heres-why-funding-nongovernmental-organizations-wont-help-democracy/>.

anti-Western sentiment at home.¹³¹ While this creates an inclination to refrain from public rebuke, perpetual silence leads observers (including civil society) to conclude rule of law issues have been dropped from the bilateral agenda. Clear and targeted public censure is warranted in response to egregious actions, both in principle (as the United States and EU lose credibility when they fail to comment) and to counter inaccurate reports by pro-government press (particularly amid government crackdowns on opposition outlets and social media). This should be coupled with more detailed discussion through private diplomatic channels in Ankara and capitals.

Critics of the engagement approach may argue it provides Erdoğan many carrots but employs few sticks, which could enable him to use these relationships to reap Western economic rewards, while at the same time repressing domestic civil society and pursuing closer relations with Russia and Iran that undermine American and European interests. There should certainly be consequences for problematic actions (i.e., sanctions for violating arms sales legislation, criminal charges against bodyguards who attacks protesters). However, the West should also be realistic about its capacity to alter Erdoğan's behavior at this stage. The greatest leverage is economic, which the EU is best placed to deploy given the scale of the trade and investment relationship. Amid the current turbulence, the focus should be helping Turkey's democracy survive in the longer term.

CONCLUSION

The only actors who benefit from the United States and Europe curbing ties significantly with Turkey are those who do not want the country facing west. There are strains in Turkey's relationship with its trans-Atlantic partners, divergent

views on regional threats, and concerns about Ankara's deteriorating rule of law. The unfortunate reality is that relations are unlikely to improve in the coming year, especially before parliamentary and presidential elections that Erdoğan hopes will consolidate his power. The United States, EU, and NATO need to buckle up for the bumpy ride ahead. In that context, constructive and principled engagement—including cooperation where possible on shared challenges, frank public and private comment on governance concerns, use of economic leverage, and expanded people-to-people ties—remains the best way to maintain relations between countries and preserve the possibility of better relations in the future.

The only actors who benefit from the United States and Europe curbing ties significantly with Turkey are those who do not want the country facing west.



131 Marc Pierini—a Carnegie scholar and former EU ambassador to Turkey—notes Erdoğan's anti-Western rhetoric is not a new development in Turkish politics. He writes: "lambasting Europe and the United States resonates deep within Turkey's collective narrative since the creation of the republic and, more importantly, is key to salvaging the current leadership's fragile majority." See Marc Pierini, "A Tale of a Dual Turkey," *Carnegie Europe*, December 18, 2017, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/75048>.

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