Turkey-U.S. Relations: Timeline and Brief Historical Context

This timeline tracks major developments from the beginning of close U.S.-Turkey ties after World War II to the present. The information provides context for lawmakers assessing the tenor and trajectory of current bilateral relations on issues ranging from general strategic cooperation to timely regional concerns and domestic Turkish politics.

**Early Cold War Partners (1945-1962)**
Soviet pressure on the Turkish government to allow free passage through the Turkish straits (the Bosphorus and Dardanelles) and its territorial claims in eastern Anatolia threatened to precipitate hostilities between the two states, whose predecessors (the Russian and Ottoman Empires) had fought 12 wars over the preceding four centuries. Turkey turned to the United States for support. Mutual opposition to Soviet expansion would underpin Turkey-U.S. ties in the coming decades.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Turkey declares war on Germany and Japan in February; becomes founding member of the United Nations</td>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>In response to Soviet demands on Turkey for shared administration of the straits, the United States counters Soviet pressure by sending ships to Turkish waters</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>Congress designates Turkey (along with Greece) a special recipient of anti-Soviet aid under the Truman Doctrine</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>Turkish troops join U.S.-U.N. forces in the Korean War</td>
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<td>1952</td>
<td>Turkey becomes a member of NATO</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>U.S. and Turkey agree to joint use of what becomes Incirlik Air Base; U.S. and Turkey sign first status of forces agreement</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>Turkey helps form Baghdad Pact to resist Soviet aggression</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>First military coup in Turkey; civilian rule returns with elections in 1961</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>Resolution of Cuban Missile Crisis includes U.S. agreement to remove nuclear-armed Jupiter missiles (judged by the U.S. to be obsolete) from Turkey</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Letter from President Lyndon Johnson to Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu (known as the “Johnson Letter”) communicates U.S. opposition to Turkish intervention in Cyprus after ethnic Greek-Turkish power sharing breaks down</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>Turkey’s second military coup occurs with the government’s resignation amid increasing street violence; elections resume in 1973</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>Turkey, using U.S.-supplied equipment, occupies the northern third of the island of Cyprus (an occupation that has continued to the present) on behalf of Turkish Cypriot minority, following a coup that installed a more pro-Greek government on the island</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Congress freezes aid and imposes arms embargo on Turkey for its actions in Cyprus</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>After intense lobbying by multiple presidential administrations and several votes to partially lift the embargo, Congress fully repeals it</td>
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The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iran’s Islamic Revolution heightened the strategic importance of the Turkey-U.S. relationship for American interests in the broader Middle East.

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<td>1980</td>
<td>United States and Turkey sign Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>Turkey’s third coup in response to social and political turmoil; elections resume</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) begins significant operations in its armed insurgency in southeastern Turkey</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Turkey allows the use of its airspace and bases for U.S. and coalition aircraft participating in Gulf War and for the postwar patrolling of northern Iraq</td>
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**Allies amid Challenges (1963-1978)**
U.S.-Turkey relations were particularly challenged by Turkey’s frequent clashes with fellow NATO member Greece over the ethnically divided island of Cyprus. Anti-Americanism grew as Turks increasingly debated the benefits and drawbacks of the bilateral relationship.

Turkey’s relative importance for U.S. policymakers declined in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but focus remained on a number of regional developments involving Turkey.

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of political control, have further complicated bilateral relations. NATO still assists Turkey with security at its southern border.

2013
Nationwide protests and corruption allegations increase domestic and Western criticism of Erdogan and his government

2014
U.S.-Turkey differences deepen in Syria over jihadists’ alleged use of Turkish territory.
U.S. support for Syrian Kurds aligned with the PKK, and other issues.

2015
After some Islamic State-linked terror attacks in Turkey, Turkey permits coalition airstrikes in Syria and Iraq; Turkey-PKK violence resumes

2016
After July coup attempt, Turkey requests that the U.S. extradite influential Turkish figure Fethullah Gülen, and begins direct military operations in Syria to counter the Islamic State and Kurdish-led forces

Turkey enters diplomatic process for Syria with Russia and Iran (“Astana Process”)

2017
U.S. begins directly arming Kurdish forces against Turkish wishes

Constitutional changes expanding presidential powers narrowly approved by referendum

Turkey detains several U.S. citizens and Turkish employees of U.S. diplomatic facilities

Turkey preliminarily agrees to purchase S-400 air defense system from Russia

2018
President Erdogan wins reelection as Turkey transitions to its new presidential system

In Syria’s Afrin district, Turkey and allied Syrian opposition militias intervene directly against PKK-linked Syrian Kurdish forces

Turkey takes delivery of the S-400 system; the Trump Administration removes Turkey from F-35 program and some Members of Congress call for sanctions under existing law

In northeastern Syria, Turkish-led forces attack PKK-linked Syrian Kurdish forces that have partnered with the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State, leading to a buffer zone monitored by Turkey, Russia, and Syria

2019

In a standoff with Russia and Syria’s government in Idlib province, Turkey clashes directly with Syrian forces and seeks NATO support

2020

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Cooperation and Contention (2013-Present)
U.S.-Turkey tensions have arisen on Syria, Turkey’s purchase of a Russian S-400 air defense system, and other matters. Domestic contention in Turkey, including the July 2016 coup attempt and Erdogan’s increased consolidation

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1991-1992 United States announces closure of 8 of its 12 military bases in Turkey; and major U.S. military grant aid to Turkey discontinued in post-Cold War environment

1992 PKK-led Kurdish insurgency intensifies in Turkey

1994 Congress withholds military loans to Turkey until submission of executive branch report on alleged human rights violations in relations to Turkey-PKK violence

1996 Turkey-Israel military cooperation agreement

1997 Turkish military compels the removal of a government led by an Islamist prime minister

U.S. designates the PKK as a foreign terrorist organization

1999 Turkey captures PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan with U.S. assistance; PKK declares ceasefire

2001 Turkey joins the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, participating mostly in a training capacity

AKP and the Middle East (2003-2012)
After the 2002 election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party (known in Turkish as the AKP), and Erdogan’s election as prime minister in 2003, Turkey-U.S. relations were shaped by Turkey’s growing economic and political clout in the Middle East.

2003 Turkish parliamentary votes do not allow U.S. invasion of Iraq from Turkey, but do allow U.S. use of Turkish bases for overflight of Iraq after U.S.-led occupation of Iraq

“Hood incident” involving U.S. military detention of Turkish special forces occurs in Iraq, fueling anti-American sentiment

2004 PKK resumes insurgency and attacks against Turkey from safe havens in northern Iraq

2007 U.S. begins military and intelligence cooperation with Turkey against PKK in northern Iraq

2010 Turkey downgrades ties with Israel after an Israeli raid on the privately-owned ship Mavi Marmara (part of an activist-led flotilla seeking humanitarian relief for the Gaza Strip) leaves eight Turkish citizens dead

Turkey unsuccessfully opposes enhanced U.N. sanctions against Iran’s nuclear program

2011 Turkey agrees to U.S./NATO deployment of missile defense radar on its territory and agrees to NATO operations in Libya

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