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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.

1945	Turkey declares war on Germany and Japan in February; becomes founding member of the United Nations
1946	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
1947	Congress designates Turkey (along with Greece) a special recipient of anti-Soviet aid under the Truman Doctrine
1950	Turkish troops join U.S.-U.N. forces in the Korean War
1952	Turkey becomes a member of NATO
1954	U.S. and Turkey agree to joint use of what becomes Incirlik Air Base ; U.S. and Turkey sign first status of forces agreement
1955	Turkey helps form Baghdad Pact to resist Soviet aggression
1960	First military coup in Turkey; civilian rule returns with elections in 1961
1962	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

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.

1964	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
1971	Turkey's second military coup occurs with the government's resignation amid increasing street violence; elections resume in 1973
1974	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
1975	Congress freezes aid and imposes arms embargo on Turkey for its actions in Cyprus
	Turkey abrogates U.S. status of forces agreement; takes control of U.S. installations; U.S. forces performing NATO functions remain
1978	After intense lobbying by multiple presidential administrations and several votes to partially lift the embargo, Congress fully repeals it

Renewed Military Cooperation (1980-1991)

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.

1980	United States and Turkey sign Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement
	Turkey's third coup in response to social and political turmoil; elections resume in 1983
1984	Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) begins significant operations in its armed insurgency in southeastern Turkey
1991	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

Reassessment (1991-2002)

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.

1991-1992	United States announces closure of 8 of its 12 military bases in Turkey; major U.S. military grant aid to Turkey discontinued in post-Cold War environment	2013	Nationwide protests and corruption allegations increase domestic and Western criticism of Erdogan and his government
1992	PKK-led Kurdish insurgency intensifies in Turkey	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
1994	Congress withholds military loans to Turkey until submission of executive branch report on alleged human rights violations in relations to Turkey-PKK violence	2015	After some Islamic State-linked terror attacks in Turkey, Turkey permits coalition airstrikes in Syria and Iraq
1996	Turkey-Israel military cooperation agreement		Violence with PKK resumes after 2013 cease-fire
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	2016	After July coup attempt, Turkey requests that the U.S. extradite influential Turkish figure Fethullah Gulen , and begins direct military operations in Syria to counter the Islamic State and Kurdish-led forces
1999	Turkey captures PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan with U.S. assistance; PKK declares ceasefire	2017	U.S. begins directly arming PKK-linked Kurdish forces in Syria against Turkish wishes Constitutional changes expanding presidential powers narrowly approved by referendum
2001	Turkey joins the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan		Turkey agrees to purchase S-400 air defense system from Russia

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 permit U.S. use of Turkish bases for overflight of Iraq after U.S.-led occupation	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
2004	PKK resumes insurgency and attacks against Turkey from safe havens in northern Iraq	2019	Turkey takes delivery of the S-400 system; the U.S. removes Turkey from F-35 program In northeastern Syria , Turkish-led forces attack the U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces mentioned above, increasing the Syrian territory Turkey administers along its border, and triggering strong U.S. criticism
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 <i>Mavi Marmara</i> (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	2020	Turkey clashes directly with Syrian forces in rebel-held Idlib province, from which Turkey seeks to prevent further refugee flows Regional tensions rise in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East between Turkey and various NATO allies and U.S. partners The Trump Administration imposes sanctions on Turkey's arms procurement agency and some of its officials for the S-400 acquisition
2011	Turkey agrees to U.S./NATO deployment of missile defense radar on its territory		

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

2021 President Biden characterizes Ottoman Empire actions against Armenians during World War I as **genocide**; Turkey's negative response may be restrained due to Erdogan's political vulnerability and Turkey's economic problems

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