

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing on

“Human Rights in Turkish-Occupied Cyprus: Erdogan's Record and Its Implications for the Ankara NATO Summit”

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Chairman Smith, Chairman McGovern, and honorable members, I thank you for the opportunity to testify on Turkey’s policies towards Cyprus, the wider Eastern Mediterranean, and the implications for the security and stability of the transatlantic alliance.

As a political scientist and policy analyst, I have studied and taught about modern Turkish politics since 2002 in Turkey and the United States. I witnessed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party’s rise to victory in November 2002 and have followed his progress since. Since his earliest days in power, I have stood in opposition to his Islamist worldview, documented his disdain toward democratic government, and chronicled his subjugation of the Turkish people to economic and political ruin. Turks today are measurably worse off under Erdogan’s rule than at any other point in Turkey’s history as a republic.

My unceasing critique of Erdogan’s record has resulted in the Turkish government’s ban of my social media accounts in Turkey by court order, its declaration of me a traitor, and its branding of me as a member of the Islamist Fetullah Gulen Cult, which was partially responsible for the coup to topple Erdogan in 2016. For my part, I am as proud a Turk as I am a British and American citizen. I was raised in a secular and progressive family. I am the son of an accomplished Air Force pilot and an internationally renowned, award-winning artist mother. My entire parental and educational upbringing biases me to respect the virtues of democratic government and reject the autocratic-Islamist project of Erdogan’s governance and the kleptocratic regime he has built. My persona and character are not limited to my words here but are echoed throughout my entire public scholarship since embarking on my career.

My reason for giving you my brief biography is simple: I am not anti-Turkey, but anti-Erdogan. My counsel to this committee is premised on my desire to protect the national security interests of the United States and the NATO alliance and, ultimately, to contribute what I can to facilitate Turkey’s return to democratic governance. Far too many scholars, analysts and journalists overlook or underreport the danger Erdogan represents to the United States, NATO and Turkey’s own citizenry. Many Turks are afraid of criticizing Erdogan, justifiably fearing loss of their livelihoods, imprisonment, or being targeted by agents of his autocratic regime.

By contrast, many Turks who are not supportive of Erdogan's domestic governance of Turkey still believe his foreign policy pursuits make Turkey stronger on the world stage. I am here to argue against this perspective and point out the increasing threat that Erdogan presents to the Eastern Mediterranean, or NATO's southeastern flank. Many Turks have forgotten or do not see that there is a difference between wanting their country to be strong, to be successful, and to defend its security interests, and wanting to enable an increasingly malign government with revisionist ambitions that could initiate armed conflict with Greece, Cyprus, or even Israel.

Turkey seeks to gain access to cutting-edge U.S. defense articles, including reentry into the F-35 program, from which it was removed in 2019 for purchasing a Russian missile defense system and an F-110 engine to power its indigenous fifth-generation fighter plane, the Kaan. Equipping Erdogan with such U.S. capabilities would be a tremendous mistake. Transferring them to Turkey would not be the same as transferring them to other stalwart NATO allies, such as Great Britain, Germany, or Poland. These countries have all demonstrated a desire to uphold the collective interests of European and NATO security; Erdogan's aim is to equip his military for revisionist purposes that could attempt to redraw the boundaries of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

NATO is a collective alliance that safeguards the security interests of all its members; it is not a body created to further one autocrat's irredentist vision.

The regime Erdogan has built could outlast him, representing a persistent threat to the security and stability of the Mediterranean and Middle East, as well as to the core security interests of the United States and NATO. The Turkey Erdogan seeks to build is not a power that intends to be a force multiplier to the transatlantic and rules-based order that emerged at the end of World War II; it is one that seeks to supplant it.

A cottage industry of analyses portrays Erdogan's Turkey as a power moving closer to supporting NATO and Europe's security interests, and as a potential guarantor for the West's efforts to contain or even thwart the threats posed by Vladimir Putin's Russia.¹ I am here to argue that nothing could be further from the truth. Such accounts rely on a desire to normalize Erdogan's autocratic exploits and whitewash and underreport his revisionist ambitions for the Near and Middle East.

Erdogan's Turkey is a state sponsor of terrorism, with a proven track record of providing materiel support for Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and potentially Hezbollah. Support for these extremist Islamist entities is based on overseeing the emergence of a new Middle East geostrategic map — one which Turkey dominates while both undermining Israel and its other regional partner and supplanting the U.S.-led security order that has underwritten stability in the Eastern Mediterranean for decades. Cyprus sits at the center of this design. It is not a peripheral dispute; it is the keystone of Erdogan's broader bid to remake the region's maritime and defense map in Turkey's favor.

Cyprus: The Keystone of Turkey's Revisionist Strategy

¹ For a representative example of this argument, see: "Turkey's Quiet Realignment: Russia's Loss Is NATO's Gain," *Foreign Affairs*, June 10, 2026. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/turkey/turkeys-quiet-realignment>)

Cyprus is the clearest illustration of the gap between the image Erdogan will project at the NATO summit in Ankara and the reality of his conduct. Turkey has illegally occupied roughly one-third of the island since its 1974 invasion, maintaining tens of thousands of troops, combat drones, and missile capabilities in territory that no state other than Turkey recognizes as the so-called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.”² The international community, including the United States and the European Union, recognizes the Republic of Cyprus as the island’s sole legitimate government.

Over the past year, Ankara has used the regional turmoil produced by the war against Iran as cover to escalate dramatically. In March 2026, Turkey deployed six F-16C fighter jets and additional air defense systems to the occupied north, operating from Ercan Airport near Nicosia.³ This was the first deployment of combat aircraft to the occupied zone and a major escalation in the militarization of the Eastern Mediterranean. The move also raised serious legal questions: Turkey’s F-16 fleet was acquired through U.S. foreign military sales and is subject to International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) end-use conditions. Positioning U.S.-manufactured aircraft in occupied territory, without consultation, is precisely the kind of conduct that warrants congressional oversight and an investigation into whether end-user agreements were violated.

The provocations did not stop there. In June 2026, Turkish F-16s harassed aircraft carrying the defense ministers of Greece, France, and the Netherlands as they flew into the Republic of Cyprus for an informal EU defense meeting, with interference originating from the illegal Tymbou airport in the occupied north.⁴ The European Commission opened an investigation, but the episode underscored Ankara’s view that Cyprus is a strategic arena through which it can challenge its regional rivals and test Europe’s willingness to defend its own interests.⁵

Turkey’s objection to Cyprus’s deepening security ties with Europe — including a Status of Forces agreement that would allow French military personnel to operate on the island (signed in June 2026) — reveals the logic at work. Ankara perceives the emergence of a regional bloc composed of Cyprus, Greece, France, and potentially Israel as a threat to be disrupted, not a stabilizing development to be welcomed.⁶ That is the posture of a revisionist power, not a status quo ally.

Turkey’s revisionist policies in response to the emerging partnerships and regional order in the Eastern Mediterranean should be kept in mind as attempts are made to kickstart a new initiative to

² Sinan Ciddi, “Turkish Deployment of F-16s in Occupied Portion of Cyprus Raises Tensions in Eastern Mediterranean,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 9, 2026.

(<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/03/09/turkish-deployment-of-f-16s-in-occupied-portion-of-cyprus-raises-tensions-in-eastern-mediterranean>)

³ “Türkiye deploys F-16s to Turkish Cyprus to boost security amid Iran war,” *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), March 9, 2026. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/turkiye-deploys-f-16s-to-turkish-cyprus-to-boost-security-amid-iran-war/news>); Cem Devrim Yaylali, “Turkey sends six F-16 fighters to Northern Cyprus amid Iran missile threats,” *Defense News*, March 9, 2026. (<https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2026/03/09/turkey-sends-six-f-16-fighters-to-northern-cyprus-amid-iran-missile-threats>)

⁴ Nektaria Stamouli, “Turkish forces harass aircraft carrying ministers into Cyprus,” *Politico Europe*, June 8, 2026. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/turkish-forces-harass-aircraft-carrying-ministers-into-cyprus>); “EU executive to look into Turkish plane harassment claims,” *Kathimerini* (Greece), June 9, 2026. (<https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1306119/eu-executive-to-look-into-turkish-plane-harassment-claims>)

⁵ Sinan Ciddi, “Turkey Escalates Tensions in Cyprus,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 9, 2026. (https://www.fdd.org/analysis/policy_briefs/2026/06/09/turkey-escalates-tensions-in-cyprus)

⁶ Nektaria Stamouli, “France, Cyprus close to concluding Status of Forces agreement for French deployment,” *Politico Europe*, June 7, 2026. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/france-cyprus-pact-for-french-deployment>)

solve the Cyprus problem. Previous attempts would have resulted in a Cyprus — which, incidentally, is days away from completing its second tenure as president of the Council of the European Union — whose foreign policy would be subject to Erdogan’s wishes. The prospect of a veto-wielding member of the European Union and a charter member of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum having to accommodate its foreign policy in any way to please the present government in Ankara should terrify both Washington and Brussels. Cyprus has transformed itself over the past decade into a frontline state for Western security interests and a key intermediary between the Middle East and Europe. To allow this strategic partner of the United States to be subject to the whims of Erdogan *in any way* would be diplomatic malpractice.

Redrawing the Map: The ‘Blue Homeland’ and Maritime Revisionism

Cyprus cannot be understood in isolation from Ankara’s wider maritime ambitions. Turkish officials have advanced domestic legislation that would codify claims to as many as 152 islands and islets in the Aegean Sea — a direct threat to sovereignty arrangements established by international treaties and long accepted by Turkey’s own NATO allies.⁷ This is the “Blue Homeland” doctrine in practice: an effort to redraw maritime boundaries unilaterally through parliamentary legislation, naval pressure, and the steady militarization of contested spaces.

The objective is to deny Greece, Cyprus, and Israel the ability to develop offshore energy resources. Ankara also seeks to fracture the partnerships these states have built around them, and to assert claims unrecognized by the majority of states. Israel, which lies less than 300 miles from Cyprus, has developed increasingly close defense and energy ties with Athens and Nicosia, including joint exercises and cooperation on offshore natural gas infrastructure. Turkish combat aircraft operating from Northern Cyprus place Israeli naval vessels, energy platforms, and air routes within closer operational reach.⁸ The militarization of Cyprus is therefore not a parochial dispute among Ankara, Athens, and Nicosia. It is a deliberate instrument for undermining the security of three U.S. partners simultaneously.

Against this backdrop, the committee should weigh the consequences for Turkey of acquiring the F-35. The deployment of fourth-generation F-16s to occupied Cyprus has already threatened the stability of the Eastern Mediterranean. The introduction of a fifth-generation stealth aircraft would transform it. An F-35 based on or operating from the occupied north would be able to penetrate contested airspace with a low-observable signature, hold Cypriot, Greek, and Israeli air defenses at risk, and surveil Israeli naval vessels and offshore energy platforms with a degree of impunity that no aircraft currently in Turkey’s inventory can achieve. Given Ankara’s demonstrated willingness to forward-deploy U.S.-origin combat aircraft to occupied territory without

⁷ Nicoletta Kouroushi, “Turkey’s Blue Homeland Agenda and the Future of Maritime Competition,” *Middle East Forum*, June 6, 2026. (<https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/turkeys-blue-homeland-agenda-and-the-future-of-maritime-competition>); Sinan Ciddi, “Turkey’s Maritime Strategy Heightens the Risk of a New Eastern Mediterranean Crisis,” *Middle East Forum*, May 13, 2026. (<https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/turkeys-maritime-strategy-heightens-the-risk-of-a-new-eastern-mediterranean-crisis>)

⁸ Sinan Ciddi, “Turkish Deployment of F-16s in Occupied Portion of Cyprus Raises Tensions in Eastern Mediterranean,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 9, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/03/09/turkish-deployment-of-f-16s-in-occupied-portion-of-cyprus-raises-tensions-in-eastern-mediterranean>)

consultation, there is every reason to expect that the F-35 would be used not as a contribution to shared defense but as an instrument of coercion against three U.S. partners.⁹

The danger is compounded by Turkey's retention of the Russian S-400 air defense system. The rationale for expelling Turkey from the F-35 program in 2019 was that operating the S-400 alongside the aircraft would allow its advanced radar to collect data on the F-35's stealth signature and expose sensitive tactical characteristics to Moscow — intelligence that Russia could be expected to share with Iran and China. That risk has not diminished; the S-400 remains on Turkish soil. Placing the world's most advanced stealth fighter in the hands of a government that simultaneously fields Russian air defenses, shelters Hamas, and is openly hostile to Israel would not strengthen the alliance. It would hand a revisionist actor a capability it could turn against the very partners NATO exists to protect.¹⁰

The NATO Summit: Marketing Versus Reality

At the NATO summit that Turkey will host in July 2026, Erdogan will present himself as a strong Western ally devoted to collective security and a potential bulwark against Vladimir Putin's Russia. That presentation is a marketing campaign, not a statement of intent. His true priority is strategic autonomy — independence from the West sufficient to pursue his revisionist and irredentist goals without constraint.¹¹

The evidence is in plain sight. When Erdogan traveled to Washington in the fall of 2025, his central objective was to obtain advanced defense technology: readmission to the F-35 program and production licenses for the F110 engines that would power Turkey's indigenous Kaan fighter. He left empty-handed on the items that mattered most, securing only smaller deals in civil nuclear cooperation and jetliner sales.¹² Two legal frameworks stood in his way and should remain in place: sanctions pursuant to the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), imposed after Turkey purchased the Russian S-400 air defense system, and Section 1245 of the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, which bars F-35 transfers to Turkey unless Ankara removes the S-400 and its associated personnel. Ankara offered no such commitment.

That calculus is now being tested in real time. In the days immediately preceding this hearing, the Trump administration informed Congress that it intends to proceed with the sale of more than \$700 million in General Electric F110 engines to power Turkey's Kaan fighter, overriding a hold placed

⁹ On the operational reach of Turkish combat aircraft based in occupied Cyprus already extended over the Eastern Mediterranean, see: Sinan Ciddi, "Turkish Deployment of F-16s in Occupied Portion of Cyprus Raises Tensions in Eastern Mediterranean," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 9, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/03/09/turkish-deployment-of-f-16s-in-occupied-portion-of-cyprus-raises-tensions-in-eastern-mediterranean>)

¹⁰ On the S-400's radar collecting data on F-35 stealth characteristics and the risk of exposure to Russia, Iran, and China, see: "Erdogan Claims Progress in Bid to Secure F-35 Fighter Jet From United States," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 27, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/06/27/erdogan-claims-progress-in-bid-to-secure-f-35-fighter-jet-from-united-states>)

¹¹ Ragip Soylu, "Turkey vows fully independent defense industry," *Middle East Eye* (UK), June 18, 2025. (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-defence-industry-fully-independent-erdogan-vows>)

¹² Sinan Ciddi and William Doran, "Erdogan Leaves Washington Empty-Handed on F-35s?" *RealClearDefense*, October 10, 2025. (https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2025/10/10/erdogan_leaves_washington_empty_handed_on_f-35s_1140092.html)

on the package by Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY), who objected that the administration had bypassed congressional review and failed to brief lawmakers on the implications of the sale or on Turkey's continued possession of the S-400. Speaking alongside Vice President Vance, the president signaled he was prepared to do something that would make Erdogan "very happy" on both the engines and the F-35, while the vice president stated that the administration was reviewing whether Turkey had met the statutory certification requirements for the aircraft.¹³

The risks of this course are significant and warrant this committee's close attention. The F110 engine is the single most important enabler of the Kaan program, the flagship of Erdogan's drive for an indigenous fifth-generation fighter and, with it, the strategic independence that drives his foreign policy. Clearing the engine sale advances precisely the capability that Turkey intends to operate free of Western constraint, and it is being read in Ankara — and presented by Turkish officials — as the first step back toward the F-35 itself. Proceeding over Congress's objections, without certifying that the S-400 has been removed as the law requires, erodes the very oversight framework that Section 1245 and CAATSA were designed to protect. It also rewards a government that has offered no concession on the S-400, no change in its sheltering of Hamas, and no reduction in its hostility toward Israel. No country, ally or not, deserves the right to acquire such capabilities as a means to undermine the security of other U.S. allies and the national security goals of the United States itself.¹⁴

There is also the issue of Turkey's dependence on and strategic cooperation with Russia. President Trump identified a core obstacle accurately: Turkey's dependence on Russian energy. Yet Erdogan confirmed his unwillingness to end Russian fossil fuel imports, which have only grown under his rule — making Turkey the third-largest importer of Russian fossil fuels after China and India.¹⁵ A leader genuinely committed to the transatlantic alliance would treat that dependency as a liability to be unwound. Erdogan treats it as a policy to be defended. The reason he seeks Western technology while preserving his ties to Moscow is that he wants the West's competencies without its constraints. The same logic motivates Turkey's missile and indigenous-fighter programs, which should alarm rather than reassure Europe and the United States.¹⁶

A further dimension deserves the committee's scrutiny: Turkey's exposure to Chinese telecommunications equipment. Ankara has permitted Huawei to play a central role in building out its national 5G network, even as the United States and a growing number of allies have moved

¹³ Jared Malsin and Robbie Gramer, "A Turkish Arms Sale Leads to a Face-Off Between Trump and Congress," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 2026. (<https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/a-turkish-arms-sale-leads-to-a-face-off-between-trump-and-congress-ee55c700>); Reuters, "US reviewing F-35 fighter jets sale to Turkey as Trump pushes \$700 million jet engine deal," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), June 25, 2026. (<https://www.jpost.com/international/article-900492>)

¹⁴ On the centrality of the F110 engine to the Kaan program and Ankara's framing of the sale as a step toward the F-35, see: Thomas Newdick, "Trump Set To Clear Critical F110 Turbofan Engine Sale For Turkey's Kaan Fighter," *The War Zone*, June 25, 2026. (<https://www.twz.com/air/trump-set-to-clear-critical-f110-turbofan-engine-sale-for-turkeys-kaan-fighter>)

¹⁵ Sinan Ciddi and William Doran, "Erdogan Leaves Washington Empty-Handed on F-35s?" *RealClearDefense*, October 10, 2025. (https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2025/10/10/erdogan_leaves_washington_empty_handed_on_f-35s_1140092.html)

¹⁶ Sinan Ciddi, "Turkey's Missile Ambitions Should Alarm Europe and the United States," *RealClearDefense*, May 16, 2026. (https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2026/05/16/turkeys_missile_ambitions_should_alarm_europe_and_the_united_states_1183123.html)

to exclude the company on the grounds that Chinese intelligence law can compel it to hand over data and that its infrastructure may contain exploitable backdoors. This is not an abstract concern for the F-35. The aircraft represents the U.S. military's frontline defensive capabilities, and its effectiveness and sustainment depend on secure networks. Washington has previously weighed restricting F-35 basing in allied countries, in part because of Huawei's presence in their telecommunications systems, and Chinese actors have a documented record of targeting F-35 design data. A Turkey that operates Russian air defenses and relies on Chinese network infrastructure constitutes a counterintelligence risk: sensitive data on the aircraft's signature, mission systems, and operating patterns that could be exposed to two of America's principal strategic competitors at once. This alone is a reason for Congress to indefinitely withhold the F-35 from Turkey.¹⁷

None of these developments describes a Turkey that is aligning to uphold NATO and Europe's security interests. The record points in the opposite direction. The Turkey Erdogan is building does not seek to be a force multiplier for the rules-based order; it seeks to supplant it, casting itself as a neo-Ottoman power and Israel's principal challenger in the Middle East.¹⁸

State Sponsorship of Terrorism and the New Regional Map

Erdogan's revisionism is not confined to maritime boundaries. His government provides material support and political sanctuary to Hamas. Turkish intelligence has hosted Hamas leaders in Istanbul,¹⁹ and the haven Turkey provides has fueled terror operations reaching into the West Bank.²⁰ Since the deadly October 7 terrorist attacks that resulted in the murder of more than 1,200 Israeli citizens, Erdogan's advocacy for Hamas has increased. He has consistently declared, "Hamas is not a terrorist organization; it is a liberation group, 'mujahideen' waging a battle to protect its lands and people." Erdogan and senior Turkish officials routinely host Hamas's senior leadership, praising their acts of terror against what Erdogan refers to as the Israeli "genocide/massacre squad."²¹ In March 2026 alone, Turkey's chief of intelligence, Ibrahim Kalin,

¹⁷ On Turkey's adoption of Huawei 5G infrastructure, see: David Sacks, "China's Huawei Is Winning the 5G Race," *Council on Foreign Relations*. (<https://www.cfr.org/articles/china-huawei-5g>) On prior U.S. consideration of restricting F-35 basing over allied Huawei networks and Chinese targeting of F-35 design data, see: "Lawmakers Consider Blocking Some F-35 Deployments over Huawei 5G Network," *Military.com*, May 13, 2020. (<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/05/13/lawmakers-consider-blocking-some-f-35-deployments-over-huawei-5g-network-reports.html>); Shannon Vavra, "U.S. Secretary of Defense urges NATO allies to block Chinese-built 5G tech," *CyberScoop*, September 20, 2019. (<https://cyberscoop.com/u-s-secretary-defense-urges-nato-allies-block-chinese-built-5g-tech>)

¹⁸ Jonathan Spyer, "Neo-Ottoman Power: Erdogan Positions Turkey as Israel's Main Middle East Challenge," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), May 31, 2025. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-855952>)

¹⁹ Sinan Ciddi, "Turkish Intelligence Chief Hosts Hamas Leaders in Istanbul," *FDD's Long War Journal*, March 26, 2026. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2026/03/turkish-intelligence-chief-hosts-hamas-leaders-in-istanbul.php>)

²⁰ Sinan Ciddi and Ahmad Sharawi, "Hamas Haven Provided by Turkey Fuels Terror in the West Bank," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 23, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/06/23/hamas-haven-provided-by-turkey-fuels-terror-in-the-west-bank>)

²¹ "President Erdogan: 'Israel's Policy of Genocide, Occupation, and Invasion Must Come to an End,'" *Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications* (Turkey), October 7, 2024. (<https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/president-erdogan-israels-policy-of-genocide-occupation-and-invasion-must-come-to-an-end>)

hosted Hamas's senior leadership in Istanbul for talks "emphasizing coordination" between Turkish officials and Hamas against Israel.²²

Since the October 7 attacks, the U.S. Treasury has sanctioned numerous Turkish entities for their support of Hamas, most recently in March 2026.²³ The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Ghazi Destek Dernegi (GDD), Hayat Yolu, and the Palestinian White Hands Assistance and Solidarity Association for their roles in channeling funds to Gaza-based charities under Hamas's control — effectively enabling the group to generate and transfer resources in support of its military operations.²⁴

Treasury officials cited internal Hamas documents obtained by investigators showing that GDD, in coordination with other sanctioned entities such as Waed Society Gaza, provided material support to individual Hamas operatives and contributed to construction projects that directly advanced the organization's infrastructure.²⁵ Hayat Yolu, meanwhile, was identified as facilitating fundraising networks tied to the Muslim Brotherhood, elements of which have been designated as terrorist organizations by the Trump administration.²⁶

Beyond Hamas, Turkey functions as a base for the wider Muslim Brotherhood network and its jihadist offshoots.²⁷ These are not the affiliations of a Western security partner; they are the instruments of a state pursuing the emergence of a new regional order it intends to dominate, displacing Israel and other U.S. partners. Ankara's ambitions are stated openly. Turkey's Interior Minister recently voiced the aspiration of governing Jerusalem — a deliberate provocation aimed at Israel.²⁸ Ankara's revival of the Hejaz Railway and its promotion of a competing trade corridor are bids to undercut Israel's regional role and reshape the region's economic geography in Turkey's favor, in rivalry with the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).²⁹

²² Sinan Ciddi, "Turkish Intelligence Chief Hosts Hamas Leaders in Istanbul," *FDD's Long War Journal*, March 26, 2026. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2026/03/turkish-intelligence-chief-hosts-hamas-leaders-in-istanbul.php>)

²³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Continues to Disrupt Hamas' Sham Charity Network as the Group Refuses to Disarm," March 12, 2026. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0415>)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Exposes and Disrupts Hamas's Covert Support Network," January 21, 2026. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0368>)

²⁶ Mariam Wahba, "U.S. Issues Its First-Ever Designations of Muslim Brotherhood Branches as Terrorists," January 15, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/01/15/u-s-issues-its-first-ever-designations-of-muslim-brotherhood-branches-as-terrorists>)

²⁷ Sinan Ciddi and William Doran, "Islamist Turkey: A Base for Muslim Brotherhood Jihadism," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 1, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/04/01/islamist-turkey-a-base-for-muslim-brotherhood-jihadism>)

²⁸ Sinan Ciddi, "Turkish Interior Minister States Dream of Governing Jerusalem, Provoking Israel," *FDD's Long War Journal*, June 8, 2026. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2026/06/analysis-turkish-interior-minister-states-dream-of-governing-jerusalem-provoking-israel.php>)

²⁹ Ahmad Sharawi and Sinan Ciddi, "Turkey's Hejaz Railway Revival Is a Bid to Undermine Israel's Regional Role," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 15, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/06/15/turkeys-hejaz-railway-revival-is-a-bid-to-undermine-israels-regional-role>); Sinan Ciddi, "Turkey's corridor dream won't beat IMEC, but it could still reshape Eurasian trade," *Kathimerini* (Greece), May 11, 2026. (<https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/1303453/turkeys-corridor-dream-wont-beat-imec-but-it-could-still-reshape-eurasian-trade>)

This pattern extends to Iran. Far from joining the Western effort to contain Tehran, Ankara condemned U.S. strikes on Iran and positioned itself as a defender of the clerical regime's survival.³⁰ Turkey has played a central role in the transfer of Iranian weapons to Sudan³¹, and its use of the SADAT paramilitary network — a Turkish equivalent to Russia's Wagner Group — together with its destabilizing interventions in the Horn of Africa demonstrates a willingness to project force in ways that run counter to Western and even counterterrorism interests.³² Taken together, these behaviors have led analysts to ask whether Turkey is becoming “the new Iran” — a NATO member whose growing challenge to Western interests must be confronted rather than wished away.³³

Authoritarianism at Home, Disinformation Abroad

The external conduct I have described is the projection of a domestic system that has abandoned democratic rule. A June 2026 European Parliament report condemned authoritarian rule in Turkey and urged sanctions against the country's justice minister, indicating the systematic erosion of judicial independence, the persecution of political opposition — including the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu — and the dismantling of press freedoms.³⁴ This same apparatus operates abroad through coordinated digital authoritarianism, including state-aligned troll and bot networks that spread deception and disinformation.³⁵ A regime that surveils and silences its own citizens cannot be expected to honor the sovereign borders or democratic norms of its neighbors.

Recommendations for Congress

The NATO summit in Ankara should not become a platform that launders Erdogan's record. The United States retains significant leverage, and Congress has both the tools and the responsibility to use it.³⁶

³⁰ Sinan Ciddi, “Backing the Tehran Regime's Survival, Turkey Condemns U.S. Strikes on Iran,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 1, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/03/01/backing-the-tehran-regimes-survival-turkey-condemns-u-s-strikes-on-iran>); Sinan Ciddi and Ahmad Sharawi, “Turkey's Mission to Put an End to the Iran War,” *RealClearWorld*, March 24, 2026. (https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2026/03/24/turkeys_mission_to_put_an_end_to_the_iran_war_1172312.html)

³¹ Sinan Ciddi, “Turkey Plays Central Role in Transfer of Iranian Weapons to Sudan,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, May 15, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/05/15/turkey-plays-central-role-in-transfer-of-iranian-weapons-to-sudan>)

³² Sinan Ciddi, “SADAT: Turkey's Wagner Group,” *The National Interest*, May 7, 2026. (<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/sadat-turkeys-wagner-group>); Sinan Ciddi and William Doran, “How Turkey's Aggression in the Horn of Africa Could Benefit al-Shabaab,” *Middle East Forum*, February 27, 2026. (<https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/how-turkeys-aggression-in-the-horn-of-africa-could-benefit-al-shabaab>)

³³ Sinan Ciddi and Natalie Ecanow, “Turkey: The New Iran? Ankara's Growing Challenge to Western Interests,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), April 6, 2026. (<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-892113>)

³⁴ Sinan Ciddi, “EU Report Slams Authoritarian Rule in Turkey, Urges Sanctions Against Justice Minister,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 22, 2026. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2026/06/22/eu-report-slams-authoritarian-rule-in-turkey-urges-sanctions-against-justice-minister>)

³⁵ Ihsan Yilmaz and Bulent Kenes, “Digital Authoritarianism in Turkish Cyberspace: A Study of Deception and Disinformation by the AKP Regime's AKtrolls and AKbots,” *European Center for Populism Studies* (Belgium), November 13, 2023. (<https://www.populismstudies.org/digital-authoritarianism-in-turkish-cyberspace-a-study-of-deception-and-disinformation-by-the-akp-regimes-aktrolls-and-akbots>)

³⁶ Sinan Ciddi, “Don't Let Turkey Hijack the NATO Summit,” *The National Interest*, June 23, 2026. (<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/dont-let-turkey-hijack-the-nato-summit>)

1. **Insist on recognition of sovereign borders.** U.S. officials should use the summit to insist publicly that Turkey recognize the established sovereign borders of Cyprus and Greece and cease its harassment of allied aircraft and vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean. The United States should make clear that there will be no recognition of the regime in Turkish-occupied Cyprus, and it should officially label the northern part of Cyprus as “occupied.”
2. **Maintain CAATSA sanctions and Section 1245 restrictions.** Congress should preserve existing sanctions and the statutory restrictions on the sale and transfer of the F-35. No advanced strategic weaponry should be transferred to Turkey while it retains the Russian S-400 system, sustains record Russian energy imports, and shelters Hamas.
3. **Investigate the ITAR and end-use questions.** Congress and the State Department should investigate whether Turkey’s deployment of U.S.-origin F-16s to occupied Cyprus violated end-user agreements and ITAR restrictions, and condition any future arms transfers — including F-16 upgrades — on guarantees that American systems will not be based in disputed or occupied territory. Simultaneously, Congress and the State Department should remove any remaining ITAR restrictions on Cyprus. The U.S.-Republic of Cyprus strategic partnership has been advancing rapidly, but is subject to an artificial and unjustified limitation, namely the requirement that ITAR restrictions on the Republic of Cyprus be waived annually. This annual waiver should no longer be required.
4. **Treat Turkey’s behavior as an alliance-wide issue.** Turkey’s conduct in Cyprus is no longer a regional dispute; it affects wider European and NATO security. The United States should coordinate with Greece, Cyprus, France, and Israel to deter continued escalation.
5. **Designate and disrupt support for terrorism.** Congress should press the executive branch to hold Ankara accountable for its sanctuary to Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood networks and scrutinize Turkey’s role in weapons transfers and paramilitary operations from Sudan to the Horn of Africa.
6. **Press for Turkey’s return to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list.** The FATF removed Turkey from its grey list in June 2024 based on largely technical, crypto-related legislative reforms, even as Ankara remained a premier jurisdiction for terrorism financing and the principal foreign champion of Hamas. As this testimony has shown, the U.S. Treasury has repeatedly identified Turkey as a base for Hamas’s financial operations, sanctioning front companies and individuals, and Turkey has done little to address the U.S.’s concerns. The delisting handed Erdogan a reputational and financial reward while relinquishing a key source of international leverage. Washington should press the FATF to reexamine that decision and return Turkey to the grey list, and, in the interim, sustain expanded scrutiny of Turkish financial institutions for compliance with anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorist-financing standards.³⁷

³⁷ Max Meizlish and Sinan Ciddi, “Turkey Should Remain on FATF Grey List,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 27, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/06/27/turkey-should-remain-on-fatf-grey-list>); see also Max Meizlish and Sinan Ciddi, “Turkey Delisting Exposes Financial Watchdog’s Blind Spot,” *Washington Examiner*, July 14, 2024. (<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/3081294/turkey-delisting-exposes-financial-watchdogs-blind-spot>)

7. **Require the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to report on religious freedom violations in occupied Cyprus under its chapter on Turkey.** In the past, USCIRF reported on Turkey’s religious freedom violations in Cyprus under the Turkey country chapter.³⁸ Its failure to continue to do so artificially inflates Turkey’s standing in the annual report on religious freedoms. Turkey already stands as one of the worst violators of religious freedoms worldwide. Its true standing — if its actions in Cyprus are taken into account — is even worse. Turkey has allowed the vandalization of historic churches and monasteries and their conversion into barns, nightclubs, and art galleries. Christians continue to be ethnically cleansed out of the northern part of Cyprus, and the continued assault on Christian heritage by Turkey raises the prospect of Christianity being extinguished on the part of the island where Christianity’s first missionary journey — undertaken by Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas — started. This is untenable under a U.S. administration whose foreign policy has prioritized the protection of Christianity.

Conclusion

Cyprus is the node where Erdogan’s ambitions become visible. It is where he tests Western resolve, militarizes contested space, and seeks to fracture the partnerships that anchor stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. The summit Turkey hosts will showcase a Turkey that does not exist — a loyal Western ally devoted to common defense. The real Turkey is a state pursuing strategic autonomy in order to advance revisionist and irredentist goals that undermine American, European, and Israeli security, and that is precisely why it courts Western technology while deepening its ties to Russia, China, and Hamas.³⁹

The United States and its allies should approach Ankara with clarity rather than wishful thinking. The gap between Erdogan’s marketing and his conduct is wide, and the cost of failing to recognize it will be borne by the very allies — Greece, Cyprus, and Israel — whose security the transatlantic alliance is meant to guarantee.⁴⁰

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

³⁸ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Turkey,” *2012 Annual Report*. (<https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2012ARChapters/turkey%202012.pdf>)

³⁹ Sinan Ciddi, “Turkey Is the NATO Ally Trump Should Pressure First,” *Washington Examiner*, April 1, 2026. (<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/restoring-america/courage-strength-optimism/4511572/turkey-is-the-nato-ally-trump-should-pressure-first>)

⁴⁰ Jonathan Schanzer, “Bridging the Gap: Turkey Between East and West,” *Testimony Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s Subcommittee on Europe*, March 5, 2025. (<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA14/20250305/117927/HHRG-119-FA14-Wstate-SchanzerJ-20250305-U2.pdf>)