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Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief

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Introduction

Several Turkish foreign and domestic policy issues are significant for U.S. interests, and Congress plays an active role in shaping and overseeing U.S. relations with Turkey.

This report provides information and analysis on key issues in the aftermath of the failed July 15-16, 2016, coup attempt, including

- the response of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Turkish government—including significant personnel and institutional changes, and calls for the United States to extradite Fethullah Gulen (see below)—amid Turkey’s continuing domestic and regional challenges;
- implications for Turkey’s cooperation with the United States and NATO; and
- U.S.-Turkey dealings and other aspects regarding Syria that involve the Islamic State organization (IS, also known as ISIS, ISIL, or the Arabic acronym *Da’esh*), and Kurdish groups.

For additional information and analysis, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

Turkey After the July 2016 Failed Coup

Coup Attempt and Aftermath

On July 15-16, 2016, elements within the Turkish military operating outside the chain of command mobilized air and ground forces in a failed attempt to seize political power from President Erdogan and Prime Minister Binali Yildirim.¹ Government officials used various traditional and social media platforms² and alerts from mosque loudspeakers³ to rally Turkey’s citizens in opposition to the plot. Resistance by security forces loyal to the government and civilians in key areas of Istanbul and Ankara succeeded in foiling the coup,⁴ with around 270 killed on both sides.⁵ The leaders of Turkey’s opposition parties and key military commanders helped counter the coup attempt by promptly denouncing it.⁶

Turkish officials have publicly blamed the plot on military officers with alleged links to Fethullah Gulen—formerly a state-employed imam in Turkey and now a permanent U.S. resident (see “Post-Plot Tensions and Gulen’s Status” below for more on the implications for U.S.-Turkey relations). Allies at one point, the AKP and Gulen’s movement had a falling out in 2013 that complicated existing struggles in Turkey regarding power and political freedom. Gulen strenuously denies involvement in the plot, but has acknowledged that he “could not rule out”

¹ Metin Gurcan, “Why Turkey’s coup didn’t stand a chance,” *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, July 17, 2016.

² Uri Friedman, “Erdogan’s Final Agenda,” *The Atlantic*, July 19, 2016; Nathan Gardels, “A Former Top Turkish Advisor Explains Why Erdogan Is The Coup’s Biggest Winner,” *Huffington Post*, July 19, 2016.

³ Pinar Tremblay, “How Erdogan used the power of the mosques against the coup attempt,” *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, July 25, 2016.

⁴ Gardels, *op. cit.*

⁵ Ray Sanchez, “Fethullah Gulen on ‘GPS’: Failed Turkey coup looked ‘like a Hollywood movie,’” *CNN*, July 31, 2016.

⁶ Kareem Shaheen, “Military coup was well planned and very nearly succeeded, say Turkish officials,” *Guardian*, July 18, 2016.

involvement by some of his followers.⁷ For more on Gulen and the Gulen movement, see CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti.

In recent years, many observers had concluded that the long era of military sway over Turkish civilian politics had ended.⁸ Reportedly, this was largely due to efforts by the government and adherents or sympathizers of Fethullah Gulen during Erdogan's first decade as prime minister (he served in that office from 2003 to 2014) to diminish the military's traditionally secularist political power.⁹

The Erdogan Era

Since Erdogan became prime minister in 2003, he and the ruling AKP have led a process of change in Turkey's parliamentary democracy that has steadily increased the power of Erdogan and other civilian leaders working with him. They have been supported by a substantial political base that largely aligns with decades-long Turkish voter preferences and backs Erdogan's economically populist and religiously informed, socially conservative agenda.¹⁰

Erdogan has worked to reduce the political power of the military and other institutions that had constituted Turkey's secular elite since the republic's founding by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923, and has clashed with other possible rival power centers, including the Gulen movement. Domestic polarization has intensified since 2013: nationwide anti-government protests that began in Istanbul's Gezi Park took place that year, and corruption allegations later surfaced against a number of Erdogan's colleagues in and out of government.¹¹

After Erdogan became president in August 2014 via Turkey's first-ever popular presidential election, he claimed a mandate for increasing his power and pursuing a "presidential system" of governance.¹² In recent years under Erdogan and the AKP, Turkey has seen

- major personnel and structural changes to the justice sector and the widespread dropping of charges or convictions against Erdogan colleagues¹³ and military leaders amid government accusations that the Gulen movement had used its own agenda to drive police and prosecutorial actions and was intent on establishing a "parallel structure" to control Turkey;¹⁴
- official or related private efforts to influence media expression through intimidation, personnel changes, prosecution, and even direct takeover of key enterprises;¹⁵
- various measures to prevent future protests, including robust police action, restrictions on social media, and official and pro-government media allegations that dissent in Turkey largely comes about through the interaction of small minorities and foreign interests;¹⁶
- the May 2016 replacement of former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's AKP government by Prime Minister

⁷ Stephanie Saul, "An Exiled Cleric Denies Playing a Leading Role in Coup Attempt," *New York Times*, July 16, 2016.

⁸ Steven A. Cook, "Turkey has had lots of coups. Here's why this one failed." *washingtonpost.com*, July 16, 2016; Patrick Kingsley, "'We thought coups were in the past': how Turkey was caught unaware," *Guardian*, July 16, 2016.

⁹ Raziye Akkoc, "Erdogan and Gulen: uneasy allies turned bitter foes," *Agence France Presse*, July 17, 2016.

¹⁰ Soner Cagaptay, "Farewell, President Demirel," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 27, 2015.

¹¹ Freedom House, *Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media, and Power in Turkey*, February 3, 2014.

¹² Under Turkey's present constitution, the presidency is officially nonpartisan and is less directly involved in most governing tasks than the prime minister. Since becoming president, Erdogan has remained active politically, has claimed greater prerogatives of power under the constitution, and has proposed constitutional change that would consolidate his power more formally by vesting greater authority in the office of the president in a way that may be subject to fewer checks and balances than such systems in the United States and other president-led democracies. Calling a popular referendum to amend the constitution would require a parliamentary supermajority beyond the AKP's current representation.

¹³ Tim Arango, "Some Charges Are Dropped in Scandal in Turkey," *New York Times*, October 17, 2014.

¹⁴ Piotr Zalewski, "Erdogan turns on Gulenists' 'parallel state' in battle for power," *Financial Times*, May 6, 2014.

¹⁵ State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015, Turkey*, updated June 14, 2016; "Turkey's Zaman: Editorial tone changes after takeover," *Al Jazeera*, March 7, 2016.

¹⁶ Lisel Hintz, "Adding Insult to Injury: Vilification as Counter-Mobilization in Turkey's Gezi Protests," *Project on Middle East Political Science*, June 6, 2016.

Binali Yildirim and others characterized as more deferential to Erdogan;¹⁷ and

- U.S. and European statements of concern regarding Turkish measures targeting civil liberties and the potential for developments that may undermine the rule of law and political and economic stability.¹⁸

Analyses of Erdogan sometimes characterize him as one or more of the following: a reflection of the Turkish everyman, a cagey and pragmatic populist, a protector of the vulnerable, a budding authoritarian, an indispensable figure, or an Islamic ideologue.¹⁹ Analyses that assert similarities between Erdogan and leaders in countries such as Russia, Iran, and China in personality, psychology, or leadership style offer possible analogies regarding the countries' respective pathways.²⁰ However, such analyses often do not note factors that might distinguish Turkey from these other countries. For example, unlike Russia or Iran, Turkey's economy cannot rely on significant rents from natural resources if foreign sources of revenue or investment dry up. Unlike Russia and China, Turkey does not have nuclear weapons under its command and control. Additionally, unlike all three others, Turkey's economic, political, and national security institutions and traditions have been closely connected with those of the West for decades. Turkey's future trajectory is likely to be informed by factors including leadership, geopolitics, history, and economics.

However, increased internal and external stresses in the past few years may have made Turkey more dependent on military force in confronting threats and maintaining stability, leading some to speculate on the potential for renewed military intervention in politics.²¹ The plotters' precise motivations are unclear, but could possibly have included differences with military and political leadership over Turkey's general trajectory or specific policies.²² Many observers theorize that the coup attempt probably sought to thwart a reportedly imminent purge of some involved in the plot.²³

¹⁷ Reuben Silverman, "Some of the President's Men: Yildirim, Davutoglu, and the 'Palace Coup' Before the Coup," reubensilverman.wordpress.com, August 1, 2016.

¹⁸ State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015, op. cit.; European Commission, Turkey 2015 Report, November 10, 2015, available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_turkey.pdf.

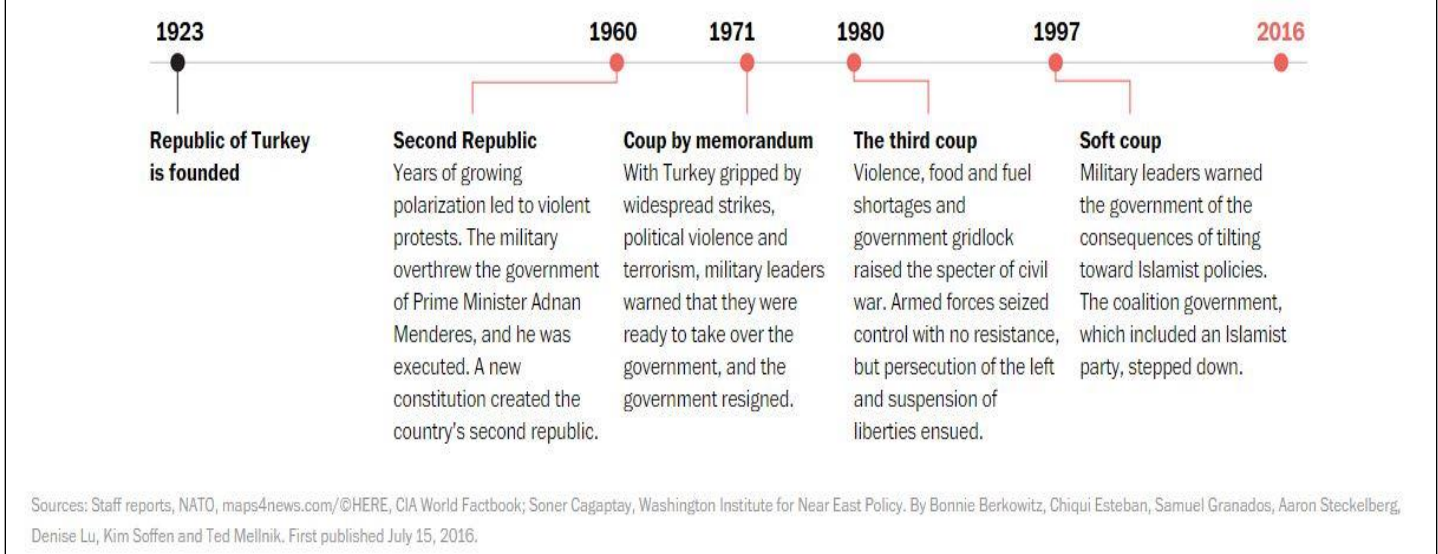
¹⁹ See e.g., Mustafa Akyol, "Turkey's Authoritarian Drift," *New York Times*, November 10, 2015; Nora Fisher Onar, "The populism/realism gap: Managing uncertainty in Turkey's politics and foreign policy," Brookings Institution, February 4, 2016; Mustafa Akyol, "Does Erdogan want his own Islamic state?" *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, April 29, 2016; Burak Kadercan, "Erdogan's Last Off-Ramp: Authoritarianism, Democracy, and the Future of Turkey," *War on the Rocks*, July 28, 2016.

²⁰ See e.g., Oral Calislar, "A tale of two Rambos: Putin, Erdogan take on West," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, December 2, 2014; Douglas Bloomfield, "Washington Watch: Is Erdogan the new Ahmadinejad?" *Jerusalem Post*, July 17, 2013; "Sending the Wrong Signal to Turkey," *New York Times*, April 19, 2016.

²¹ See, e.g. Lars Haugom, "A Political Comeback for the Turkish Military?" *Turkey Analyst*, March 11, 2016; Michael Rubin, "Could there be a coup in Turkey?" American Enterprise Institute, March 21, 2016; Gonul Tol, "Turkey's Next Military Coup," *Foreign Affairs*, May 30, 2016; Cengiz Candar, "How will Turkey's military use its restored standing?" *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, April 24, 2016.

²² See, e.g., Borzou Daragahi, "Document Reveals What Really Drove Turkey's Failed Coup Plotters," BuzzFeed, July 28, 2016.

²³ Joe Parkinson and Adam Entous, "Turkey's Spies Failed to See Coup Coming," *Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 2016; Metin Gurcan, "Why Turkey's coup didn't stand a chance," op. cit.

Figure I. Past Turkish Domestic Military Interventions

Source: *The Washington Post*.

Amid post-plot turmoil and an atmosphere of distrust, Turkey's government has detained or dismissed tens of thousands of personnel within its military, judiciary, civil service, and educational system, and taken over or closed various businesses, schools, and media outlets.²⁴ The government largely justifies its actions by claiming that those affected are associated with the Gulen movement, even though the measures may be broader in who they directly impact.²⁵ Amnesty International alleges that some detainees have been subjected to beatings, torture, and other human rights violations.²⁶ Given that several schools and other organizations with apparent ties to the Gulen movement are located around the world, Turkey's government has appealed to other governments to close down these organizations. Some have either done so or indicated a willingness to do so, and some have not.²⁷

The United States, various European leaders, and the U.N. Secretary-General have cautioned Turkey to follow the rule of law.²⁸ Western countries' emphasis on concerns about the government response has reportedly bothered many Turks (including some who normally oppose Erdogan) who largely show support for the government's post-coup actions, and who may have expected the West to show more solidarity with the Turkish people after they faced down the coup.²⁹

²⁴ Tulay Karadeniz, et al., "Turkey dismisses military, shuts media outlets as crackdown deepens," Reuters, July 28, 2016; Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkey seizes assets as post-coup crackdown turns to business," Reuters, August 18, 2016; Joe Parkinson and Emre Peker, "Turkey Tightens the Screw," *Wall Street Journal*, August 25, 2016.

²⁵ "Turkish anger at the West: Duplicity coup," *Economist*, August 20, 2016.

²⁶ Merrit Kennedy, "Amnesty International: After Turkey's Failed Coup, Some Detainees Are Tortured, Raped," NPR, July 25, 2016.

²⁷ "The hunt for Gulenists: Extradition quest," *Economist*, August 20, 2016.

²⁸ See, e.g., Duncan Robinson and Mehul Srivastava, "US and EU leaders warn Turkey's Erdogan over post-coup crackdown," *Financial Times*, July 18, 2016; "UN head 'deeply concerned' by ongoing arrests in Turkey," *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 28, 2016.

²⁹ Kadercan, op. cit.; Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, "Coup Attempt Unifies Turkey — But Could Distance the West," German Marshall Fund of the United States, August 2, 2016.

Observers debate how lasting and influential the purges will be,³⁴ and how the failed coup and echoes of past Turkish military interventions might influence future military and government actions.³⁵ In late July, Turkey's Supreme Military Council (Turkish acronym YAS) decided that the country's top military commanders, who maintained their loyalty to the government and were taken hostage during the failed coup, would retain their positions.³⁶ Shortly thereafter, the government announced a dramatic restructuring of Turkey's chain of command, giving the civilian government decisive control over the YAS. Erdogan also placed the military more firmly under the civilian government's control and revealed plans to place Turkey's national intelligence agency under his direct control, as well as to reorganize institutions involved with military training and education.³⁷

State of Emergency and Death Penalty Debate

On July 21, the Turkish parliament voted to approve a three-month state of emergency, which can be extended. This allows the government to rule by decree. Turkey also partially suspended the European Convention on Human Rights, citing examples from France, Belgium, and Ukraine as precedents.³⁰ Additionally, Turkey is engaged in a nationwide debate on reinstating capital punishment. Pointing to anti-coup protests that have voiced support for bringing back the death penalty, President Erdogan has stated that if the parliament passes such a measure, he will sign it.³¹ Capital punishment was abolished in Turkey in 2004 as an EU membership prerequisite. Some EU officials have recently reiterated that no country can join the EU while maintaining the death penalty,³² making any reinstatement likely to render Turkey's long-stalled prospects for accession an even more remote possibility.³³

With nearly half of the generals and admirals who were serving on July 15 now detained³⁸ and/or dismissed from service,³⁹ there are doubts in some quarters about the efficacy of the Turkish military in combating the numerous threats to Turkish security, including those from the Islamic State and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).⁴⁰ Beyond the personnel and institutional challenges, many observers assert that the internal divisions revealed by the coup attempt will be detrimental to both cohesion and morale.⁴¹

³⁰ "Turkish Lawmakers Give Leader Erdogan Sweeping New Powers," Associated Press, July 21, 2016.

³¹ "Erdogan: I will approve death penalty if parliament votes," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 7, 2016.

³² Selen Girit, "Will Turkey's failed coup mean a return to the death penalty?" BBC News, July 19, 2016.

³³ Kursat Akyol, "Will Turkey reinstate the death penalty?" *Al-Monitor Turkish Pulse*, July 29, 2016.

³⁴ Ben Hubbard, et al., "Failed Turkish Coup Accelerated a Purge Years in the Making," *New York Times*, July 22, 2016.

³⁵ See, e.g., Tim Arango, "With Army in Disarray, a Pillar of Turkey Lies Broken," *New York Times*, July 29, 2016. For references to past military interventions that occurred outside the chain of command (Turkey's first coup in 1960 and two failed coups in 1962 and 1963), see Nick Danforth, "Lessons for U.S.-Turkish Relations from a Coup Gone By," *War on the Rocks*, July 26, 2016; Aaron Stein, "The Fracturing of Turkey's Military," Atlantic Council, July 20, 2016.

³⁶ Emre Peker, "Turkey Firms Grip on Its Military," *Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2016.

³⁷ Cinar Kiper and Elena Becatoros, "Turkey's Erdogan brings military more under gov't," Associated Press, August 1, 2016; Yesim Dikmen and David Dolan, "Turkey culls nearly 1,400 from army, overhauls top military council," Reuters, July 31, 2016.

³⁸ Arango, "With Army in Disarray, a Pillar of Turkey Lies Broken," op. cit.

³⁹ Peker, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Aaron Stein, "The Fallout of the Failed Coup," *American Interest*, August 16, 2016; Metin Gurcan, "Critical meeting will determine fate of Turkish forces post-coup," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, July 25, 2016; Humeyra Pamuk and Gareth Jones, "INSIGHT- Turkish military a fractured force after attempted coup," Reuters, July 26, 2016.

⁴¹ Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Troubling Turn," *Foreign Affairs*, July 19, 2016; James Stavridis, "Turkey and NATO: What Comes Next Is Messy," *Foreign Policy*, July 18, 2016.

Implications for U.S./NATO Cooperation

The July 2016 failed coup and Turkey's trajectory in its aftermath could significantly impact U.S.-Turkey relations given Turkey's regional importance and membership in NATO.⁴⁵ Among NATO allies, only the U.S. military has more active duty personnel than Turkey's.⁴⁶

Post-Plot Tensions and Gulen's Status

In the wake of the failed coup, some tensions have arisen between the United States and Turkey. Secretary of State John Kerry warned on July 16 that a wide-ranging purge "would be a great challenge to [Erdogan's] relationship to Europe, to NATO and to all of us."⁴⁷ As mentioned above, an apparent disconnect between many Turks and Western observers regarding Turkey's post-coup response may be one factor complicating U.S.-Turkey relations.⁴⁸ Some Turkish officials and media have accused the United States of prior knowledge of or involvement in the coup attempt. President Obama dismissed such accusations on July 22 as "unequivocally false" and threatening to U.S.-Turkey ties.⁴⁹ The claims may partly stem from popular Turkish sensitivities about historical U.S. closeness to Turkey's military. General Joseph Votel, head of U.S. Central Command, and James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, both have raised concerns about how post-plot military personnel changes might affect U.S.-Turkey cooperation, prompting criticism from Erdogan that has further fed speculation in Turkey about alleged U.S. connections with the plot.⁵⁰

Incirlik Air Base

Incirlik (pronounced *in-jeer-leek*) air base has long been the symbolic and logistical center of the U.S. military presence in Turkey. Over the past 15 years, the base has been critical in supplying U.S. military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. It currently hosts U.S.-led coalition aircraft carrying out anti-IS strikes in Syria and Iraq, and around 1,500 U.S. personnel. Dependents of U.S. military and government personnel were ordered to leave Incirlik and other U.S. installations in Turkey in March 2016.⁴²

During and shortly after the July coup attempt, power to the base was shut off and the airspace over it was closed to some U.S. aircraft after pro-coup forces were revealed to have been using the airfield and assets based there. U.S. personnel and assets at Incirlik continued to function on backup generators.⁴³ U.S. anti-IS sorties have since resumed. The arrest of the base's Turkish commander for alleged involvement in the coup plot has raised suspicions among some in Turkey about whether the United States knew about the coup in advance.⁴⁴

⁴² Andrew Tilghman, "U.S. military dependents ordered to leave Turkey," *Military Times*, March 29, 2016.

⁴³ Michael S. Schmidt and Tim Arango, "In a Bid to Maintain Ties, Turkey Changes Its Tone," *New York Times*, August 2, 2016; Selin Nasi, "Turbulence in Turkish-US ties: The Incirlik crisis," *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 21, 2016.

⁴⁴ Oriana Pawlyk and Jeff Shogol, "Incirlik has power again, but Turkey mission faces uncertain future," *Military Times*, July 22, 2016.

⁴⁵ Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, "Erdogan Triumphs After Coup Attempt, but Turkey's Fate Is Unclear," *New York Times*, July 18, 2016.

⁴⁶ "Turkey: Executive Summary," *IHS Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - Eastern Mediterranean*, July 25, 2016.

⁴⁷ Gardiner Harris, "John Kerry Rejects Suggestions of U.S. Involvement in Turkey Coup," *New York Times*, July 17, 2016.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Unluhisarcikli, op. cit.

⁴⁹ White House, Remarks by President Obama and President Pena Nieto of Mexico in Joint Press Conference, July 22, 2016.

⁵⁰ Dion Nissenbaum and Paul Sonne, "Turkish President Rebukes U.S. General," *Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 2016. Earlier, Clapper had said in an interview that the intelligence he had seen had not turned up evidence of Gulen's involvement in the coup plot. David Ignatius, "A reality check on the Middle East from America's spy chief," *Washington Post*, July 21, 2016. However, in an early August interview on Turkish television, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey John Bass referred to the "apparent involvement of a large number" of Gulen's supporters in the plot. Tim (continued...)

Further complicating U.S.-Turkey relations, in the plot's aftermath the Turkish government has intensified its calls (which date back to 2014)⁵¹ for the United States to extradite Gulen.⁵² According to polls, calls for Gulen's extradition have widespread public support in Turkey.⁵³ In a July 19 phone call with Erdogan, President Obama said that the United States is "willing to provide appropriate assistance to Turkish authorities investigating the attempted coup" while urging that Turkish authorities conduct their investigation "in ways that reinforce public confidence in democratic institutions and the rule of law."⁵⁴ The State Department acknowledged in August 2016 that Turkey has formally requested Gulen's extradition for matters predating the coup attempt,⁵⁵ with Turkey possibly still working to prepare additional documentation in connection with coup-related allegations. For more information on U.S.-Turkey dynamics regarding the extradition issue, see CRS In Focus IF10444, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkey, and the United States: A Reference*, by Jim Zanotti. For more information on the U.S. extradition process in general, see CRS Report RS22702, *An Abridged Sketch of Extradition To and From the United States*, by Charles Doyle.

Some Turkish officials have sought to portray U.S. extradition of Gulen as critical for positive U.S.-Turkey relations,⁵⁶ though the potential consequences if he is not extradited quickly or at all remain unclear. In early August 2016, during a visit to Turkey by General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, top Turkish officials reassured Dunford that the United States would continue to enjoy access to Incirlik and other bases in Turkey.⁵⁷ Turkey maintains the right to cancel U.S. access to Incirlik with three days' notice.

Specific Issues for U.S. Policy

Specific issues of concern with implications for U.S. policy going forward include the following:

- **Turkey's NATO Role.** U.S./NATO basing and operations in Turkey, joint exercises and expeditionary missions, and NATO assistance (including air defense batteries and AWACS aircraft)⁵⁸ to address Turkey's external threats.
- **Arms Sales and Bilateral Military Cooperation.** U.S. arms sales or potential sales to Turkey include F-35 next-generation fighter aircraft.⁵⁹ The United States provides annual security-related aid to Turkey of approximately \$3-\$5 million.⁶⁰

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Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, "Turks Agree on One Thing: U.S. Was Behind Failed Revolt," op. cit.

⁵¹ Gulsen Solaker, "Turkey's Erdogan calls on U.S. to extradite rival Gulen," Reuters, April 29, 2014.

⁵² Jessica Durando, "Turkey demands extradition of cleric Fethullah Gulen from U.S.," *USA Today*, July 19, 2016.

⁵³ "Most Turks believe a secretive Muslim sect was behind the failed coup," *Economist*, July 28, 2016.

⁵⁴ White House, Readout of the President's Call with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, July 19, 2016.

⁵⁵ State Department Daily Press Briefing, August 23, 2016.

⁵⁶ Schmidt and Arango, op. cit.

⁵⁷ Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Erin Cunningham, "Pentagon's top general seeks to cool anti-American sentiment in Turkey," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2016.

⁵⁸ NATO Fact Sheet, "Augmentation of Turkey's Air Defence," June 2016; NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, "NATO AWACS Increases Assurance Measures to Turkey," March 15, 2016; John-Thor Dahlberg, "NATO chief: AWACS will aid anti-Islamic State operations," Associated Press, July 4, 2016.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Rathke and Lisa Sawyer Samp, "Security in the Eastern Mediterranean after the Coup Attempt: Turkey's Reckoning and Washington's Worries," Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 21, 2016; "Despite Tensions With US, Lockheed Prepares to Hand Over F-35s to Turkey," *Sputnik News*, July 20, 2016. Turkey is one of 12 partner countries (including the United States) in the multinational consortium responsible for the F-35's manufacture. See <https://www.f35.com/global>. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress in 2006 of (continued...)

- **Syria and Iraq Issues and Anti-IS Coalition.** Including U.S.-Turkey dynamics involving the Islamic State, Kurds within and outside Turkey, other state and non-state actors, and contested territory in northern Syria.
- **Domestic Stability, Human Rights, and Kurdish Issues.** Including the government's approach to rule of law, civil liberties, terrorist threats, Kurds and other minorities, and nearly 3 million refugees and migrants from Syria and elsewhere.
- **Border Concerns.** Turkey's ability and willingness, in concert with other international actors, to control cross-border flows of refugees, migrants, and possible foreign fighters and terrorists.

(...continued)

a possible direct commercial sale of up to 100 F-35s to Turkey, with delivery on any sale projected to take place over the next decade. To date, Turkey has ordered six F-35s. "Turkey – Procurement," *IHS Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - Eastern Mediterranean*, December 8, 2015. For more information on recent, ongoing, and prospective U.S. arms transfers to Turkey, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

⁶⁰ State Department FY2017 Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Appendix 3, pp. 114-116.

Recently Improved Turkish Relations with Israel and Russia

Turkey's relations with key neighbors could have significant implications for U.S.-Turkey relations as well. In the weeks prior to the failed coup, Turkey had undertaken efforts to reconcile or improve its troubled ties with both Israel and Russia, and had stated an interest in improving its relations with other nearby countries. The efforts may partly have reflected Turkish leaders' desires to (1) bolster Erdogan's position domestically and internationally in light of various national security threats, economic concerns (including a major decline in foreign tourism), and recent criticism of his rule;⁶¹ (2) address Turkey's growing demand for external sources of energy;⁶² and (3) improve Turkey's prospects of influencing regional political-military outcomes, particularly in Syria and Iraq.⁶³ These efforts appear to have continued after the coup attempt.⁶⁴ It is unclear how far-reaching or durable Turkish adjustments in foreign policy will be and to what extent they portend greater closeness to or independence from U.S. policies.

In late June 2016, Turkey and Israel announced the full restoration of diplomatic relations. Reportedly, Vice President Joe Biden facilitated the rapprochement in part due to potential mutual benefits anticipated by both sides from the construction of a natural gas pipeline from offshore Israeli fields to Turkey.⁶⁵ According to media reports, the rapprochement includes Israeli compensation to the families of those killed in the 2010 Gaza flotilla incident⁶⁶ in exchange for an end to legal claims, as well as opportunities for Turkey to assist with humanitarian and infrastructure projects for Palestinian residents in the Gaza Strip. It is unclear to what extent Turkey might—as part of the rapprochement—contemplate limiting its ties with Hamas or the activities of some Hamas figures reportedly based in Turkey.⁶⁷

Also in June, Turkey made strides toward repairing relations with Russia that had been strained since November 2015, when a Turkish F-16 downed a Russian Su-24 aircraft near the Turkey-Syria border under disputed circumstances. Erdogan wrote a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin expressing regret for the November incident. In response, Russia lifted various economic sanctions it had imposed after the incident,⁶⁸ and state-owned Gazprom subsequently announced that work that had reportedly been put on hold regarding a planned natural gas pipeline between the two countries (known as Turkish Stream) would resume.⁶⁹ Concerns about possible Russian retaliation prevented Turkey from carrying out air sorties over Syria after the incident,⁷⁰ and reported Russian support or enabling of Syrian Kurdish forces may have also been partially motivated by bilateral tensions.⁷¹

Some analysts posit that in light of Western criticism of the post-coup crackdown on domestic opposition, Erdogan may opt to seek closer relations with Russia, possibly at the expense of Turkey's relations with the United States and Europe.⁷² However, Turkey has a long history of tension with Russia,⁷³ and the differences between the two nations

⁶¹ Yaroslav Trofimov, "Turkey Changes Tack on Foreign Policy to Win Back Friends," *Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2016.

⁶² Soner Cagaptay and James Jeffrey, "Turkey's Regional Charm Offensive: Motives and Prospects," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 27, 2016.

⁶³ Laura Pitel, "Flurry of diplomatic activity marks Turkey foreign policy shift," *Financial Times*, June 28, 2016.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Amberin Zaman, "Do Ankara, Damascus perceive common Kurdish threat?" *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, August 22, 2016; Semih Idiz, "Turkey is part of the Western system," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 23, 2016.

⁶⁵ Many analysts assert that a Turkey-Israel pipeline would probably traverse Cypriot waters, thus necessitating an improvement in Turkish-Cypriot relations, if not a resolution to the decades-long dispute between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. For information on ongoing diplomacy regarding Cyprus, see CRS Report R41136, *Cyprus: Reunification Proving Elusive*, by Vincent L. Morelli. Discussion of a pipeline may also attract the attention of Russia, currently Turkey's largest natural gas supplier.

⁶⁶ For more information on the incident, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

⁶⁷ Rory Jones, et al., "Turkey, Israel Trumpet Benefits of Deal to Normalize Relations," *Wall Street Journal*, June 27, 2016.

⁶⁸ "Russia closes 'crisis chapter' with Turkey," *Al Jazeera*, June 29, 2016.

⁶⁹ Dmitry Solovyov, "Russia, Turkey reach 'political decision' on TurkStream, nuclear power plant: agencies," Reuters, July 26, 2016.

⁷⁰ Deniz Zeyrek, "Turkey suspends Syria flights after crisis with Russia," *Hurriyet Daily News*, November 27, 2015.

⁷¹ Trofimov, op. cit.; Fabrice Balanche, "The Struggle for Azaz Corridor Could Spur a Turkish Intervention," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch 2532, December 11, 2015.

⁷² Soner Cagaptay, "If tensions increase with the west, Erdogan might find a friend in Putin," *Guardian*, July 23, 2016.

on Syria reportedly remain wide.⁷⁴ In August 2016, Turkish Prime Minister Yildirim indicated that Incirlik could possibly be made available for Russian use against the Islamic State in Syria, though the likelihood of this happening is unclear.⁷⁵

Strategic and Political Assessment

U.S. civilian and military installations and personnel in Turkey were unharmed during the July 2016 attempted putsch. However, concerns surrounding plot-related events that transpired at Incirlik air base (see textbox above) have fueled discussion among analysts about the advisability of continued U.S./NATO use of Turkish bases,⁷⁶ including the reported storage of aircraft-deliverable nuclear weapons at Incirlik (for more information, see CRS Insight IN10542, *U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Turkey*, by Amy F. Woolf).⁷⁷

Turkey's location near several global hotspots makes the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the United States and NATO. Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through its straits pursuant to the Montreux Convention of 1936. Turkey's embrace of the United States and NATO during the Cold War came largely as a reaction to post-World War II actions by the Soviet Union seemingly aimed at moving Turkey and its strategic control of maritime access points into a Soviet sphere of influence.

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⁷³ Soner Cagaptay, "When Russia Howls, Turkey Moves," *War on the Rocks*, December 2, 2015.

⁷⁴ Colum Lynch, "Exclusive: Behind Closed Doors at the U.N., Russia and Turkey Are Still Battling," *Foreign Policy*, August 15, 2016.

⁷⁵ John Vandiver, "Turkey open to Russian planes at US Incirlik hub," *Stars and Stripes*, August 23, 2016.

⁷⁶ Rathke and Samp, op. cit.

⁷⁷ Aaron Stein, "Nuclear Weapons in Turkey Are Destabilizing, but Not for the Reason You Think," *War on the Rocks*, July 22, 2016; Tobin Harshaw, "Why the U.S. should move nukes out of Turkey," *Bloomberg*, July 25, 2016; Jeffrey Lewis, "America's Nukes Aren't Safe in Turkey Anymore," *Foreign Policy*, July 18, 2016; Eric Schlosser, "The H-Bombs in Turkey," *New Yorker*, July 17, 2016.

Figure 2. Map of U.S. and NATO Military Presence in Turkey



Sources: Department of Defense, NATO, and various media outlets; adapted by CRS.

Notes: All locations are approximate. All bases are under Turkish sovereignty, with portions of them used for limited purposes by the U.S. military and NATO. The U.S. and German Patriot missile batteries are scheduled to be withdrawn by October 2015 and January 2016, respectively.

On a number of occasions throughout the history of the U.S.-Turkey alliance, events or developments have led to the withdrawal of U.S. military assets from Turkey or restrictions on U.S. use of its territory and/or airspace.⁷⁸ Calculations regarding the costs and benefits to the United States of a U.S./NATO presence in Turkey, and how changes or potential changes in U.S./NATO posture might influence Turkish calculations and policies, revolve to a significant extent around the following two questions:

- To what extent does the United States rely on the use of Turkish territory or airspace to secure and protect U.S. interests?

⁷⁸ For more information, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

- To what extent does Turkey rely on U.S./NATO support, both in principle and in functional terms, for its security and its ability to exercise influence in the surrounding region?

The cost to the United States of finding a temporary or permanent replacement for Incirlik air base would likely depend on a number of variables, including the functionality and location of alternatives, the location of future U.S. military engagements, and the political and economic difficulty involved in moving or expanding U.S. military operations elsewhere.

Any reevaluation of the U.S./NATO presence in and relationship with Turkey would take a number of political considerations into account alongside strategic and operational ones. Certain differences between Turkey and its NATO allies, including some related to Syria in recent years, may persist irrespective of who leads these countries given their varying (1) geographical positions, (2) threat perceptions, and (3) roles in regional and global political and security architectures. Turkey's historically and geopolitically driven efforts to avoid domination by outside powers—sometimes called the “Sèvres syndrome”⁷⁹—resonate in its ongoing attempts to achieve greater military, economic, and political self-sufficiency and to influence its surrounding environment.

The potential for the United States to use its political relationship with Turkey to boost U.S. influence in the greater Middle East remains inconclusive. Regardless of some difficulties with the United States and other NATO countries, Turkey remains a key regional power that shares linkages and characteristics with the West,⁸⁰ which may distinguish Turkey from other Muslim-majority regional powers such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Therefore, cooperation with Turkey, along with other actors, is likely to remain relevant for the advancement of U.S. interests in the volatile area.⁸¹

However, recent foreign and domestic policy developments may have constrained Turkey's role as a shaper of regional outcomes, a model for neighboring countries, and a facilitator of U.S. interests.⁸² Additionally, as Turkey's energy consumption grows along with its economy, its dependence on Russia⁸³ and Iran⁸⁴ for significant portions of its energy may contribute to constraints on some aspects of its security cooperation with the United States and NATO. Turkey engages with a wide range of non-NATO actors as part of its efforts to cultivate military and defense industrial links and to exercise greater regional and global influence politically and economically.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Nick Danforth, “Forget Sykes-Picot. It's the Treaty of Sèvres That Explains the Modern Middle East,” *foreignpolicy.com*, August 10, 2015.

⁸⁰ “Foreign policy: Alone in the world,” *Economist*, February 6, 2016.

⁸¹ See, e.g., M. Hakan Yavuz and Mujeeb R. Khan, “Turkey Treads a Positive Path,” *New York Times*, February 12, 2015.

⁸² Michael Crowley, “Did Obama get Erdogan wrong?” *Politico*, July 16, 2016. Soli Ozel of Kadir Has University in Istanbul, quoted in Liz Sly, “Turkey's increasingly desperate predicament poses real dangers,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 2016.

⁸³ Russia supplies about 20% of Turkey's energy consumption. “Russia v Turkey: Over the borderline,” *Economist*, November 28, 2015.

⁸⁴ Turkey has become less dependent on Iranian oil in recent years, but—according to 2015 government figures—still receives about 22% of the oil it imports from Iran (with more than 45% now coming from Iraq) and 15.3% of the natural gas it imports from Iran (with more than 58% coming from Russia). See <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa>.

⁸⁵ For example, in a now-discontinued effort to seek a foreign partner for a multibillion-dollar air and missile defense system, Turkish officials in 2013 indicated a preliminary preference for a Chinese state-controlled company's offer (continued...)

For the time being, Turkey lacks comparable alternatives to its security and economic ties with the West, with which it shares a more than 60-year legacy of institutionalized cooperation. Turkey's NATO membership and economic interdependence with Europe appear to have contributed to important Turkish decisions to rely on, and partner with, sources of Western strength. However, as Turkey has prospered under these circumstances, its economic success has driven its efforts to seek greater overall self-reliance and independence in foreign policy.

Syria: Islamic State and Kurdish Groups

A number of developments, such as international jihadist terror incidents and refugee flows, particularly in the past year, have driven U.S. expectations regarding Turkish cooperation with respect to Syria. Though some observers alleged that Turkey had been slow in 2013 and 2014 to curtail activities involving its territory that were seen as bolstering the Islamic State and other Sunni extremist groups,⁸⁶ Turkey has partnered with the U.S.-led anti-IS coalition, including through hosting coalition aircraft that (since summer 2015) strike targets in Syria and Iraq. In engaging in these efforts, Turkish officials have sought greater intelligence sharing from foreign fighters' countries of origin, with some success.⁸⁷

Even as periodic IS-linked terrorist attacks and cross-border rocket attacks have killed dozens in Turkey in recent months, various factors contribute to Turkish leaders' continuing concerns about Kurdish groups (a political organization known as the PYD and its militia, known as the YPG) aligned with the PKK,⁸⁸ as well as the Syrian government and its allies. Turkish priorities are likely to depend on perceived threats and the options Turkish leaders discern for minimizing them.⁸⁹ Turkey's capacity to influence events in Syria appears to be affected by the July 2016 failed coup and military shakeup.⁹⁰ These, in turn, may be impacting the calculations of the Syrian government and other key actors.⁹¹ In August 2016, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu departed significantly from previous Turkish policy when he stated that Turkey could accept an interim role for President Asad of Syria during a post-conflict transition.⁹²

Turkey is reportedly worried about U.S. coordination with and recent gains by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an umbrella grouping of various Kurdish, Arab, and other Syrian

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until reported problems with negotiations, criticism from NATO allies, and competing offers from European and U.S. companies apparently led the Turks to move away from this preference. Lale Sariibrahimoglu, "Turkey begins T-Loramids talks with Eurosam," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, September 8, 2014.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Alison Smale, "Turkey's Role as Migrant Gateway Is Source of New Urgency for E.U.," *New York Times*, November 18, 2015; Lale Sariibrahimoglu, "On the borderline—Turkey's ambiguous approach to Islamic State," *IHS Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 16, 2014.

⁸⁷ Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, "Undercover teams, increased surveillance and hardened borders: Turkey cracks down on foreign fighters," *Washington Post*, March 6, 2016.

⁸⁸ For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10350, *The Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran*, by Jim Zanotti and Bolko J. Skorupski.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Liz Sly and Karen DeYoung, "Ignoring Turkey, U.S. backs Kurds in drive against ISIS in Syria," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2016; Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Istanbul attack vengeance will be like 'rain from hell,'" CNN, June 29, 2016; Nick Ashdown, "Turkey's Tourism Plummets amid Bombings and Crisis with Russia," *Jerusalem Post*, June 14, 2016.

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Yaroslav Trofimov, "Fallout from Turkey Coup Leaves Syria Rebels in the Lurch," *Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 2016.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Nabih Bulos, "Kurds blur lines in Syrian conflict," *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 2016.

militias largely led by the YPG. SDF gains raise the possibility of effective YPG control over most, if not all, of Syria's northern border. For more information see CRS Report R44513, *Kurds in Iraq and Syria: U.S. Partners Against the Islamic State*, coordinated by Jim Zanotti. Turkey claims to have received a promise from the United States that YPG forces will not occupy territory west of the Euphrates River, a proposition that is being tested in the wake of the YPG's participation in the capture of the Syrian town of Manbij from the Islamic State in August 2016.⁹³

In August 2016, U.S. and Turkish aircraft supported an incursion by Turkish tanks and special forces into the Syrian town of Jarabulus just across the border (see **Figure 3** below). The operation, which also involved some Syrian militias that oppose both the Islamic State and the Asad regime, was nominally intended to clear Jarabulus of IS fighters. However, a U.S. official has been cited as saying that the operation also sought to "create a buffer against the possibility of the Kurds moving forward."⁹⁴ During his August 2016 visit to Turkey, Vice President Joe Biden said that failure by YPG forces to go back to the east side of the Euphrates would endanger U.S. support for the Syrian Kurdish group.⁹⁵

Turkey has dubbed the operation "Euphrates Shield," and presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin has stated that it is aimed at neutralizing threats that Turkey perceives from both the Islamic State and the YPG.⁹⁶ Amid reports that the YPG was leaving Manbij to affiliated Arab forces, Turkish fire apparently targeted some Syrian Kurdish positions west of the Euphrates.⁹⁷ The *New York Times* noted in late August that before Turkey's July coup attempt led to greater government control over the military, many military commanders opposed government proposals for direct Turkish action in Syria, including an alleged plotter who was killed during the coup attempt and had headed Turkey's special forces.⁹⁸

Going forward, it is unclear to what extent:

- the Turkish military might maintain forces over the border in Jarabulus in hopes of monitoring IS and/or YPG fighters and preventing any advances;
- U.S., Turkish, and other anti-IS coalition forces might coordinate rules of engagement for administering areas occupied inside Syria, both generally and in relation to specific state and non-state armed groups;
- direct Turkish operations might extend beyond the Jarabulus area to other places along the border, either with or without U.S. support; and
- Turkey's actions are connected to its objectives regarding broader outcomes in Syria and to its dealings with other key stakeholders, including Russia, Iran, and the Asad regime.

⁹³ "Turkey expects Syrian Kurdish forces to withdraw after Manbij operation: minister," Reuters, August 15, 2016.

⁹⁴ "IS conflict: Turkey-backed Syrian rebels take Jarabulus," BBC News, August 24, 2016.

⁹⁵ "US urges PYD to not cross Euphrates, lends support to Turkish ops," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 24, 2016.

⁹⁶ Amberin Zaman, "Turkish Troops Enter Syria to Fight ISIS, May also Target U.S.-Backed Kurdish Militia," Woodrow Wilson Center, August 24, 2016.

⁹⁷ Emre Peker, et al., "Turkey Secures Grip on Syria Border Zone," *Wall Street Journal*, August 26, 2016.

⁹⁸ Tim Arango, "Syria Operation Points to a Shift in Turkey," *New York Times*, August 26, 2016.

Figure 3. Northern Syria: Areas of Control



Sources: CRS, based on data from IHS Conflict Monitor (last revised August 22, 2016), UN OCHA, and Esri; and adapted pursuant to media accounts as of August 25, 2016.

Note: All designations are approximate and subject to change.

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