

Challenging Friends: Türkiye-U.S. Relations

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Abstract

This article analyzes the underlying wellsprings for the major strains that disrupt the U.S. - Türkiye relationship. These strains arise from the U.S. support of the PYD/YPG/YPJ in Northern Syria as boots on the ground against ISIL; Türkiye's purchase of the Russian S400 missile defense system; Türkiye's energy imports from Russia and Iran; the U.S. refusal to extradite Fetullah Gülen; and Washington's complaints about the AKP government's anti-democratic tendencies. This article analyzes why and how some of these issues have evoked strong ire and distrust on both sides and others much less so by employing a paradigm based on five integrated variables: Türkiye's military and economic capabilities; the availability of its natural resources, particularly energy; as well as threats to the legitimacy of the AKP regime and to the society's ethnic and religious cohesion. Utilizing the paradigm, the article proposes measures that will increase the opportunities to build a firmer partnership between the U.S. and Türkiye.


Keywords: Türkiye-U.S. Relations, national security, terrorism, NATO

1. Introduction

In analyzing Türkiye-U.S. Relations in the decade of the 2020s this paper poses two essential questions: How do we explain the ongoing relations between the two nations despite the multiplicity of issues over which they disagree that might otherwise rupture the relationship? In the light of the explanations for the persistence of their relations, what possibility exists for the two nations to resolve most, if not all, of their disputes to achieve a more harmonious relationship?

2. The Prominent Türkiye – U.S. Disputes

The persistent U.S.-Türkiye disputes have been well noted within Washington, including for example in a catalogue of the US “problems” with Türkiye reported by the Senate’s Committee on Foreign Relations.¹ The disputes may be summarized as follows. I list them in the descending order of their risks to the disruption of the relationship, the highest risk first.

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¹ See, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy on Turkey: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Seventeenth Congress, First Session, July 21, 2021* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2021). A more balanced and academic view can be found in Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas, *Turkey (Türkiye): Major Issues and U.S. Relations* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2024). <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R44000.pdf>

1. The most intractable dispute involves their opposing policies concerning Syria. The U.S. maintains a small contingent of about 900 ground troops in the area of Syria's oil production and a small contingent at the Al Tanf base on the border with Iraq. The troops support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition of militias led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG)/Women's Protection Units (YPJ) under the direction of its political wing, the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The U.S. uses the SDF to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Ankara also maintains forces in northeast Syria to contain the PYD and push the YPG back from the Turkish border. The Turkish forces and their Arab allies clash from time to time with the SDF.² The risk of these clashing military operations for US-Türkiye relations was illustrated when the US on October 5, 2023 shot down a Turkish drone flying too close to US troops.³ The underlying problem is that Türkiye views the PYD and YPG as terrorist affiliates of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), while the US, which also recognizes the PKK as terrorists, remains silent on classifying the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization. Neither side appears to agree on how to resolve this issue short of an overarching resolution of the Syrian civil war, which is problematic in and of itself.
2. Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system has met with loud outcries from the US and its NATO partners. They stress the S-400's lack of interoperability with NATO's air defense systems and the risk that the S-400s would undermine the stealth effectiveness of F-35 jets, to Russia's benefit.⁴ The US retaliated by canceling Türkiye's membership in the F-35 program and imposing sanctions on Türkiye's defense procurement agency under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). However, the Biden Administration has since softened the harshness of this response, presumably because of the value of Türkiye's role in opposing Russia's war with Ukraine. The Administration has been negotiating with President Erdoğan to apply Türkiye's F-35 deposit to purchase more F-16s and upgrading Türkiye's aging F-16 fleet in exchange for unblocking Sweden's membership in NATO.⁵ Congressional opposition held up the F-16 deal, to which Erdoğan responded by requiring Turkish parliamentary approval for acceptance of Sweden into NATO.⁶ With Turkey's approval of Sweden's membership in NATO, the President, Congress and the State Department all approved the sale of 40 new F16s and upgrade kits for Türkiye's 79 existing F16s.
3. Apart from incentivizing negotiations with NATO over air defenses, the S-400 acquisition has been viewed as another illustration of Türkiye's "balancing act" with Russia. As part of Erdoğan's promotion of "strategic autonomy," i.e., an independent foreign policy,

² Gregory Aftandilian, "Syrian Kurds in an Increasingly Precarious Position," *Arab Center Washington DC*, October 18, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/syrian-kurds-in-an-increasingly-precious-position/>

³ Tara Copp, Matthew Lee, and Lolita C. Baldor, "US shoots down Turkish drone in Syria; came close to troops," *AP News*, October 05, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/syria-turkey-shot-down-06b5b407e91ffb3d41096bbfe5f1ef75>

⁴ Interestingly, Greece owns a Russian S-300 system, a source of embarrassment for Türkiye's S-400 debacle with the US. After refusing to ship the system to Ukraine, Greece promised to work with the US to replace the system with US weapons. See, Vassilis Nedos, "No transfer of S-300s to Ukraine," *ekathimerini.com*, February 22, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1205258/no-transfer-of-s-300s-to-ukraine/>

⁵ Rich Outzen and Pinar Dost, "A looming US-Turkey F-16 deal is about much more than Sweden's NATO bid," *The Atlantic Council*, July 8, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/turkeysource/a-looming-us-turkey-f-16-deal-is-about-much-more-than-swedens-nato-bid/>

⁶ Hüseyin Hayatsever, "Sweden's NATO accession and Turkey's bid to buy F-16 jets should be kept separate, Erdogan says," *Reuters*, September 10, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/swedens-nato-accession-turkeys-bid-buy-f-16-jets-should-be-kept-separate-erdogan-2023-09-10/>

his balancing act creates a modus vivendi with Russia in Syria and assures the flow of Russian oil and gas into Türkiye. The Republic also helps Russia to evade sanctions by cooperating in transiting Russian oil and gas into Europe. Nevertheless, the US has not raised Türkiye's violation of sanctions to obtain Russian energy to the level of an intractable rupture of the US – Türkiye relationship.⁷ Moreover, there appear to be built-in limitations to how much weight Ankara is willing to put on the scale favoring Putin. Türkiye has opposed Russian intervention in Libya and backs Azerbaijan in the conflict with Armenia, which gets Russian support.

4. It is also not clear to what extent Washington remains chagrined over Türkiye's relations with Iran, which occasionally lead to breaches of the US sanctions against the Islamic Republic. Ankara's balancing act with Tehran benefits Türkiye when the neighbors cooperate on military actions against their respective Kurdish terrorist groups, the PKK for Türkiye, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) in Iran's case.⁸ Türkiye also purchases gas from Iran. However, there are also built-in limitations to how much Ankara is willing to cooperate with Tehran, including rivalries in Syria, Iraq, and Azerbaijan.⁹
5. Similarly, there are threats of disruption in the relationship from time to time over incidents between Türkiye and other US allies over Cyprus, Greek control over Aegean Islands, and Eastern Mediterranean gas production. For example, the Turkish Cypriot government took steps to develop the abandoned seaside town of Varosha/Maraş, igniting another controversy and highlighting the need for a final resolution concerning the divided island.¹⁰ There also remains risks of conflict between Greece and Türkiye over the Greek claim to a 12-mile maritime boundary and Türkiye's claim that Greece is militarizing offshore islands in violation of treaty obligations.¹¹ Into this tinderbox Erdoğan has poured more rhetorical fuel by his tacit support for the concept of the *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland), which vastly expands the maritime boundary for Türkiye in the Mediterranean.¹²

Competition over Eastern Mediterranean gas production pits Türkiye against US allies Israel and Egypt, as well as Greece and Cyprus.¹³ The US response has been to adjust

⁷ Sanctions against Türkiye for Russian violations target companies and individuals. For example, Turkish companies with ties to Russian intelligence. See, Fatima Hussein, "The US sanctions more foreign firms in a bid to choke off Russia's supplies for its war in Ukraine," *AP News*, November 2, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/treasury-russia-ukraine-sanctions-turkey-97a291245b211ef20f412c82d6128db8>. Sanctions also target companies with military production that hurts Ukraine. See, Alexandra Sharp, "U.S. Imposes Landmark Sanctions on Turkey," *Foreign Policy*, September 14, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/14/us-turkey-sanctions-russia-ukraine-shipping-nato/>

⁸ Paul Iddon, "The significance of Turkey and Iran's military cooperation against the PKK," *Ahval*, September 17, 2020, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/turkeys-anti-pkk-operation-and-development-road-iraq-are-two-sides-same-coin>

⁹ Alex Vatanka, "Erdoğan in Tehran, but Turkey and Iran have plenty of mistrust to overcome," *Middle East Eye*, August 3, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/erdogan-tehran-turkey-and-iran-have-plenty-mistrust-overcome>; Mustafa Gürbüz, "Turkey's Evolving Policy toward Iran," *Arab Center Washington DC*, February 16, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/turkeys-evolving-policy-toward-iran/>

¹⁰ "An Island Divided: Next Steps for Troubled Cyprus," *International Crisis Group Report 268*, April 17, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/cyprus/268-island-divided-next-steps-troubled-cyprus>

¹¹ Ryan Gingeras, "Dogfight Over The Aegean: Turkish-Greek Relations In Light of Ukraine," *War On The Rocks*, June 8, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/06/dogfight-over-the-aegean-turkish-greek-relations-in-light-of-ukraine/>

¹² Ryan Gingeras, "Blue Homeland: The Heated Politics Behind Turkey's New Maritime Strategy," *War On The Rocks*, June 2, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <http://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

¹³ Joshua Krasna, "A Long, Hot Summer for Eastern Mediterranean Gas Politics," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, September 26, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/09/a-long-hot-summer-for-eastern-mediterranean-gas-politics/>

its previous neutrality towards Cyprus and the Aegean issues and to increase military cooperation in favor of Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. It signaled its support of Greece and Greek Cyprus by lifting the arms embargo on Southern Cyprus and entering into a Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement with it.¹⁴ Washington has also built up a military base in the northern Greek port of Alexandroupoli, 11 miles from the border with Türkiye.¹⁵ It is part of what Alan Makovsky has called hedging bets against Turkish equivocation.¹⁶

6. Another potential locus for a dispute between the US and Türkiye has been Ankara's occasional threats to restrict and even deny the US/NATO use of the Incirlik air base. In 2020, the Trump Administration responded by publicizing its exploration of relocating base operations to Souda Bay in Crete.¹⁷
7. Another issue causing stress for both Washington and Ankara arose immediately following the attempted coup against the AKP regime on July 15, 2016. It resulted in the demand by the Erdoğan government for the extradition of Fetullah Gülen, whom it accused of fomenting the failed coup. The U.S. refusal to extradite Gülen reinforced the AKP government's suspicions that America had a role in the coup.¹⁸ On the other hand, this issue appears to have lost much of the heat that it once generated.
8. A similar set of issues that generate heat when expressed but have not led to any hostile reactions on either side are Washington's complaints from time to time about the authoritarian direction into which various US spokespeople believe the Erdoğan regime is heading, as well as the AKP government's human rights abuses. One quotable statement by Senator Menendez that encapsulated this complaint was, "To say that more lawyers and journalists are arrested and in jail in Turkey than in any other place in the world is saying something, considering some of those other places in the world."¹⁹

In return, the AKP has promoted its own brand of anti-American rhetoric that it believes has helped it get re-elected. Examples of anti-American rhetoric regularly crop up with each Middle East crisis. This includes the crisis involving the Hamas attack on Israel of October 7, 2023 and the Israeli forceful invasion of Gaza that followed. Erdoğan, who is supportive of Hamas based on his affinity for the Muslim Brotherhood, turned the event into an anti-American remonstrance by complaining about the US sending a carrier strike force into the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁰

¹⁴ Sevinç İrem Balcı, "Defence Cooperation Agreement Between US-GASC and the Future of the Relations," *Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies*, February 1, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.ankasam.org/anka-analizler/defence-cooperation-agreement-between-us-gasc-and-the-future-of-the-relations/?lang=en>

¹⁵ Niki Kitsantonis and Anatoly Kurmanav, "Sleepy Greek Port Becomes U.S. Arms Hub, as Ukraine War Reshapes Region," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/18/world/europe/greece-port-russia-ukraine-weapons.html>

¹⁶ Alan Makovsky, "Opportunities and Challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean: Examining U.S. Interests and Regional Cooperation: Testimony Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism and Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber," *Center for American Progress*, May 02, 2022, accessed date 17, 2024. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/opportunities-and-challenges-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-examining-u-s-interests-and-regional-cooperation/>

¹⁷ John C. K. Daly, "Amid Turkey's Deteriorating Relations with the U.S. the Future of Incirlik airbase is Unclear," *Turkey Analyst*, October 21, 2020, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/653-amid-turkey%E2%80%99s-deteriorating-relations-with-the-us-the-future-of-incirlik-airbase-is-unclear.html>

¹⁸ Ionnis N. Grigoriadis and Ümit Erol Aras, "Distrusted Partnership: Unpacking Anti-Americanism in Turkey," *Middle East Policy* 30, no. 1 (2023): 124-125.

¹⁹ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "U.S. Policy on Turkey," *Foreign Relations Committee*, July 21, 2021, accessed date May 20, 2024. <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/us-policy-on-turkey-071421>

²⁰ Henry J. Barkey, "Turkey, the United States and the Israel-Hamas War," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 25, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/article/turkey-united-states-and-israel-hamas-war>

9. Another one of Ankara's balancing policies that may quietly rankle Washington without generating adverse actions is Türkiye's relations with China. Erdoğan has gone so far with his balancing strategy as to suggest Türkiye may join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the anti-West alliance led by Beijing.²¹ There have been some infrastructure benefits to Türkiye from participating in Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. However, the Republic's balance of trade with China has been negative despite its currency swaps with Beijing.²² Moreover, Ankara's sympathy with the Uyghurs creates built-in limits to expanding the relationship.²³

3. Türkiye – U.S. Partnering In NATO

On the other hand, the central issue that cements the strategic partnership between the two nations is Türkiye's membership in NATO. Türkiye's geostrategic value to the US and the Western alliance has become more apparent since Putin's invasion of Ukraine, which exploded in February 2022. Türkiye has demonstrated its agreement with NATO's support of Ukraine by providing Ukraine with Bayraktar drones and mine-resistant armored vehicles. It has also cooperated with Kyiv in the co-production of stealth drones.²⁴ NATO has further benefited from Türkiye's control of the Bosphorus by virtue of the Montreux Convention and Ankara's restrictions on Russia's naval access from the Black Sea through the Straits to the Mediterranean, hampering its supply line to Syria and restricting its ability to bring in more warships to the Black Sea. Though Russia is purportedly using commercial ships to supply its troops in Syria.²⁵ NATO also benefited from Erdoğan's balancing policy with Russia that enabled the mediation of a deal allowing Ukrainian (and Russian) grain shipments out of the Black Sea in 2022, thereby helping to save Ukraine's wartime economy from collapsing.

Washington also views Ankara's hosting of some 4 million Syrian refugees as a mission critical to preventing wholesale attempts by these refugees to enter Europe, which the State Department views as "threatening European political unity,"²⁶ one of the underpinnings of NATO cohesion. Hence Türkiye's support for Syrian refugees makes an indirect contribution to NATO stability as an alliance.

4. Pessimism and Optimism on The Türkiye – U.S. Disputes

Commentators on the various disputes between Türkiye and the U.S. and their probable outcomes have expressed a variety of sentiments ranging from pessimism to optimism. For examples of a pessimistic outlook from a US perspective, see Howard Eissenstat and Alex Vatanka.²⁷ For an example of a pessimistic outlook based upon entrenched Turkish

²¹ Christopher S. Chivvis, Alper Coşkun, and Beatrix Geaghan-Breiner, "Türkiye in the Emerging World Order," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 31, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/10/turkiye-in-the-emerging-world-order>

²² Ragıp Soylu, "Turkey's love affair with currency swaps explained," *Middle East Eye*, June 16, 2021, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-central-bank-swap-deals-love-explained>

²³ Lenore G. Martin, "The Prospects for Turkish-Chinese Bilateral and Multilateral Security Cooperation," *Sociology of Islam* 4, no. 1-2 (2016): 113-128.

²⁴ Tacan İldem, "A balancing act: Turkey's misunderstood position on Ukraine," *European Leadership Network*, November 9, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/a-balancing-act-turkeys-misunderstood-position-on-ukraine/>

²⁵ Yörük Işık, "Russia is violating the spirit of Montreux by using civilian ships for war," *Middle East Institute*, May 18, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2023/september/russia-violating-montreux-convention-civilian-ships>

²⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Integrated Country Strategy: Turkey* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2022).

²⁷ Howard Eissenstat, "A Rocky Outlook for Turkey-US Unhappy Marriage," *Middle East Institute*, October 24, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/rocky-outlook-turkey-us-unhappy-marriage>; Vatanka, "Erdoğan in Tehran."

public hostility, see Ionnis N. Grigoriadis and Ümit Erol Aras.²⁸ For examples of a middling assessment of stability in Turkish-US relations see James Jay Carafano or the crisis management approach advocated by Galip Dalay.²⁹ For an example of a more optimistic academic perspective, see Kadir Üstün.³⁰

From my brief overview of these comments it would appear that the pessimists outnumber the optimists. Interestingly, and perhaps as part of his negotiating style, President Erdoğan has expressed optimism. He is quoted as saying: “There is no problem between Türkiye and the U.S. that they as two strategic partners cannot resolve.”³¹ A similar sentiment was echoed by the White House when describing President Biden’s congratulations on Erdoğan’s re-election with the statement that the two Presidents “expressed their shared commitment to continue working together as close partners to deepen cooperation between our countries and people.”³²

Many of the solutions the commentators offer are transactional, or more generally propose that the two sides engage in a transactional approach to improve their relations. Dalay, for example, proposes that the two nations discard their concepts of a strategic alliance, engage in crisis management for handling their contentious disputes, and focus their energies on areas of common interest such as in the Black Sea region.³³ Similarly, Carafano identifies specific regions in which the US should seek common ground with Türkiye, such as in the Black Sea, the “Middle Corridor” of the Caucasus and Central Asia, Greece, Armenia, the Middle East and Africa.³⁴ Whereas, Robert A. Manning urges the two sides to take a “business-like relationship” to resolving the disputes.³⁵

Many of these solutions require government level negotiations between the leadership of Türkiye and the U.S., for example over the S-400 impasse and the US support for the YPG. Kökmen, for example, sees the way forward to strengthening the strategic partnership by mutual recognition of each side’s security concerns: the US should end its support of Syrian Kurds and Türkiye should keep its S-400 in storage.³⁶ To some extent these suggested solutions rely upon the leadership personalities in Washington and Ankara.³⁷ Other transactional solutions require the cooperation of third parties, for example multi-party resolution of the Syrian civil war³⁸ or the conclusion of peace between Ankara and the PKK. There are also

²⁸ Grigoriadis and Aras, “Distrusted Partnership,” 122-136.

²⁹ James Jay Carafano, “The future of U.S.-Turkey relations,” *Geopolitical Intelligence Services AG*, July 3, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/u-s-turkey-relations/>; Galip Dalay, “US-Turkey relations will remain crisis-ridden for a long time to come,” *Brookings*, January 29, 2021, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/us-turkey-relations-will-remain-crisis-ridden-for-a-long-time-to-come/>

³⁰ Kadir Üstün, “U.S.-Turkey Relations Endure Despite Crises,” *Insight Turkey* 22, no. 2 (2022): 23-32.

³¹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “There is no problem between Türkiye and the U.S. that they as two strategic partners cannot resolve,” September 9, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/139678/-there-is-no-problem-between-turkiye-and-the-u-s-that-they-as-two-strategic-partners-cannot-resolve->

³² “Readout of President Biden’s Call with President Erdogan of Türkiye,” *White House Briefing*, May 29, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/29/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-president-erdogan-of-turkiye-2>. The sentiment was previously echoed in the US State Department’s “Integrated Country Strategy: Turkey” with the statement concerning Chief of Mission Priorities that “Turkey is an essential U.S. partner” and that improving diplomatic facilities “will be a powerful, visible reminder of the United States’ strong and enduring relationship with Turkey.” See, U.S. Department of State, *Integrated Country Strategy*, 1, 3.

³³ Dalay, “US-Turkey relations.”

³⁴ Carafano, “The future of U.S.-Turkey relations.”

³⁵ Robert A. Manning, “The Turkey dilemma and the limits of US power,” *The Hill*, January 18, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3817873-the-turkey-dilemma-and-the-limits-of-us-power/>

³⁶ Nihat Kökmen, “Prospects for US-Turkish strategic relationship,” *Atlantic Council*, June 23, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/ac-turkey-defense-journal/prospects-for-an-improved-us-turkish-strategic-relationship/>

³⁷ See, Üstün, “U.S.-Turkey Relations Endure.” Üstün compares the Obama Administration approach to Trump’s.

³⁸ See, Stephen J. Flanagan and Peter A. Wilson, “Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Partnership and the U.S. Army,” in *Turkey’s*

proposals for half measures such as the “quick wins” proposed by Jeffrey. These include “F-16 sales” and a “ceasefire with the PKK (or at least continued Turkish restraint in Northeast Syria).”³⁹

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with these transactional solutions. Their problem, however, is that they address only discrete disputes or may only work for the short-term. They hold no promise for resetting the relationship between Türkiye and the U.S. to resolve the multiplicity of issues. Furthermore, in the context of Erdoğan’s pursuit of an independent global and regional role for Türkiye or for Ankara’s balancing foreign policy, they offer no prospects for the avoidance of future and unanticipated disputes. For example, the unexpected eruption of the Gaza War between Israel and Hamas has once again put the US and Türkiye on opposite sides of a conflict.⁴⁰

There are, nevertheless, a number of analysts who have advocated more permanent solutions for the US and Türkiye policy divide. They propose ways to reduce incidents of hostility between the two nations by moderation of their behavior and their rhetoric. Oya Dursun-Özkanca, for example, wants to restore fundamental trust between the two nations and advocates greater military and diplomatic exchanges between them as a means to achieving it.⁴¹ Similarly, Alper Coşkun looks to the high level bilateral bureaucratic exchanges of the “Strategic Mechanism” to build increased trust between the two countries more effectively than did the diplomatic and military working groups created in 2018, which failed.⁴² Özgür Özdamar advocates each side reducing its role expectations as a step towards behavioral modification and foresees a fundamental link between the two sides at the societal level because “American and Turkish people want to live in democratic societies with free market economies, a goal that ties these two countries together.”⁴³ Robert Manning’s similar solution is for the two sides to reduce their role expectations in a multipolar world where US power is limited.⁴⁴ Behavioral modification by changing fundamental attitudes was also a theme in the 2017 resolution proposed by Kirişçi, who stated: “Both nations should demonstrate greater sensitivity to each other’s concerns: Turkey needs the United States to show a more nuanced appreciation of its security concerns; the United States needs Turkey to show a strict commitment to governance by the rule of law.”⁴⁵

Nationalist Course Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army, eds. Stephen J. Flanagan et al., (Santa Monica: RAND Cooperation, 2020), 202.

³⁹ James F. Jeffrey, “Handling Turkey-West Relations After Erdogan’s Election Victory: Engage, Understand, Overcome,” *Wilson Center*, June 9, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2023. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/handling-turkey-west-relations-after-erdogans-election-victory-engage-understand-overcome>

⁴⁰ See, Eissenstat, “A Rocky Outlook.”

⁴¹ Oya Dursun-Özkanca, “US-Turkey Relations: How To Avoid A Complete Breakdown,” *IstanPol*, February 4, 2020, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://istanpol.org/en/post-us-turkey-relations-how-to-avoid-a-complete-breakdown>

⁴² Alper Coşkun, “Making the New U.S.-Turkey Strategic Mechanism Meaningful,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 12, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/05/12/making-new-u.s.-turkey-strategic-mechanism-meaningful-pub-87117>; Office of the State Department Spokesperson, “The United States and Türkiye: A Key NATO Ally and Critical Regional Partner,” February 19, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-and-turkiye-a-key-nato-ally-and-critical-regional-partner/>.

⁴³ Özgür Özdamar, “Role Theory in Practice: US-Turkey Relations in Their Worst Decade,” *International Studies Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2024): 41-59.

⁴⁴ Manning, “The Turkey dilemma.”

⁴⁵ Kemal Kirişçi, “How to Fix U.S.-Turkey Relations,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 2017, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/opinion/how-to-fix-us-turkey-relations.html>

5. Analyzing Turkish-US Relations from the Perspective of their National Security Interests

The proposals for both the transactional and more permanent solutions to the multiplicity of persisting disputes between the US and Türkiye have much to be commended. However, I suggest that they will not provide convincing answers to the questions posed by this paper unless we analyze why these solutions will or will not work. For that purpose, we need a more fundamental understanding of the perception of each nation as to its own national interests and the differences in their perceptions of the other's national interests. In short, both the cooperative and non-cooperative relations between Türkiye and the US result from the pursuit of their respective national interests. Of these, their primary interest is in bolstering their national security.

That should lead us first to delve into the concept of “national security” as postulated in International Relations theory. IR theories of “national security” have undergone a substantial transformation since Arnold Wolfers challenged the discipline to provide specifications for this ambiguous and often contested concept.⁴⁶ The various paradigms for national security that have developed to operationalize the concept⁴⁷ have one thing in common: “national security” is no longer defined narrowly in terms of a nation's military capabilities to deter or defend against extra-territorial or internal military threats. Depending on the scholars involved and the threats under examination, it now encompasses economic security, political security, societal security, environmental security, energy security, food and water security, and cyber security, in addition to military security.

Interestingly, this expansive definition has even spilled over from the academy to bureaucratic and diplomatic discourse. Examples range from the definition used for “Homeland Security” by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the “Total National Security Paradigm” promoted by President Xi Jinping. For example the EPA declares: “Originally conceived as protection against military attack, national security is now widely understood to include non-military dimensions, such as security from terrorism, minimization of crime, economic security, energy security, environmental security, food security, and cyber-security.”⁴⁸ For his part, President Xi Jinping told his Communist Party cadres in 2014 to “build a national security system that integrates such elements as political, military, economic, cultural, social, science and technology, information, ecological, resource, and nuclear security.”⁴⁹

Conceptually, national security depends on a nation's ability to deter or counter threats to its three components: territory, society and regime. The problem with the expansive definitions of national security above is that they include too many elements, factors, or variables to produce a coherent theory.⁵⁰ A paradigm with a limited and integrated set of independent variables would be more-effective for analyzing national security.⁵¹ The limited

⁴⁶ David A. Baldwin, “The Concept of Security,” *Review of International Studies* 23 (1997): 5-26.

⁴⁷ Murat Şengöz, “An Examination of the National Security Paradigms Within the International Relations Discipline As On And Post-Cold War,” *Mecmua* 14 (2022): 182-198.

⁴⁸ “Homeland Security,” *United States Environmental Protection Agency*, July 24, 2024, accessed August 01, 2024. <https://www.epa.gov/national-security>

⁴⁹ Zongti Guojia Anquan Guan, “Total National Security Paradigm,” *The Center for Strategic Translation*, 2022, accessed May 17, 2024. <https://www.strategictranslation.org/glossary/total-national-security-paradigm>.

⁵⁰ This is similar to the criticism of Neo-classical realism for being too *ad hoc* in its selection of variables to explain patterns of international political behavior. See, Kevin Narizny, “Neoclassical Realism and its Critics,” *International Security* 43, no. 2 (2018): 199-203.

⁵¹ Lenore G. Martin, “Towards an Integrated Approach to National Security in the Middle East,” in *New Frontiers in Middle*

set of five variables I propose consist of a state's overall military and economic capabilities; the availability of its natural resources such as energy, food and water; the political legitimacy of its regime; and the degree of ethnic and religious tolerance and cohesion of its society.⁵²

Applying the paradigm to answer the first question posed in this paper leads us to the following conclusion. We can best explain the persistence of the so-called "strategic partnership" of the US and Türkiye because there is sufficient convergence of their perceptions of the threats to their respective national security. We also conclude from application of the paradigm that to create a more harmonious relationship each side will need to take actions to overcome their divergent perceptions of threats to the other side's national security. That can be operationalized with respect to the five variables in the paradigm as follows.

6. Converging Perceptions of Threats: Achieving Greater National Security - Boosting Military Capabilities

The Syrian impasse and S-400 issue are symptomatic of the problematic divergence of the U.S. and Türkiye over threats to their respective states and territories from essentially the MENA region. In particular, this encompasses perceived threats from Türkiye's potentially hostile neighbors: Syria, Iraq and Iran. The S-400 issue is easier to resolve than the Syrian situation because it involves finding other ways to boost Türkiye's military and economic capabilities. The S-400 acquisition resulted from a failed attempt by the AKP government to negotiate a better deal for US patriot missile systems and defense technology transfers.⁵³ As noted, this backfired with the US and NATO fearing that the system would undermine the effectiveness of the new generation of F-35 fighters.

The US Administration has more recently demonstrated a willingness to reconcile with Türkiye by agreeing to supply advanced F-16 fighters and technology to improve Türkiye's air defense capabilities.⁵⁴ However, Ankara has still not decommissioned its S-400 system. Nevertheless, better prospects for sidelining the S-400 in Türkiye appear likely from the Republic's development of its own multi-layered surface to air missile defense system, including the longer range SIPER missile defense.⁵⁵ The US could therefore facilitate the obsolescence of the S-400 by offering technology assistance for the development of Türkiye's home-grown missile defense. Moreover, the S-400 system itself has not performed well to protect Russian military assets against Ukrainian air strikes. This would provide another reason for Türkiye to mothball its S-400 system.

For deterring and defending against existential threats from inside and beyond MENA, particularly nuclear threats, Türkiye has little choice but to remain committed to the NATO

East Security, ed. Lenore G. Martin, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 3-22.

⁵² In this selection of a limited set of variables, my approach fits within but is at the same time distinguishable from the co-located Copenhagen School, popularized by Barry Buzan. See, Şengöz, "An examination of the national security," 182-198; Marianne Stone, "Security According to Buzan: A Comprehensive Security Analysis," *Security Discussion Papers Series* 1, no. 1 (2009): 1-11.

⁵³ Jill Townsend and Rachel Ellehuus, "The Tale of Turkey and the Patriots," *War on the Rocks*, July 22, 2019, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/07/the-tale-of-turkey-and-the-patriots/>; Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, "Now Is the Time to Resolve the Turkey-US S-400 Dispute," *German Marshall Fund*, April 27, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/now-time-resolve-turkey-us-s-400-dispute>. Ünlühisarcıklı sees the patriot systems as no longer available for Türkiye.

⁵⁴ Türkiye is also developing its own version of the F-16, the TF-X, but still needs US cooperation for the project as this stealth fighter uses engines provided by the US. See, Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey seeks partners for TF-X fighter program amid fiscal uncertainty," *Defense News*, August 31, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2023/08/31/turkey-seeks-partners-for-tf-x-fighter-program-amid-fiscal-uncertainty/>

⁵⁵ Agnes Helou, "As interest in Russia's S-400 wanes, Turkey pushes its own air defense systems," *Breaking Defense*, March 24, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/03/as-interest-in-russias-s-400-wanes-turkey-pushes-its-own-air-defense-systems/>; Paul Iddon, "The Siper Solution: Could Turkey undo the S-400 debacle," *GERCEK News*, February 3, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.gerceknews.com/article/the-siper-solution-could-turkey-undo-the-s-400-debacle-218623>

alliance. Ankara and Washington both realize that NATO is the only source for the nuclear umbrella the Republic needs against potential nuclear blackmail from Russia and in future from Iran. Still, as part of his policy of strategic independence, President Erdoğan has ignited speculation as to Türkiye's interest in development of its own nuclear capabilities.⁵⁶ Türkiye's peaceful nuclear reactor program could fuel that speculation. Washington, therefore, has an incentive to encourage Ankara to abide by its commitments in the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons by assuring Türkiye of the nuclear deterrence protection it receives as a NATO member. To some extent the latest Russian invasion of Ukraine and Putin's threats to use tactical nuclear weapons will facilitate that assurance.

As noted, the most difficult challenge for reducing the stresses built into the US – Türkiye strategic partnership arises from the ongoing Syrian civil war and the US support for the PYD/PYG affiliate of the PKK. The US continues to maintain small contingents of ground troops in Syria (900) and Iraq (2,500), ostensibly to assist in countering ISIS. As such they become targets of attacks by Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and their allies.⁵⁷ However, from the perspective of America's national security interests, it will be difficult to remove these forces as they also serve a larger purpose of interrupting the flow of arms from Iran to its proxies and as a deterrent to more aggressive moves by Iran and its proxies in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen against US Middle East allies, Israel and the Gulf monarchies. Furthermore, they promise the US a seat at the table for negotiating an end to the Syrian civil war.

Ankara, on the other hand, views the US protected Kurdish forces at the Turkish border as much a threat to the peace of Türkiye as they do the PKK forces over the Iraqi border in the Qandil Mountains. From the Turkish perspective it makes no sense for the U.S. to classify the PKK as a terrorist organization, conceding that the PKK remains a threat to the Turkish state, while at the same time remaining silent as to the status of the YPG/YPJ and the Syrian-Kurdish dominated SDF, which Ankara views as another potential threat to the Turkish state. To some extent, the PKK's threats to the territorial integrity of Türkiye may have diminished with the prospects that Ankara's cross-border military campaigns against the PKK may be succeeding.⁵⁸ Ankara has also been signaling that it is willing to make peace with the Assad regime.⁵⁹ This may take time, but ultimately any such peace agreement is likely to require the removal of all foreign forces from Syria. This would include those of the U.S., Türkiye, Russia, and Iran, as well as ISIL and other foreign and militant Islamist forces. Washington should seek to align with Ankara in proposing terms for such a peace agreement. In conjunction with coordinating positions for a Syrian peace agreement, Washington should negotiate with Ankara over the fate of the PYD/YPG.

⁵⁶ Assa Ophir, "Turkey's Nuclear Future," *Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, December 15, 2021, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://dayan.org/content/turkeys-nuclear-future>.

⁵⁷ Chris Gordon, "Attacks on US Forces in Iraq and Syria Continue After American Airstrikes," *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, October 30, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/attacks-us-forces-iraq-syria-american-airstrikes/>.

⁵⁸ Amberin Zaman, "Does Ankara attack mark strategy shift for Turkey's PKK?," *Al-Monitor*, October 2, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/10/does-ankara-attack-mark-strategy-shift-turkeys-pkk>.

⁵⁹ Umut Aras, "Erdoğan says he may meet Syria's Assad for 'peace' in the region," *Al Jazeera*, January 5, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/5/syria-348>.

7. Converging Perceptions of Threats: Achieving Greater National Security - Boosting Economic Capabilities and Essential Natural Resources

One of the reasons for Türkiye's concern over its economic security is that it lacks most of the energy resources required to drive its economy.⁶⁰ Türkiye imports 74% of its energy needs.⁶¹ A large portion of the oil and gas imports come from Russia. Therefore, Türkiye refuses to join in the Western sanctions regime against Russia to protect its economic security.⁶² Washington has not retaliated and imposed sanctions to cut off these Russian energy sources, although, the US does impose targeted sanctions against Turkish companies providing goods to Russia that have military applications.⁶³ Türkiye also imports natural gas from Iran. Of Türkiye's gas imports in 2022, Russia provided 39%, Iran 17% and the remainder came from a combination of sources of which Azerbaijan was 16%, and the US and Algeria each had 10%.⁶⁴

Compared to its defiance of the sanctions regime against Russia, Türkiye appears to have been more respectful of the US sanctions against Iran. This has resulted in significant declines in Türkiye's trade with Iran. This is not just because of sanctions but also because of cheaper energy imports from Russia.⁶⁵ Moreover, in the future Türkiye will be looking to the Black Sea as an alternative source for natural gas and an additional way to reduce dependency on imports from Iran (and Russia). Ankara's efforts to diversify its energy sources also incentivize its willingness to cooperate with US allies developing natural gas sources in the Eastern Mediterranean. It would appear that successive US administrations do not link Türkiye's dependency on Russian and Iranian energy imports with an intolerable threat to US security or as an actionable threat to the security of its NATO and MENA allies. On the contrary, we may conclude that there is already some convergence of the perceptions by Washington and Ankara of the need to avoid Turkish economic insecurity.

8. Non-Converging Perceptions of Threats to the Erdoğan Regime

It is difficult to draw the same conclusions concerning the threats to the AKP regime by Washington and Ankara, at least from their respective rhetoric concerning each other's government. The Biden regime has expressed negative reactions to Erdoğan's authoritarian proclivities and Türkiye's human rights abuses. Symptomatic of this was Biden's pointed exclusion of Türkiye from his 2023 Summit for Democracy.⁶⁶ It is not clear, however, to what extent the US administrations use their disappointment concerning Erdoğan's anti-

⁶⁰ Expressed another way, Türkiye's current account deficits (imports vs. exports) suffer from a dependency on the import of 99% of its gas and 93% of its oil in a high volatility energy environment. See, "Türkiye: Country Note (2023)," *OECD*, June 30, 2023, accessed May 17, 2024. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2023/06/government-at-a-glance-2023-country-notes_a95d10b5/turkiye_29f3e2d2.html.

⁶¹ "Türkiye's International Energy Strategy," *Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa>.

⁶² Natalia Konarzewska, "Turkey will not give up on its Lucrative Trade with Russia," *Turkey Analyst Articles*, June 26, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/709-turkey-will-not-give-up-on-its-lucrative-trade-with-russia.html>. Türkiye became Russia's top source of imports in 2022, doubling Türkiye's exports to Russia from 2021.

⁶³ Alexandra Sharp, "U.S. Imposes Landmark Sanctions on Turkey," *Foreign Policy*, September 14, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/14/us-turkey-sanctions-russia-ukraine-shipping-nato/>. These are in addition to the CAATSA sanctions imposed because of Türkiye's S-400.

⁶⁴ "Country Analysis Brief: Türkiye," *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, July 11, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Turkiye/turkiye.pdf

⁶⁵ Vatanka, "Erdoğan in Tehran."

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Hagedorn, "Turkey left off guest list for Biden's 2nd democracy summit," *Al-Monitor*, March 24, 2023, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/03/turkey-left-guest-list-bidens-2nd-democracy-summit>

democratic actions to counter other demands that Ankara makes on Washington in their other disputes. Perhaps this is an avoidance of diplomatic hypocrisy. It could be noted that Washington tolerates anti-democratic behavior and human rights abuses from other autocratic governments allied with the U.S., such as the Gulf monarchies. On the other hand, branding the AKP regime as anti-democratic and abusive of human rights does enhance the anti-Turkish lobby groups in Congress in their efforts to persuade key legislator gatekeepers to block military appropriations for Türkiye and argue for sanctions.⁶⁷

From the AKP government's perspective, the suspected Gülenist movement's involvement in the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, was a clear challenge to the legitimacy of the regime. It has branded the movement (FETO) as a terrorist organization. Ankara has gone further and views the US refusal to extradite Gülen as implicating Washington in the coup attempt.⁶⁸ The AKP government's abuse of the Turkish legal system to punish the regime's opponents and critics may factor into the reluctance by US officials to push for the extradition of Fethullah Gülen. However, the legal process itself is a sufficient obstacle for the extradition without any political interference – one way or the other.⁶⁹ On the other hand, the lengthy and complex extradition process appears to have tamped down the frequency of the antagonistic rhetoric over this issue.

One obvious solution to the lack of convergence of perceptions of threats to the AKP regime is to encourage Washington administrations to lower the volume of the rhetoric and reduce the repetition of these claims – while working quietly with Ankara to push for democratic reforms and release of regime opponents from jail. This should have an ameliorative effect on the AKP regime's promotion of anti-Americanism among the larger Turkish population. Washington can also help to reduce the widespread perception of the U.S. as a threat to the Republic by increasing the amount of people-to-people exchanges between the two nations. For example, in promoting a societal level “charm offensive” the US could increase the opportunities for Turkish students and academics to study and research in the U.S.⁷⁰ As noted by commentators, it would also be important for this effort to increase diplomatic and military exchanges between the two countries.

9. Non-Converging Perceptions of Threats to Turkish Society: The lack of Tolerance for Ethnic and Religious Minorities

The one national security variable that remains a significant perception of threat for Türkiye and not equally appreciated by the U.S. is Türkiye's “Kurdish issue.” The lack of convergence on this issue is due to Türkiye defining the PKK as a separatist terrorist organization. Since the end of the Peace Process in 2015 it has been concentrating on military means to address the conflict. The U.S. also recognizes the PKK as a terrorist organization, however, from the US perspective, the Kurdish issue arises from the continued denial by the Republic of cultural and linguistic rights to Türkiye's Kurds.⁷¹ Furthermore, Türkiye's denial of political

⁶⁷ See, “Full Committee Hearing: U.S. Policy on Turkey – Victoria Nuland: Witness Testimony,” *Foreign Relations Committee*, July 21, 2021, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/us-policy-on-turkey-071421>

⁶⁸ Grigoriadis and Aras, “Distrusted Partnership,” 125.

⁶⁹ Michael Werz and Max Hoffman, “The Process Behind Turkey's Proposed Extradition of Fethullah Gülen,” *Center for American Progress*, September 7, 2016, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-process-behind-turkeys-proposed-extradition-of-fethullah-gulen/>

⁷⁰ Türkiye's student enrollment was a paltry 0.9% of the 2021/22 948,519 international student population in the U.S. See, “U.S. Embassy Ankara Media Note – IIE Open Doors Report,” *U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Türkiye*, November 16, 2022, accessed date May 17, 2024. <https://tr.usembassy.gov/turkish-students-choose-to-study-in-the-united-states>.

⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *Integrated Country Strategy*, 13.

rights is evidenced by the closing of Kurdish dominated political parties and imprisoning their elected leaders, hampering the possibility of negotiations.⁷² While these minority rights are denied, the risk will remain of the PKK using violence to protest against their denial. The AKP government, however, needs its nationalist MHP member coalition to maintain a Parliamentary majority, and therefore has little incentive to resume peace talks with the PKK.⁷³

Nonetheless, Washington's encouraging Ankara to resume the peace process with the PKK would, if successful, have major ripple effects on Türkiye's perception of its national security. Among other things, the Republic would preserve its military capabilities for reactions to threats in its dangerous neighborhood, where its potential adversaries, Syria, Iran, and Russia, would be denied the ability to "play the PKK card." Making peace with the PKK would boost Türkiye's economic security by adjusting the guns vs butter balance in favor of butter. And AKP success at the negotiating table would enhance the legitimacy of the regime while increasing societal tolerance for ethnic diversity.

How to gain these benefits, however, remains a challenge. Negotiating with the PKK can nevertheless be encouraged using Track II diplomacy that can ultimately persuade governmental leaders to embark on reviving peace talks. Civil society groups on both sides could engage in such Track II diplomacy using the process that led to the Oslo accords.⁷⁴ Moreover, implementing Kurdish minority rights does not need to reform the current Türkiye Constitution. It requires only a willingness to operationalize the principles for the minority rights that are already embedded in the Constitution.⁷⁵

10. Conclusions

This article has analyzed a finite set of issues that disrupt the strategic partnership between the U.S. and Türkiye and the reasons for the persistence of the relationship in terms of the convergence and divergence of their perceived threats to national security. For the analytical framework the paper applied the paradigm for the concept of national security consisting of five integrated variables: the nation's military and economic capabilities; the availability of essential natural resources, especially in this case, energy supplies; the legitimacy of the regime and the tolerance within its society for religious and ethnic diversity, and in Türkiye's case, particularly the Kurds. Application of the paradigm has also pointed us towards seeking solutions that bring about greater convergence of their national security interests.

Türkiye and the U.S. can cooperate to design better alternatives to the S400 program, making it obsolete and less of a source of friction between the two states, though the distrust this situation has created will admittedly take time to recede. On the issue of cooperation between Türkiye and Russia and Türkiye and Iran, the U.S. has been more tolerant of Türkiye's need for energy imports to support its economy, while Türkiye has been reducing its reliance upon both Russia and Iran as a source of energy. Both governments have also reduced their criticism of each other, the U.S. with respect to Türkiye's anti-democratic policies and Türkiye with respect to the extradition of Fetullah Gülen.

⁷² Lenore G. Martin, "The Plight of Turkey's Minorities: What Obstacles and Opportunities Exist for Equal Citizenship beyond the Republic's Centennial?" *Turkish Studies* 24, no. 3-4 (2023): 550-569.

⁷³ Oya Dursun-Özkanca, "US-Turkey Relations,"

⁷⁴ Lenore G. Martin, "A New Track Towards Resolving Turkey's Kurdish Issue," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2017): 8-13.

⁷⁵ Martin, "The Plight of Turkey's Minorities," 563.

The most divisive of these of all the issues straining the relationship proves to be the divergence of perceptions concerning the threats to Türkiye from the Kurds, particularly Syrian Kurds, which the US uses to counter ISIL and deter Iranian aggression. A revival of the peace process between the AKP regime and the PKK as discussed above would, if successful, help to resolve that issue. To encourage a revival of peace negotiations with the PKK, civil society leaders in both Türkiye and the US should engage in Track II diplomacy. While this offers no quick resolution, like other worthwhile endeavors, as the optimists that comment on the challenging relations between Türkiye and America might say: better to light a candle (yea, even a thousand candles) than to curse the darkness.

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