

Sample Affirmative Backup Brief

AFF Backup: Impose Global Magnitsky Act Sanctions on Turkey

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Background

Andrew Brunson

1. No Credible Evidence of Guilt

Director for Government Affairs at the Center for American Progress Doug Molof and National Security Expert Sam Hananel wrote in July 31, 2018, (The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country. Doug Molof is the director for Government Affairs at American Progress. Molof previously served as a senior advisor in the office of Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) and handled trade, defense, labor, financial services, appropriations, and veterans' issues. Molof is a proud graduate of the University of Texas at Austin with degrees in journalism and economics. Sam Hananel is a senior director of media relations at American Progress, where he handles a portfolio of issues that include national security, energy and environment, legal policy, and democracy and government reform. Prior to joining American Progress, Hananel was a reporter at the Associated Press, where he covered the U.S. Supreme Court, Congress, and labor. Hananel received his bachelor's degree from Washington University in St. Louis and a law degree from Tulane University.) The Center for American Progress, "What Turkey's Political Changes Mean for U.S.-Turkish Relations," (Accessed January 16, 2026) <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/turkeys-political-changes-mean-u-s-turkish-relations/>

"The United States should also address what amounts to a policy of hostage-taking by the Turkish government. Turkey should expeditiously release Andrew Brunson, now under house arrest, and other Americans held in Turkish jails for alleged crimes. This should also be the case for Turkish nationals working for the U.S. consulates in Adana and Istanbul. Although Brunson has been charged with aiding the PKK and "FETO"—the name Turkish authorities have given to the Gülenists they accuse of orchestrating the July 15, 2016, coup attempt—the Turkish government has not presented any credible evidence of his guilt. In fact, much of what the indictment asserts as evidence, such as Brunson's possession of a recipe for an Arab dish supposedly favored by Gülenists, is laughable. The Trump administration should convey to the Turkish government that should these violations continue, the United States will use the tools offered by the Global Magnitsky Act23 to sanction those Turkish officials responsible for the unwarranted detention of U.S. citizens."

2. The Conditions of Brunson's Detention

Ph.D. Seth Frantzman wrote for the Middle East Forum on November 19, 2022, (The Middle East Forum, a think tank founded in 1994 by Daniel Pipes, promotes American interests in the Middle East and protects Western values from Middle Eastern threats. In the Middle East, we focus on ways to defeat radical Islam; work for Palestinian acceptance of Israel; develop strategies to contain Iran; and deal with advancing anarchy. Domestically, the Forum emphasizes the danger of lawful Islamism; protects the freedoms of anti-Islamist authors, and activists; and works to improve Middle East studies. A journalist and analyst concentrating on the Middle East. Seth J. Frantzman has a PhD from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was an assistant professor at Al-Quds University. He is the Oped Editor and an analyst on Middle East Affairs at The Jerusalem Post and his work has appeared at The National Interest, The Spectator, The Hill, National Review, The Moscow Times, and Rudaw. He is a frequent guest on radio and TV programs in the region and internationally, speaking on current developments in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.) Middle East Forum, "The Inside Story of the U.S. Pastor Held Hostage by Turkey," (Accessed on January 27, 2026) <https://www.meforum.org/the-inside-story-of-the-us-pastor-held-hostage-by> [article condensed for clarity]

"Brunson and his family were told to go to a local police station. He had filed a visa renewal application in April 2016. He arrived at the station on October 7, 2016. USCIRF, which profiled his case, noted that "a lawyer who asked to visit Andrew was denied access. When the lawyer returned with an affidavit, officials told him that he signed a statement declaring that he did not want a lawyer; the document he signed waived his right to legal representation. Initially, Turkey also refused to allow a US Consulate representative to meet with him, a violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. During this period, members of the pastor's church attempted to bring food, water and clothing to him but were denied access until October 13. Brunson was not allowed contact with other prisoners and was held incommunicado in the Harmandali Detention Center."

Later in the same article, he writes,

“THE PASTOR was kept in tough conditions in detention. He was held in solitary confinement, and US officials could not visit him. The litany of accusations against the pastor eventually led to a hearing on December 8-9. “Someone very high in the Turkish government decided to put me in prison. The prosecutor tasked with doing this ordered my judicial arrest, so my status changed. I was no longer under administrative arrest; this was now criminal... So, first they decided to put me in prison, and then found someone to accuse me.””

Later in the same article, he writes,

“In August 2017 Brunson was transferred to the Kiriklar Prison, where he was kept in a cell for 24 hours a day. Restrictions for visits were relaxed a bit; the visits now lasted up to an hour rather than a mere 35 minutes; and he did get visits from his family and US diplomats.”

3. Brunson’s Release

Ph.D. Seth Frantzman wrote for the Middle East Forum on November 19, 2022, (The Middle East Forum, a think tank founded in 1994 by Daniel Pipes, promotes American interests in the Middle East and protects Western values from Middle Eastern threats. In the Middle East, we focus on ways to defeat radical Islam; work for Palestinian acceptance of Israel; develop strategies to contain Iran; and deal with advancing anarchy. Domestically, the Forum emphasizes the danger of lawful Islamism; protects the freedoms of anti-Islamist authors, and activists; and works to improve Middle East studies. A journalist and analyst concentrating on the Middle East. Seth J. Frantzman has a PhD from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was an assistant professor at Al-Quds University. He is the Oped Editor and an analyst on Middle East Affairs at The Jerusalem Post and his work has appeared at The National Interest, The Spectator, The Hill, National Review, The Moscow Times, and Rudaw. He is a frequent guest on radio and TV programs in the region and internationally, speaking on current developments in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. As a correspondent and researcher has covered the war on ISIS in Iraq and security in Turkey, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, the UAE and eastern Europe.) Middle East Forum, “The Inside Story of the U.S. Pastor Held Hostage by Turkey,” (Accessed on January 27, 2026) <https://www.meforum.org/the-inside-story-of-the-us-pastor-held-hostage-by> [article condensed for clarity]

“On May 17 the White House confirmed Trump had raised the issue with Erdogan. “President Trump raised the incarceration of Pastor Andrew Brunson and asked that the Turkish government expeditiously return him to the United States,” the White House said in a statement after the meeting. However, Turkey didn’t change course. It appeared Ankara wanted to use Brunson as a bargaining chip in some kind of hostage diplomacy.”

Later in the same article, he writes,

“The Turkish economy was collapsing due to the “Brunson sanctions.” He was eventually convicted on a charge of aiding terrorism. He was released on October 12, 2018, returning immediately to the US. THE CRISIS had cost Turkey. The US had slapped sanctions on Turkey in August 2018. NATO allies aren’t supposed to hold hostages, and Ankara got a message from Washington that under the Trump administration this wasn’t just a story of a court trial; Ankara would release the pastor or Turkey would receive pressure. Today Brunson is free, but many issues around the case remain unresolved. Ankara’s threatening behavior, ramping up threats against the West, has continued.”

4. Brunson Was Held for Concessions

Ph.D. Seth Frantzman wrote for the Middle East Forum on November 19, 2022, (The Middle East Forum, a think tank founded in 1994 by Daniel Pipes, promotes American interests in the Middle East and protects Western values from Middle Eastern threats. In the Middle East, we focus on ways to defeat radical Islam; work for Palestinian acceptance of Israel; develop strategies to contain Iran; and deal with advancing anarchy. Domestically, the Forum emphasizes the danger of lawful Islamism; protects the freedoms of anti-Islamist authors, and activists; and works to improve Middle East studies. A journalist and analyst concentrating on the Middle East. Seth J. Frantzman has a PhD from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was an assistant professor at Al-Quds University. He is the Oped Editor and an analyst on Middle East Affairs at The Jerusalem Post and his work has appeared at The National Interest, The Spectator, The Hill, National Review, The Moscow Times, and Rudaw. He is a frequent guest on radio and TV programs in the region and internationally, speaking on current developments in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. As a correspondent and researcher has covered the war on ISIS in Iraq and security in Turkey, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, the UAE and eastern Europe.) Middle East Forum, "The Inside Story of the U.S. Pastor Held Hostage by Turkey;" (Accessed on March 13, 2026) <https://www.meforum.org/the-inside-story-of-the-us-pastor-held-hostage-by> [article condensed for clarity]

"According to reports in *The Washington Post* and elsewhere, the Turkish authorities asked the US to ask Israel to release a Turkish citizen during the crisis. Israel did release a Turkish woman who had been detained in the summer of 2018. Media reports alleged a secret deal. Yet Brunson wasn't freed. It appears Ankara reneged. Perhaps Ankara thought it would wring out more concessions. In October 2018, Brunson finally returned to the US."

5. Sanctions used for Brunson no longer in place

According to Business Insider on November 2, 2018, (Business Insider is a major American financial and business news website launched in 2007, now owned by Axel Springer SE. It provides comprehensive, digital-first coverage on technology, finance, markets, strategy, and lifestyle. Known for its fast-paced, analytical, and, at times, tabloid-style, reporting, it reaches a large global audience, focusing on making business news engaging for everyone.) Business Insider, "Sanctions lifted on Turkish officials after US pastor freed," (Accessed March 13, 2026) <https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-sanctions-lifted-on-turkish-officials-after-us-pastor-freed-2018-11>

"WASHINGTON (AP) – The United States has lifted sanctions on two senior Turkish officials that were imposed in connection with the detention of American pastor Andrew Brunson. The U.S. had sanctioned Turkey's justice minister, Abdulhamit Gul, and interior minister, Suleyman Soylu, in August for their role in Brunson's arrest and detention. Brunson spent nearly two years in confinement in Turkey on espionage and terrorism-related charges. He was sentenced to three years in prison in October but then was released and allowed to leave the country for the time already spent in custody. The Treasury Department said in a statement Friday that Gul and Soylu have been removed from a sanctions list. Brunson's confinement in Turkey caused a major rift in Turkish-U.S. relations."

What Is the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act?

6. History of the GMA

On August 7, 2025, the Congressional Research Service wrote that, (The Congressional Research Service (CRS) works exclusively for the United States Congress, providing policy and legal analysis to committees and Members of both the House and Senate, regardless of party affiliation. As a legislative branch agency within the Library of Congress, CRS has been a valued and respected resource on Capitol Hill for more than a century. CRS is well-known for analysis that is authoritative, confidential, objective and nonpartisan. Its highest priority is to ensure that Congress has 24/7 access to the nation's best thinking.) Congressional Research Service, "Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Sanctions: The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act," (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF10576>

"The Global Magnitsky Act was inspired by a Russia-focused law, the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012 (Sergei Magnitsky Act; Title IV of P.L. 112-208; 22 U.S.C. §5811 note). Sergei Magnitsky, a tax lawyer and auditor in Russia, documented tax fraud and other corruption by individuals associated with the Russian government. Russian authorities arrested Magnitsky in November 2008. Magnitsky was subject to torture and other human rights violations while in detention and ultimately died in prison in November 2009. Congress passed the Sergei Magnitsky Act to require the President to identify and sanction persons involved in the alleged crimes uncovered by Magnitsky or responsible for his detention, abuse, death, or the ensuing cover-up, or, more broadly, responsible for human rights violations against individuals seeking to expose the illegal activity of Russian officials or to exercise or defend human rights and freedoms in Russia. The Global Magnitsky Act effectively globalizes the 2012 law by authorizing the President to make inadmissible to the United States, revoke any already-issued visa, and block property under U.S. jurisdiction of, and prohibit U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with, any foreign individual or entity that the President determines is "responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights," as defined at 22 U.S.C. §2304(d)(1), against individuals in foreign countries working (1) to expose illegal activities of government officials or (2) to obtain, exercise, defend, or promote human rights and freedoms, including rights to a fair trial and democratic elections; or is a foreign government official responsible for acts of significant corruption, a senior associate of such an official, or a facilitator of such acts, which include the expropriation of private or public assets for personal gain, corruption in government contracts or natural resource extraction, bribery, and the offshore sheltering of ill-gotten gains."

7. Text of the GMA

According to the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, (The Legal Information Institute (LII) at Cornell Law School is a non-profit, open-access website providing free online access to American and international legal materials. Founded in 1992, it publishes key documents like the U.S. Code, Supreme Court decisions, and legal dictionaries to make law accessible to everyone.) Legal Information Institute, "22 U.S. Code Chapter 108 - GLOBAL MAGNITSKY HUMAN RIGHTS ACCOUNTABILITY," (Accessed March 13, 2026) <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/chapter-108>

"Definitions. In this chapter: (1)Foreign person The term "foreign person" has the meaning given that term in section 595.304 of title 31, Code of Federal Regulations (as in effect on the day before December 23, 2016). (2)Gross violations of internationally recognized human rights The term "gross violations of internationally recognized human rights" has the meaning given that term in section 2304(d)(1) of this title. (3)Person The term "person" has the meaning given that term in section 591.308 of title 31, Code of Federal Regulations (as in effect on the day before December 23, 2016). (4)United States person The term "United States person" has the meaning given that term in section 595.315 of title 31, Code of Federal Regulations (as in effect on the day before December 23, 2016). Authorization of imposition of sanctions. (a) In general.—The President may impose the sanctions described in subsection (b) with respect to any foreign person the President determines, based on credible evidence— (1) is responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against individuals in any foreign country who seek— (A) to expose illegal activity carried out by government officials; or (B) to obtain, exercise, defend, or promote internationally recognized human rights and freedoms, such as the freedoms of religion, expression, association, and assembly, and the rights to a fair trial and democratic elections; (2) acted as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign person in a matter relating to an activity described in paragraph (1); (3) is

a government official, or a senior associate of such an official, that is responsible for, or complicit in, ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, acts of significant corruption, including the expropriation of private or public assets for personal gain, corruption related to government contracts or the extraction of natural resources, bribery, or the facilitation or transfer of the proceeds of corruption to foreign jurisdictions; or (4) has materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services in support of, an activity described in paragraph (3). (b) Sanctions described.—The sanctions described in this subsection are the following: (1) INADMISSIBILITY TO UNITED STATES.—In the case of a foreign person who is an individual— (A) ineligibility to receive a visa to enter the United States or to be admitted to the United States; or (B) if the individual has been issued a visa or other documentation, revocation, in accordance with section 221(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1201(i)), of the visa or other documentation. (2) BLOCKING OF PROPERTY.— (A) IN GENERAL.—The blocking, in accordance with the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.), of all transactions in all property and interests in property of a foreign person if such property and interests in property are in the United States, come within the United States, or are or come within the possession or control of a United States person. (B) INAPPLICABILITY OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY REQUIREMENT.—The requirements of section 202 of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701) shall not apply for purposes of this section. (C) EXCEPTION RELATING TO IMPORTATION OF GOODS.— (i) IN GENERAL.—The authority to block and prohibit all transactions in all property and interests in property under subparagraph (A) shall not include the authority to impose sanctions on the importation of goods. (ii) GOOD.—In this subparagraph, the term “good” has the meaning given that term in section 16 of the Export Administration Act of 1979 (50 U.S.C. App. 2415).”

8. New Ministers Recently Appointed

According to the Turkish newspaper *The Daily Sabah* on February 11, 2026, (Daily Sabah is a prominent English-language pro-government daily newspaper in Turkey, launched on February 24, 2014, and owned by the Turkuvaz Media Group. It covers Turkish politics, business, and culture with a “Local Perspective, Global Vision” motto, acting as a key English voice for the Turkish government’s viewpoint.) The Daily Sabah, “Türkiye appoints new justice and interior ministers in cabinet reshuffle,” (Accessed February 25, 2026) <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/turkiye-appoints-new-justice-and-interior-ministers-in-cabinet-reshuffle/news>

“Istanbul Chief Prosecutor Akın Gürlek was announced as Türkiye's new justice minister and Erzurum Governor Mustafa Çiftçi was appointed to lead the Interior Ministry on Tuesday, following presidential decrees published in the Official Gazette. Gürlek replaces Yılmaz Tunç, who stepped down after requesting to be relieved of his duties, while Çiftçi succeeds Ali Yerlikaya.”

Definitions

9. Definition of Sanctions

Sarah Krulikowski, an International Economist at the U.S. Internal Trade Commission, wrote in March of 2024, (The United States International Trade Commission (USITC or ITC) is an agency of the United States federal government that advises the legislative and executive branches on matters of trade. It was created by Congress in 1916 as the U.S. Tariff Commission. It changed to its current name in 1974. It is an independent, bipartisan entity that analyzes trade issues such as tariffs and competitiveness and publishes reports. As a quasi-judicial entity, the USITC investigates the impact of imports on U.S. industries, and directs actions against unfair trade practices, such as subsidies; dumping; and intellectual property infringement, including copyright infringement. Savyora (Sarah) Krulikowski has been an International Economist at the USITC since 2023. Previously, she was a Language Analyst at the U.S. Department of Justice and a Financial Economist at the Bank of the United States. She received her Masters in Economics from Georgetown University, her Masters in International Trade and Finance from Lancaster University, and her Bachelors in International Economic Relations from the University of Uzbekistan, where she graduated with honors) The U.S. Internal Trade Commission, “Economic Sanctions: An Overview,” (Accessed January 27, 2026) https://www.usitc.gov/publications/332/executive_briefings/ebot_economic_sanctions_overview.pdf [ellipses in original]

“Definition. Economic sanctions (hereunder, “sanctions”) are often defined as “...the deliberate, government-inspired withdrawal, or threat of withdrawal, of customary trade or financial relations.”¹ More specifically, sanctions are punitive measures (for example, prohibiting trade, stopping financial transactions, or barring economic assistance) imposed by one country, group of countries, or a multilateral body (for example, the United Nations (UN)) on a target country, entity, or group of individuals that violate international norms. Sanctions are typically used as a foreign policy tool to restrict or limit the target’s economic activities, especially when domestic or international pressure for action exists but diplomacy alone would render too mild a response, while a military action—too severe. By attempting to influence the target’s behavior, sanctions may pursue a range of foreign policy and/or national security goals, such as improving human rights, deterring aggression, or preventing the proliferation of weapons.”

10. Definition of Hostage Diplomacy

According to the Stimson Center on May 31, 2023, (The Stimson Center is a nonprofit, nonpartisan US think tank that analyzes issues related to global peace. It is named after the American lawyer and politician Henry L. Stimson. Stimson Center analyzes issues such as nuclear proliferation, arms trafficking, water management, wildlife poaching, and responses to humanitarian crises. It also provides consulting for US and international institutions and publishes articles for the general public. Stimson also convenes dialogues on global challenges.) The Stimson Center, “Iran’s Strategic Shift in Hostage Diplomacy,” (Accessed January 27, 2026) <https://www.stimson.org/2023/irans-strategic-shift-in-hostage-diplomacy/>

“In 2022 alone, the U.S. government secured the safe recovery of at least 13 U.S. nationals in exchange for political and economic concessions or in humanitarian swaps of prisoners. It has become such a prevalent issue that the Biden administration recently declared the wrongful and unlawful detentions of U.S. nationals abroad a national emergency. This practice, often referred to as hostage diplomacy, is an increasingly common foreign policy tool for some states, including the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet the reasons states engage in this practice and what could be done to prevent its growing use have not gone through rigorous study. For the purposes of this article, “hostage diplomacy” is defined as the practice of a state using detained civilian foreign and dual nationals to diplomatically engage with or gain leverage over the foreign policy of another state. In a recent research project for the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, we assessed the factors and conditions that motivate Iran, among other major players in this space, to detain foreign and dual nationals. We examined U.S. negotiations with Iran, what factors encouraged Iran to detain foreign and dual nationals, and how hostage diplomacy is evolving. Iran, which recently swapped a Belgian aid worker for an Iranian diplomat convicted in a bomb plot, has a relatively long history of engaging in hostage diplomacy. This means that enough cases existed on a long enough timeline to distinguish trends in the practice.”

Facts

Fact 1: The President Can Sanction Foreign Human Rights Abusers

11. The U.S. Frequently Uses GMA Sanctions

On February 22, 2024, Andrew Self, a Senior Advisor at the State Department's Office of Global Sanctions and Threat Finance, wrote that, (Andrew H. Self is a Senior Advisor in the U.S. State Department's Office of Global Sanctions and Threat Finance, as well as its Bureau of Economic Business Affairs. Prior to working in this role, he was a Foreign Affairs Officer at the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. Self served in the Maryland Army National Guard from 2021 to 2023 after spending the previous 5 years as an Intelligence Specialist at the National Ground Intelligence Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he specialized in Turkish affairs. He received his BA in International Relations and Affairs and his MA in Middle East Studies from The George Washington University. He also earned his MS in Strategic Intelligence at the National Intelligence University in 2022 and a doctorate in International Affairs at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in 2024.) Federal Register, "Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act Annual Report," (Accessed January 16, 2026) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/02/23/2024-03532/global-magnitsky-human-rights-accountability-act-annual-report>

"In 2023, the United States took significant action under the Global Magnitsky sanctions program ("Global Magnitsky"), sanctioning 78 foreign persons over the course of the year. As of December 2023, the United States has sanctioned over 650 foreign persons (individuals and entities) pursuant to E.O. 13818 since 2017. This sanctions program, which targets those connected to serious human rights abuse, corrupt actors, and their enablers, represents the best of the United States' values and enduring commitment to promoting respect for human rights and combatting corruption around the world. Through Global Magnitsky, the United States has sought to disrupt and deter serious human rights abuse and corruption abroad; promote accountability for those who act with impunity; and maintain U.S. global leadership on anti-corruption and human rights promotion in coordination with U.S. partners, allies, and civil society where appropriate."

Fact 2: Turkey Engages in Hostage Diplomacy

12. Official Travel Warning Because of Arbitrary Detentions

According to a travel advisory to U.S. citizens from the U.S. State Department on October 16, 2024, (The United States Department of State is an executive department of the U.S. federal government responsible for the country's foreign policy and relations. Equivalent to the ministry of foreign affairs of other countries, its primary duties are advising the U.S. president on international relations, administering diplomatic missions, negotiating international treaties and agreements, protecting citizens abroad and representing the U.S. at the United Nations.) U.S. Department of State, "Turkey Travel Advisory," (Accessed February 10, 2026) <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/turkey-travel-advisory.html>

"Exercise increased caution when traveling to Türkiye due to terrorism and arbitrary detentions. Some areas have increased risk. Read the entire Travel Advisory. Do Not Travel To: Sirnak province, Hakkari province, and any area within six miles (10 kilometers) of the Syrian border due to terrorism. Country Summary: Terrorist groups continue plotting possible attacks in Türkiye. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations. Be cautious in transportation hubs, markets, malls, and government buildings, as well as hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, and parks. Be careful in airports and at major events. Security forces have detained tens of thousands of people, including U.S. citizens, for alleged ties to terrorist groups based on scant or secret evidence and grounds that appear to be politically motivated. U.S. citizens have also been subject to exit bans that prevent them from departing Türkiye. Protests not approved by the Turkish government can lead to arrest, as can criticizing the government, including on social media."

13a. Turkey Currently Holds At Least 2 U.S. Citizens Hostage

Elizabeth Richards, the Director of Hostage Advocacy & Research at the Foley Foundation, wrote in March of 2025 that at least two Americans were held in wrongful detention in Turkey as of

2024, (The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation (JWFLF) was founded after the kidnap and murder of American freelance journalist James Foley, who was reporting on the conflict in Syria. JWFLF advocates for the freedom of all Americans held hostage abroad and promotes the safety of journalists worldwide. We advocate for American hostage freedom by: Supporting individual hostages, wrongful detainees and their families; Raising awareness about US citizens kidnapped or wrongfully detained abroad; Conducting annual research to ensure US hostage policy is prioritizing the return of our citizens held abroad and assisting their families; Engaging with the US Congress, White House, FBI, and Department of State to push for necessary improvements in US hostage policy; Collaborating with third party experts and partner organizations assisting families in their efforts to free their loved ones. Elizabeth Richards is the Director of Hostage Advocacy and Research at the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation. Liz is a United States Air Force veteran who served as the Hostage Mission Manager at Fort Meade, Maryland. In this role, Liz led a team focused on hostage recovery, resolving 18 cases of captivity around the world and rescuing 30 civilians. As an adjunct university professor, she taught behavioral statistics and research methods. While in the role of private sector research associate, Liz applied her background clinical psychology to conduct qualitative research projects. She also volunteers as an advocate for the health and empowerment of women and girls.) **James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, "Bringing Americans Home: 2024 Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Landscape,"** (Accessed January 16, 2026) https://jamesfoleyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Final_Bringing-Americans-Home-2025-quantitative-report_.pdf

In 2024, Americans were held across 17 countries. Despite recent successes in securing releases from China and Russia, consistent with past years, China and Russia together still accounted for about a third of all known cases of Americans being unjustly held overseas at the end of the calendar year. The number of wrongful detentions in both countries is likely higher given the limited access that U.S. Consular Affairs has to Americans being detained in those countries. At the close of 2024, Americans were still being unjustly held in at least 15 countries.

Table 1

WHERE AMERICANS WERE HELD IN 2024

Country	Number of Americans Held
Afghanistan	4
China	8
Egypt	2
Iran	2
Palestinian Territories	3*
Russia	5
Saudi Arabia	3**
Turkey	2

*The remains of four additional Americans killed in the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas also remain held hostage. **All cases are exit bans.

Note: Countries in which a single, known American is being wrongfully detained are excluded from this table.

Impact: This study reveals that at least 2 American nationals were wrongfully detained by the Turkish government as of 2024. That is 2 *that we know of for a fact*. There are likely more.

13b. Link: The Foley Estimate Is Too Small

Elizabeth Richards, the Director of Hostage Advocacy & Research at the Foley Foundation, wrote

in March of 2025, (The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation (JWFLF) was founded after the kidnap and murder of American freelance journalist James Foley, who was reporting on the conflict in Syria. JWFLF advocates for the freedom of all Americans held hostage abroad and promotes the safety of journalists worldwide. We advocate for American hostage freedom by: Supporting individual hostages, wrongful detainees and their families; Raising awareness about US citizens kidnapped or wrongfully detained abroad; Conducting annual research to ensure US hostage policy is prioritizing the return of our citizens held abroad and assisting their families; Engaging with the US Congress, White House, FBI, and Department of State to push for necessary improvements in US hostage policy; Collaborating with third party experts and partner organizations assisting families in their efforts to free their loved ones. Elizabeth Richards is the Director of Hostage Advocacy and Research at the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation. Liz is a United States Air Force veteran who served as the Hostage Mission Manager at Fort Meade, Maryland. In this role, Liz led a team focused on hostage recovery, resolving 18 cases of captivity around the world and rescuing 30 civilians. As an adjunct university professor, she taught behavioral statistics and research methods. While in the role of private sector research associate, Liz applied her background clinical psychology to conduct qualitative research projects. She also volunteers as an advocate for the health and empowerment of women and girls.) James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, “Bringing Americans Home: 2024 Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Landscape,” (Accessed January 16, 2026) https://jamesfoleyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Final_Bringing-Americans-Home-2025-quantitative-report_.pdf

“There is no publicly agreed upon number of U.S. nationals (also referred to below as “Americans”) who are taken hostage and wrongfully detained abroad. The U.S. government does not provide exact numbers, citing national security concerns, and instead officials speak in general numbers. For example, in various public forums, Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens while in office shared round numbers with qualifiers like “about” or “around” regarding the number of Americans being wrongfully detained. By comparison, the Foley The U.S. Hostage & Wrongful Detainee Flag, designed by David Ewald and families of Americans unjustly held captive abroad, was codified as a national symbol by Congress in 2023. Foundation publishes on its website an assessed number of Americans held captive, which is kept up to date as new information becomes available. At any given time, there has been a substantial gap between the rough count the government sporadically shares, and the specific number of Americans detained wrongfully as assessed by the Foundation. Not all cases are public, however, and the Foundation believes that the actual number of Americans unjustly held captive abroad to be higher than its own published statistics.”

13c. Methodology: The Foley Foundation Study

Elizabeth Richards, the Director of Hostage Advocacy & Research at the Foley Foundation,

explained in 2024 that, (The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation (JWFLF) was founded after the kidnap and murder of American freelance journalist James Foley, who was reporting on the conflict in Syria. JWFLF advocates for the freedom of all Americans held hostage abroad and promotes the safety of journalists worldwide. Elizabeth Richards is the Director of Hostage Advocacy and Research at the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation. Liz is a United States Air Force veteran who served as the Hostage Mission Manager at Fort Meade, Maryland. In this role, Liz led a team focused on hostage recovery, resolving 18 cases of captivity around the world and rescuing 30 civilians. As an adjunct university professor, she taught behavioral statistics and research methods. While in the role of private sector research associate, Liz applied her background clinical psychology to conduct qualitative research projects. She also volunteers as an advocate for the health and empowerment of women and girls.) James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, “Bringing Americans Home: 2024 Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Landscape,” (Accessed January 16, 2026) [article condensed for clarity] https://jamesfoleyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Final_Bringing-Americans-Home-2025-quantitative-report_.pdf

“The U.S. government defines hostagetaking as “the unlawful abduction or holding of a U.S. national against their will by a non-state actor in order to compel a third person or governmental organization to do or abstain from doing any act as a condition for the release of the person detained. Americans held by a government that refuses to acknowledge that it is holding them also fall into this category. The Levinson Act sets out 11 criteria that provide a framework to inform the Secretary of State’s decision-making process.

Ultimately though, the decision to designate an American as wrongfully detained is at the discretion of the Secretary. The Foley Foundation bases its own assessments on the U.S. government’s definitions of hostage-taking and wrongful detention.¹⁶ One exception is that the Foley Foundation includes individuals who are subject to exit bans (i.e., individuals who are not imprisoned but who are unable to leave the country in which they are located) in its count of wrongful detentions whereas the U.S. government does not. Exit bans accounted for 25% (9) of the total number of detentions the Foley Foundation counted as unjust at the end of 2024.”

She continues,

“The Foley Foundation database originated out of the Combating Terrorism Center’s dataset. The database is limited to U.S. nationals only (i.e., U.S. citizens, and Legal Permanent Residents). As with any dataset compiled based on publicly available data of sensitive events, there are likely gaps. The foundation’s database has been continuously updated since 2018. As of December 31, 2024, the database held 491 recorded incidents, including hostage-taking by designated terrorist organizations, such as the hostagetaking of 12 Americans by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and wrongful detentions by nation states. The dataset does not include hostage-taking by criminal organizations. Hostage-taking by criminal organizations does not typically involve demands for political concessions, is often shorter in duration, and private in nature (i.e., not reported to the general public). As such, criminal hostage-taking is outside the scope of the Foley Foundation’s research. The timeframe for the data used in this report runs from January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2024, to enable comparisons of the hostage and wrongful detention landscape in the 10 years preceding the issuance of PPD-30 and the years following its implementation (2015-2024). PPD-30 established the U.S. hostage enterprise. Independent t-tests were conducted to statistically compare the number of Americans held, the number of new cases of Americans taken, the number of Americans released, and the number of Americans who died in captivity. Additionally, Pearson’s correlations examined the strength of the relationship of time (i.e., calendar years) and the variables cited above, to assess if there were significant changes over time, across the full dataset, 2005-2024. Finally, Pearson’s correlations were run only for the post-PPD-30 period to assess if any significant trends emerged. A statistical significance level of <.05 was used for all tests. Prior to any analysis, a visual inspection of the data was performed. Four cases marked as not public were removed from the dataset. An additional 25 cases where the outcome was unknown were also removed prior to analysis. There were two cases in the dataset marked as both hostage cases and wrongful detention cases. For the purposes of this analysis, both incidents were recorded as hostage only. A Shapiro-Wilk assumption of normality test was performed on all data, to ensure assumptions of normality were not violated Pearson’s correlations and independent t-tests were accomplished using JASP.”

Harms

Harm 1: Violates the Rights of American Citizens

14. Unacceptable Disregard for the Rights of Americans

According to Senators Thom Tillis and Chris Van Hollen, as quoted by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on April 9, 2019, (The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent commission of the U.S. Federal Government. For over 45 years, the Commission has monitored compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advanced comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental, and military cooperation in the 57-nation OSCE region.) The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe “Wicker and Cardin Introduce Legislation to Defend U.S. Citizens and Diplomatic Staff from Political Prosecution in Turkey,” (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://www.csce.gov/press-releases/wicker-and-cardin-introduce-legislation-defend/>

“While the Turkish government made a step in the right direction with the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson last October, more needs to be done for Turkey to show good faith and act like a NATO ally.” said Sen. Tillis, co-chair of the Senate Human Rights Caucus. “This bipartisan legislation will impose sanctions on those responsible for the wrongful imprisonments of American citizens and diplomatic staff, and I hope progress will be ultimately made through the release of Serkan Gölge and other U.S. citizens currently imprisoned in Turkey.” “Turkey’s blatant disregard for the rights of American citizens and diplomatic staff within their country is unacceptable. This legislation makes clear to Turkey that we will not accept the status quo. I urge the Senate to take up this bill immediately, so we can levy swift sanctions on senior Turkish officials and apply some serious pressure to get Turkey to release these wrongfully detained Americans and diplomatic staff,” said Sen. Van Hollen, co-chair of the Senate Foreign Service Caucus.”

15. Hostage-Taking Exerts Profound Costs

The Soufan Center explained in September of 2023 that, (The Soufan Center is an independent nonprofit organization based in New York City. Our mission is to provide cutting-edge research, analysis, and strategies to anticipate and counter the world's most urgent security challenges. Vina Nadjibulla joined the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada as Vice-President, Research & Strategy in November 2023. In this role, she leads the Foundation's research and programmatic activities focused on Canada's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. This includes overseeing APF Canada's research agenda, fellowship programs, education and capacity-building initiatives, and regional programming through the Indo-Pacific Initiative. She also plays a key role in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and advancing the Foundation's public policy impact. Stephanie Foggett is a Research Fellow at The Soufan Center. Her areas of focus include global terrorism and counterterrorism; terrorism and extremism online and in the information space; crisis management; and hostage policy and response. She previously served as the Director of Global Communications at The Soufan Group from 2020-2023, where she led on strengthening engagement with media and strategic partners on matters relating to international security, counterterrorism, and geopolitics. She previously worked at The Soufan Center on Strategic Partnerships and Engagement from 2017 to 2020.) The Soufan Center, "Citizens for Leverage: Navigating State Hostage-Taking in a Shifting Geopolitical Landscape," (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TSC-Special-Report-Citizens-for-Leverage-Navigating-State-Hostage-Taking-in-a-Shifting-Geopolitical-Landscape.pdf>

"Impacted countries need to engage with the issue seriously when cases of state hostage-taking occur. What is evident from the publicly available information on past cases is that the practice exerts profound costs on the detainees and their families, as well as on the foreign policies of governments whose citizens are targeted. Recent high-profile cases in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada illustrate the costs, severity, and complexity of the challenge. Responses have included national policies and legislation like the Levinson Act in the United States, as well as collective actions like the Canada-led declaration, the declaration's Policy Action Plan, and relevant United Nations frameworks. Any foreign citizen is at risk of being taken hostage by a state. The practice exposes nationals of all countries who travel, work, and live abroad to some degree of risk. Not only is this practice contrary to international law, but it also undermines global cooperation, travel, and trade. Among the victims and survivors of state hostage-taking, there are marked vulnerabilities for journalists, aid workers, academics, business travelers, and human rights defenders. All that said, foreign nationals with a range of backgrounds have found themselves victims of the practice."

Impact: Even one American citizen abandoned to the predations of a foreign power is a human rights violation and a significant problem that the United States has an obligation to address.

Harm 2: Gives Turkey Unjust Leverage

16. Hostage-Taking Poses an Unusual and Extraordinary Threat

According to the White House on July 12, 2023, (Whitehouse.gov is the official, legitimate website for the White House, managed by the U.S. government to provide information about the President, policies, and the Executive Branch, serving as a primary source for official announcements and public engagement.) White House, "Notice on the Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to Hostage-Taking and the Wrongful Detention of United States Nationals Abroad," (Accessed January 27, 2026) <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/07/12/notice-on-the-continuation-of-the-national-emergency-with-respect-to-hostage-taking-and-the-wrongful-detention-of-united-states-nationals-abroad/>

"Hostage-taking and the wrongful detention of United States nationals are heinous acts that undermine the rule of law. Terrorist organizations, criminal groups, and other malicious actors who take hostages for financial, political, or other gain — as well as foreign states that engage in the practice of wrongful detention, including for political leverage or to seek concessions from the United States — threaten the integrity of the international political system and the safety of United States nationals and other persons abroad. Hostage-taking and the wrongful detention of United States nationals abroad continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. For this reason, the national emergency declared in Executive Order 14078 of July 19, 2022, must continue in effect beyond July 19, 2023."

17. Turkey Turns Americans Into Political Bargaining Chips

Dr. Aykan Erdemir and Former Ambassador Eric Edelman wrote for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies on May 31, 2018. (The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) is a Washington, DC-based nonpartisan 501(c)(3) research institute focusing on national security and foreign policy. FDD conducts in-depth research, produces accurate and timely analyses, identifies illicit activities, and provides policy options – all with the aim of strengthening U.S. national security and reducing or eliminating threats posed by adversaries and enemies of the United States and other free nations. Ambassador Eric S. Edelman retired as a career minister in the U.S. Foreign Service on May 1, 2009. He serves as chair of FDD’s Turkey Program and as an advisor to FDD’s Center on Military and Political Power. He also serves as a counselor at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, as a distinguished practitioner in residence at the Philip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, and as a non-resident senior fellow at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia. As the under secretary of defense for policy (August 2005–January 2009), he oversaw strategy development as the Defense Department’s senior policy official with global responsibility for bilateral defense relations, war plans, special operations forces, homeland defense, missile defense, nuclear weapons and arms control policies, counter-proliferation, counter-narcotics, counterterrorism, arms sales, and defense trade controls. He served as U.S. ambassador to the Republics of Finland and Turkey in the Clinton and Bush administrations and was principal deputy assistant to the vice president for national security affairs. He has been awarded the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service, the Presidential Distinguished Service Award, and several Department of State Superior Honor Awards. In January 2011, he was awarded the Legion d’Honneur by the French government. He received a B.A. in history and government from Cornell University and a Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from Yale University. Dr. Aykan Erdemir, director of international affairs research at the Anti-Defamation League, is the former senior director of FDD’s Turkey Program. He is a former member of the Turkish Parliament (2011 to 2015) who served on the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, EU Harmonization Committee, and the Ad Hoc Parliamentary Committee on the IT Sector and the Internet. Aykan is a founding and steering group member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief. He was awarded the Stefanus Prize for Religious Freedom in 2016 and the First Freedom Award of the Hellenic American Leadership Council in 2019 in recognition of his advocacy for minority rights and religious freedom. After completing his B.A. in international relations at Bilkent University, Ankara, Aykan received an M.A. in Middle Eastern studies and Ph.D. in anthropology and Middle Eastern studies from Harvard University. He worked as faculty member at Bilkent University’s Department of Political Science and Public Administration (2015-2016) and at Middle East Technical University’s Department of Sociology (2004-2011), where he also served as deputy dean of the Graduate School of Social Sciences.) The Foundation for Defense of Democracies, “Erdogan’s Hostage Diplomacy: Western Nationals in Turkish Prisons,” (Accessed January 16, 2026) <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2018/05/31/erdogans-hostage-diplomacy-western-nationals-in-turkish-prisons/>

“Since last summer, American and European officials have on several occasions condemned Turkey’s “hostage diplomacy” – efforts by the Turkish government to make political bargaining chips out of Western prisoners arrested in Turkey since the coup. Following the arbitrary detention of Western nationals in Turkey, they argue, the government uses the prisoners as pawns to extract concessions in bilateral relations with the U.S. and EU countries. As one Freedom House analyst observed, “Turkey’s new foreign policy is hostage-taking.” Indeed, as President Erdogan turned increasingly autocratic at home, Turkey’s international reputation and relations with its traditional transatlantic partners have also frayed.”

Impact: Hostage-taking gives Turkey an illegal advantage in diplomacy which harms the position of the United States by pressuring us to give in to Turkey’s foreign policy demands. This practice needs to end.

Advantages

Advantage I: Defends American Citizens

18. GMA Sanctions on Turkey Worked in 2018

On April 1, 2019, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies reported that, (The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) is a Washington, DC-based nonpartisan 501(c)(3) research institute focusing on national security and foreign policy. FDD does not accept donations from any foreign governments. FDD conducts in-depth research, produces accurate and timely analyses, identifies illicit activities, and provides policy options – all with the aim of strengthening U.S. national security and reducing or eliminating threats posed by adversaries and enemies of the United States and other free nations.) Foundation for Defense of Democracies, “The Prospect of U.S. Sanctions Exacerbates Turkey’s Political and Economic Risks,” (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/memos/2019/04/01/the-prospect-of-u-s-sanctions-exacerbates-turkeys-political-and-economic-risks/>
“On August 1, 2018, the U.S. Treasury designated Turkey’s Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gul and Minister of Interior Suleyman Soyly under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act for their human rights abuses, especially the detention and arrest of U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson. The U.S. lifted these sanctions on November 2, 2018, following Pastor Brunson’s release from prison.”

19. Targeted Sanctions Hold Human Rights Abusers Accountable

Human Rights First, an international humanitarian organization, noted in November of 2022 that, (Human Rights First (formerly known as the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights) is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3), international human rights organization based in New York City, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. Its work centers on four main issue areas: authoritarianism, extremism, systemic injustice and the abuse of technology. It closely works with lawyers, veterans and security experts, technologists, and allied advocates to further its policy agenda.) Human Rights First, “Global Magnitsky and Targeted Sanctions,” (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://humanrightsfirst.org/project/global-magnitsky-and-targeted-sanctions/>

“Targeted human rights and anti-corruption sanctions like those authorized under the Global Magnitsky sanctions program and related authorities can hold accountable the world’s worst human rights abusers and corrupt actors. Human Rights First is the U.S. co-chair of a global coalition of more than 340 civil society organizations that advocate for the use of targeted sanctions in response to human rights abuse and corruption. Along with our partners, we develop cases recommending specific perpetrators for sanctions to help bring a measure of accountability for serious human rights abuse and acts of corruption.”

Impact: Sanctions against corrupt or abusive government officials are extremely effective, as can be seen with Pastor Brunson, ending detentions and holding human rights abusers accountable.

Advantage 2: Removes Undue Leverage

20a. GMA Sanctions Deter Hostage-Taking Long-Term

The Soufan Center explained in September of 2023 that, (The Soufan Center is an independent nonprofit organization based in New York City. Our mission is to provide cutting-edge research, analysis, and strategies to anticipate and counter the world's most urgent security challenges. Vina Nadjibulla joined the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada as Vice-President, Research & Strategy in November 2023. In this role, she leads the Foundation's research and programmatic activities focused on Canada's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. This includes overseeing APF Canada's research agenda, fellowship programs, education and capacity-building initiatives, and regional programming through the Indo-Pacific Initiative. She also plays a key role in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and advancing the Foundation's public policy impact. Stephanie Foggett is a Research Fellow at The Soufan Center. Her areas of focus include global terrorism and counterterrorism; terrorism and extremism online and in the information space; crisis management; and hostage policy and response. She previously served as the Director of Global Communications at The Soufan Group from 2020-2023, where she led on strengthening engagement with media and strategic partners on matters relating to international security, counterterrorism, and geopolitics. She previously worked at The Soufan Center on Strategic Partnerships and Engagement from 2017 to 2020.) The Soufan Center, "Citizens for Leverage: Navigating State Hostage-Taking in a Shifting Geopolitical Landscape," (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TSC-Special-Report-Citizens-for-Leverage-Navigating-State-Hostage-Taking-in-a-Shifting-Geopolitical-Landscape.pdf>

"In addressing state hostage-taking, governments need to focus on two equally important imperatives: to bring their detained citizens home and to deter and prevent the practice. While deterrence must be a priority, it cannot come at the expense of current hostages. Deterrence through denial of concessions to perpetrator states has clear limits and has been unevenly applied by the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and other countries facing detentions of their nationals for leverage. At the end of the day, securing the release of individual hostages often requires engaging in difficult negotiations and concessions. To offset these concessions, governments must do more to raise the costs on the perpetrator states outside of individual cases. In other words, government policies should focus on punishing the perpetrators without denying protection to the detainees. Deterrence through punishment—ensuring high costs for countries that engage in this practice—should become the focus of response efforts. Currently, there are limited costs imposed on perpetrator states, and collective action in this area is lacking. In recognition of this reality, US President Joseph Biden has mandated the United States to develop "deterrence strategies to raise the cost of hostage taking so that it is no longer used as a tool of diplomacy by states engaged in the practice." Biden has also authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to impose financial sanctions and visa bans on individuals responsible for wrongful detentions using powers granted to the president by the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Deterrence through punishment will require governments to be creative when developing new tools to raise costs on perpetrator states and to be more courageous in applying the tools that already exist, such as Magnitsky sanctions, legal action, travel bans, and financial penalties."

20b. Link: Sanctions Increase Costs of Hostage-Taking

On June 4, 2025, Chair and Senior Associate of Global Security at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, respectively, Jon Alterman and Jason Rezaian, wrote, (The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing practical ideas to address the world's greatest challenges. Thomas J. Pritzker was named chairman of the CSIS Board of Trustees in 2015. Founded in 1962, CSIS is led by John J. Hamre, who has served as president and chief executive officer since 2000. Jon B. Alterman holds the Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. Jason Rezaian is the director of press freedom initiatives at the Washington Post. He served as the Post's correspondent in Tehran from 2012 to 2016, and spent 544 days unjustly imprisoned by Iranian authorities until his release in January 2016. He is a non-resident senior associate with the CSIS Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy.) Center for Strategic & International Studies, "Combating State Hostage Taking and Wrongful Detention," (Accessed January 27, 2026) <https://www.csis.org/analysis/combating-state-hostage-taking-and-wrongful-detention>

"In recent years, some foreign governments have refined their practice of seizing U.S. citizens as leverage against the U.S. government. Congress should respond by creating tools to help the U.S. government fight back more effectively. The premise of this activity should be that seizing Americans for leverage is a calculated behavior. To counter it, the U.S. government must aim to alter the perpetrators' cost-benefit analysis. While the United States will sometimes need to negotiate for detainees' release, it should strive to reduce the frequency of prisoner exchanges. Achieving that goal requires both deterring governments from taking Americans and discouraging U.S. nationals from traveling to

high-risk countries.”

Later on, he writes,

“Proposed mechanisms of deterrence include:

- International condemnation
- Department of State travel warnings or designations that U.S. travelers are at risk of kidnapping (K designation) or wrongful detention (D designation)
- Barring certain kinds of U.S. government aid
- Restricting financial transactions that touch U.S. dollars
- Targeted sanctions, asset freezes, and seizures, aligned with the processes, procedures, and products of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (22 U.S.C. 108)
- Restricting government officials and their family members from travel to the United States
- Declaring some senior government officials persona non grata
- Sharply constraining the size of delegations to the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York
- Blocking family members of regime insiders from certain types of visas, including those allowing them to pursue higher education in the United States
- Restricting visas for students from perpetrating states
- Requiring special endorsements for U.S. passport use to offending countries
- Restricting remittance flows
- Sharply restricting the amount of U.S. currency travelers can carry into perpetrating states
- Targeting businesses that facilitate the direct or indirect travel of U.S. nationals to especially serious offenders, including raising U.S. landing fees for airlines that travel there if they allow U.S. passport holders to travel on those routes
- Voting against loans in international financial institutions
- Creating additional narrow exemptions to the FSIA to allow lawsuits to proceed in U.S. courts against foreign governments and officials for wrongful, unlawful, and arbitrary detention of U.S. nationals”

Impact: When the U.S. makes clear that it will use sanctions to protect our people, Turkey will lose the leverage they have by releasing the hostages currently held. Moreover, they will be deterred from taking future hostages to avoid the hit to their wallets.

Openers/Closers

21. U.S. Needs to Show Moral Courage to Bring Detainees Home

President and Board Member of the Foley Foundation, respectively, Diane Foley and David Levinson, wrote for The Hill on October 24, 2025, (Since 1994, The Hill has reported on the intersection of politics and business, connecting Capitol Hill, K Street, Wall Street and Pennsylvania Avenue for non-partisan coverage of all factors in legislative decisions. It offers objective and in-depth coverage of Congress, the Administration, business and lobbying, campaigns and more. The Hill has a print circulation of more than 24,000 and is read by opinion leaders, including 100 percent of Congressional offices, the White House, political pundits, association executives, lobbyists and corporate leaders. Diane Foley is president of the Foley Foundation. Foley’s son James was beheaded by ISIS nearly 10 years ago. David Levinson is a board member of the Foley Foundation. Levinson’s father Robert disappeared in Iran and was the longest held hostage in U.S. history.) The Hill, “Hostage diplomacy is rising: America needs a strategy that works for all,” (Accessed January 27, 2026) <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/5570899-hostage-enterprise-needs-review/>

“Dozens of Americans remain unjustly detained abroad – some for years. Increasingly, these cases involve foreign governments that target, capture, and use U.S. nationals as bargaining chips for political leverage, flagrantly violating human rights. The United States must show strategic resolve and moral courage to bring them home.”

22. Doing Nothing Gives Turkey the Green Light

Journalist Eli Okun, reporting for Politico, noted on December 29, 2018, (Politico is an American political digital newspaper company founded by American banker and media executive Robert Allbritton in 2007. It covers politics and policy in the United States and internationally, with publications dedicated to politics in the U.S., European Union, United Kingdom, and Canada, among others. Primarily providing distributed news, analysis and opinion online, it also produces printed newspapers, radio, and podcasts. Its coverage focuses on topics such as the federal government, lobbying, and the media. Eli Okun is a Playbook reporter at POLITICO, contributing to the flagship morning newsletter and co-authoring Playbook PM. His newsletters encompass a wide range of politics and policy daily, from the White House to Congress to campaigns. He's also written articles about foreign policy. Before joining POLITICO in 2017 as a web producer and copy editor, he worked as a reporter for the New Hampshire Union Leader, covering local news and presidential politics. A Maryland native, he graduated from Brown University, where he studied international relations and was editor-in-chief of The Brown Daily Herald.) Politico, “He’s still in prison”: Trump lifts Turkey sanctions but Americans remain detained,” (Accessed January 16, 2026) <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/29/trump-lifts-turkey-sanctions-americans-detained-1076618>

“To Clyde Forsberg, an academic and a U.S. citizen who was detained in Turkey for several days shortly after the coup attempt, the U.S. has failed to stand up to Erdogan. “Now it’s all about restoring relations with Turkey and getting back to this nonsense about what good friends the United States and Turkey are,” said Forsberg, who now teaches in Kyrgyzstan. “Erdogan knows very well that he can be absolutely outrageous and nobody will do anything. And it seems to me the longer that Americans are in prison in Turkey and their own country isn’t doing anything, that just gives Erdogan the green light” to do what he wants.”

Answers to NEG Arguments

“GMA Sanctions Difficult to Enforce”

23. Targeted Sanctions Are the Most Effective Measures Out There

On March 1, 2021, Attorney Adam Gomes-Abreu published an article for the Journal of International Business and Law, finding that, (Adam J. Gomes-Abreu is an associate in the Antitrust & Competition Practice Group in the New York office of Kirkland & Ellis LLP. His practice focuses on merger investigations and litigation. He earned his JD at the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University in 2022, where he received a Citation of Excellence in Constitutional Law and served as the Managing Editor of Staff at the Journal of International Business & Law) Journal of International Business and Law, Vol. 20, Iss. 2, “Are Human Rights Violations Finally Bad for Business? The Impact of Magnitsky Sanctions on Policing Human Rights Violations,” (Accessed January 17, 2026) <https://scholarlycommons.law.hofstra.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1390&context=jibl>

“This Note will show that financial sanctions and travel bans that target individual actors, rather than actions taken against nation states, are the most effective measures in policing human rights violations in the current global political climate. Adopted by the U.S. in 2012, the Magnitsky Act serves as a model for targeted economic sanctions to police human rights violations that should be used more extensively to police the actions of corrupt government actors that deprive their citizens of their inalienable human rights. The Magnitsky Act, and the laws modeled after the Magnitsky Act, punish human rights violators by freezing their individual financial assets in the sanctioning country, restricting their ability to travel to the sanctioning country, and extending criminal liability to financial institutions that conduct business with sanctioned individuals in the sanctioning country. The Magnitsky Act goes a step further than other UN sanctions regimes because it provides a basis for sanctioning human rights violations and government corruption on the individual level. This fills a void left by most modern human rights sanctions regimes by allowing the sanctioning country to hold corrupt government actors accountable for their actions, thereby eliminating their perceived sovereign impunity.”

24. GMA Sanctions Are Exceptional

Former Coordinator for Global Anti-Corruption at the State Department Richard Nephew and Former Senior Advisor at the Office of Sanctions Coordination at the State Department Brad

Brooks-Rubin wrote for Lawfare Media on February 4, 2025, (Lawfare (lawfaremedia.org) is a non-profit, multimedia publication specializing in in-depth analysis of national security law, policy, and foreign policy. It covers topics like cybersecurity, terrorism, executive power, and democracy, providing written, podcast, and audio analysis to foster understanding of legal actions taken to protect the nation. Brad Brooks-Rubin was a senior adviser in the Office of Sanctions Coordination at the State Department from 2022 to 2024. He is now a partner at Arktouros PLLC. Richard Nephew was the inaugural coordinator for global anti-corruption at the State Department from 2022 to 2024 and was elected president of the Conference of the States Parties of the UN Convention Against Corruption in December 2023. He's now a senior research scholar at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and Center on Global Energy Policy. Lawfare Media "Corruption Sanctions Are Worth the Investment," (Accessed February 20, 2026) <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/corruption-sanctions-are-worth-the-investment>

"The great debate over sanctions is whether they "work," given their costs, which can be found in lost economic activity, unintended consequences, or the long-term erosion of a country's economic competitiveness. Sanctions on corrupt actors frequently represent an exception to these critiques. They play an essential role in promoting responsible investment and helping to level playing fields in developing economies. Still, sanctions remain underinvested in by the United States, European Union, and other Group of Seven (G7) partner governments. This should change. The principal vehicle for corruption-focused economic sanctions is the Global Magnitsky Act and associated executive order, Executive Order 13818, which result in asset freezes (and by extension, a freezing out from the U.S. financial system) and visa restrictions. Unlike with other sanctions regimes, corruption-focused sanctions have substantial advantages. First, they are highly targetable and can be used to isolate individuals and entities precisely in response to their illicit behavior. Second, they inflict pain on those engaged in corruption in a way that they uniquely appreciate: taking away, or at least significantly restricting, their wallets. When paired with travel bans, asset freezes on corrupt officials and their networks directly prevent them from using their ill-gotten gains, improving the chances of restitution to the victims of corruption and deterring others from taking similar risks. Moreover, by taking away bad actors' access to funds, corruption sanctions can prevent them from being able to engage in further acts of corruption."

25. GMA Sanctions Are a “Successful Example” and Impose a “Significant Penalty”

John Morrison, Founder and CEO of the international nonprofit the Institute for Human Rights and Business, wrote on July 20, 2020, (The Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) is the leading global think tank working to ensure corporate activity respects the rights of workers and communities. For over 15 years, we have been a trusted partner to businesses, governments, civil society and communities worldwide, together driving everyday and systemic change. John Morrison founded IHRB and was Chief Executive Officer between 2009 - 2025. John advises a number of governments, intergovernmental organisations, and businesses on human rights and wider issues of sustainability, development, and international affairs. He is the author of ‘The Social License’, which makes the case for a new form of social contract between business and society, and he has been published widely on issues relating to global governance, corporate responsibility, human rights, climate action, refugee protection, and human trafficking. John also sits on the UK Foreign Secretary’s Human Rights Advisory Group and has been a Harkness Fellow to the USA. He has been named one of the 100 most influential people worldwide on the issue of eliminating modern day slavery. John directed the Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights (2003-9), was Head of Public Affairs for The Body Shop International (2000-3), and before this worked in the field of refugee protection (in relation to the former Yugoslavia and on issues of human trafficking).) “The Magnitsky Effect – Economic Consequences for Human Rights Abuse?” (Accessed February 25, 2026) <https://www.ihrb.org/latest/magnitsky-effect>

“This is perhaps one of the reasons why targeted sanctions that penalise those in positions in power more than the country as a whole are becoming increasingly interesting, particularly when those individuals are known also to rely on illicit means for maintaining their power. In relation to US Global Magnitsky sanctions, one of the leading anti-corruption NGOs, Global Witness, puts it this way: ‘Sanctions make it more difficult for corrupt individuals to launder their ill-gotten gains in the US, or continue to do business in US dollars, the most common global currency. It is a successful example of concrete action being taken against the corrupt and the worst human rights abusers, hitting them where it hurts the most – in their pocket. The inconvenience of being denied entry to the US is also a significant penalty, as is the considerable stigma that comes with being sanctioned. By targeting individuals rather than entire countries or sectors, the Magnitsky Act avoids broad-based sanctions that can affect vulnerable populations.’”

Impact: There is a reason GMA sanctions are employed hundreds of times each year: they work. They worked with Turkey to address wrongful detentions specifically in 2018. There is no reason to think that they would fail in this instance.

“Sanctions Will Undermine U.S.–Turkish Relations”

26. Turkey Must Act Like a NATO Ally to Be Treated Like One

According to Former U.S. Senator (now U.S. Secretary of State) Marco Rubio, as quoted by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on April 9, 2019, (The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent commission of the U.S. Federal Government. For over 45 years, the Commission has monitored compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advanced comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental, and military cooperation in the 57-nation OSCE region. Marco Rubio is an American politician, attorney, and diplomat serving as the 72nd United States secretary of state since 2025. A member of the Republican Party, he represented Florida in the U.S. Senate from 2011 to 2025. Rubio is also the acting national security advisor.) The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe “Wicker and Cardin Introduce Legislation to Defend U.S. Citizens and Diplomatic Staff from Political Prosecution in Turkey,” (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://www.csce.gov/press-releases/wicker-and-cardin-introduce-legislation-defend/>

“Erdogan’s government continues to undermine the rule of law in Turkey, including by targeting American citizens and locally-employed U.S. diplomatic staff. I’m proud to join this bipartisan effort to hold senior Turkish officials who are knowingly responsible for the wrongful detention of or politically-motivated false charges against American citizens and U.S. local employees at our diplomatic posts accountable,” Sen. Rubio said. “The Turkish government must live up to its commitment and act like a NATO ally if they wish to continue to be treated like one.””

27. Turkey Cooperates With NATO Despite Sanctions

According to the European Council on Foreign Relations on March 18, 2025, (The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) is an award-winning international think-tank that aims to conduct cutting-edge independent research on European foreign and security policy and to provide a safe meeting space for decision-makers, activists and influencers to share ideas. Mustafa Aydın is a professor of International Relations at Kadir Has University (Istanbul), president of the International Relations Council of Turkey, and coordinator of the Global Academy. Before, he served as the rector of the Kadir Has University (2010-2018), and was a guest researcher at Michigan, Harvard, and Athens universities. Asli Aydintasbas is an associate senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relation. Her focus includes Turkish foreign policy and external ramifications of its domestic politics. She joined ECFR after a lengthy career in journalism. Aydintasbas is a graduate of Bates College, where she was the recipient of Maung Maung Gyi Award for Excellence in International Relations. She has a MA in Journalism and Middle East Studies from New York University.) European Council on Foreign Relations, “Bridging the Bosphorus: How Europe and Turkey can turn tiffs into tactics in the Black Sea,” (Accessed February 20, 2026) <https://ecfr.eu/publication/bridging-the-bosphorus-how-europe-and-turkey-can-turn-tiffs-into-tactics-in-the-black-sea/> [article condensed for clarity]

“But Turkey’s Black Sea strategy is also fundamental to its relationship with Ukraine. The Turkish government has been helping Ukraine defend itself by selling it drones and other defence equipment, and jointly producing drones. It has also increased its cooperation with NATO on various mechanisms to support regional stability. For example, Turkey maintains round-the-clock air and naval reconnaissance missions in the Black Sea and provides up to 67% of all situational awareness information to NATO and Ukraine. It also stopped the Russian navy from passing through the Turkish straits, which allowed Ukraine to decimate Moscow’s Black Sea Fleet.”

Later on, the article says,

“This divergence on Syrian Kurds further created the mood music for closer cooperation with Russia in Syria. In 2019, after several years of turmoil in Turkey-US ties, Turkey purchased an S-400 missile system from Russia, triggering US sanctions on Turkey’s defence industry. During 2015-2019, Turkey intervened three times in northern Syria to curb US-backed Kurdish groups.”

Impact: The US sanctioned Turkey in 2019 (not with GMA sanctions and not for taking American citizens hostage) but Turkey still cooperated with us extensively on key issues.

“Sanctions Push Turkey Closer to Russia and China”

28. Turkey Is Pivoting Away from Russia

Attorney and Contributor at the Hoover Institution Gordon Chang wrote on July 17, 2023, (The Hoover Institution is a prominent American public policy think tank and research center located at Stanford University, founded in 1919 by Herbert Hoover. It promotes principles of individual, economic, and political liberty, free enterprise, and limited government. The institution conducts research on domestic and international policy and houses a renowned library and archives on 20th-century history. Gordon Guthrie Chang is an American lawyer, political analyst and conservative columnist known for his hawkish rhetoric on China. In 1976, Chang graduated from the Cornell Law School. He then lived in mainland China and in Hong Kong for close to two decades, where he worked as Partner and Counsel at the law firms Baker & McKenzie and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP.) The Hoover Institution, “Turkey: “Unfaithful Ally” No More,” (Accessed February 19, 2026) <https://www.hoover.org/research/turkey-unfaithful-ally-no-more> [article condensed for clarity]

“Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is now engineering a “pivot.” fast turning away from Russia and embracing Europe and America instead. Turkey’s strongman leader, for instance, allowed Finland to join NATO, which occurred in April. Furthermore, he has just given his initial okay on membership for Sweden. That Scandinavian country probably will, despite some last-minute foot-dragging by Erdogan, become the alliance’s 32nd member by the end of the year.”

Later on, the article says,

“Fortunately, Erdogan could often be talked into doing the right thing. Turkey, under intense pressure from both the United States and the European Union, in March began to block the transit of sanctioned goods to Russia. This development followed reports that Brian Nelson, the top U.S. Treasury sanctions official, met with Turkish counterparts the previous month in Ankara and Istanbul. Moreover, the Turkish president dropped plans to deploy the S-400 missile system. The missiles and associated equipment are now in storage in Turkey. In a related development, Erdogan has not yet bought a second S-400 batch as he had apparently threatened to do. What is Erdogan’s game? Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, he has been generally successful in his “delicate balancing act” between Russia on one side and NATO partners and Ukraine on the other. Turkey will always try to please everyone. There are signs, however, that Erdogan’s sly maneuvering, which has greatly aided Vladimir Putin, is “increasingly untenable.” The Turkish strongman’s recent tilt to the West is evidence that he understands that Putin cannot be his long-term partner.”

29. Turkey Has Far More to Lose

Journalist Amberin Zaman wrote for the New York Times on August 7, 2018, (The New York Times is a newspaper based in Manhattan, New York City. The New York Times covers domestic, national, and international news, and publishes opinion pieces and reviews. As one of the longest-running newspapers in the United States, the Times serves as one of the country's newspapers of record. Amberin Zaman is Al-Monitor's chief correspondent and covers major stories on the Middle East and North Africa from across the region and beyond. Zaman's reporting focuses on geopolitical trends, diplomacy and human rights. She has covered conflicts in Iraq, Syria and the South Caucasus and hosts Al-Monitor's "On the Middle East" podcast. Zaman is widely acknowledged for her courageous work on Turkey and the Kurds for which she was named a "Hero" by the Coalition for Women in Journalism. Prior to joining Al-Monitor as a full time reporter in 2018, Zaman was The Economist's Turkey correspondent for 16 years. Zaman was also a regular contributor to The Washington Post, The Daily Telegraph, The Los Angeles Times and Voice of America and penned weekly columns in the Turkish language media. Zaman, who studied political science at Franklin College in Lugano Switzerland, speaks fluent French, Turkish and Bengali.) New York Times, "Understanding the Failed Deal With Turkey That Sparked Trump's Fury," (Accessed February 20, 2026) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/07/opinion/turkey-andrew-brunson-prison.html>

"Congress has lined up its own set of sanctions, which include freezing the sale of F-35 fighter jets to Turkey, as retaliation for the imprisonments and Turkey's plans to acquire the Russian-made S-400 missile system, which the Pentagon sees as compromising NATO security. The Turkish government's supporters in the Trump administration argue for de-escalation because they see the relationship with Turkey as too valuable to forsake. They argue that punitive measures would drive Mr. Erdogan fully into the embrace of Russia, China and Iran. And Mr. Erdogan, who is hailed by a large number of Muslims as a fearless champion of the Palestinian cause, could cut Turkey's ties to Israel. They are wrong. Should Washington stick to its guns, it might just help nudge Mr. Erdogan back to the democratic path of reform. After all, Turkey has far more to lose from a rupture than the United States does. The Americans don't have the kind of economic leverage the Europeans have over Turkey. But infuriated by Turkish recalcitrance, Congress now wants the Trump administration to block future funding for Turkey from global lenders like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank — assistance it might need given its economic troubles."

Impact: Turkey is geopolitically independent. It will maintain ties with Russia and China no matter what we do. However, they need us too much politically and economically to pull away significantly.

“Tariffs, Not Sanctions, Were Key to Brunson’s Release”

30a. Tariffs Had No Connection to Brunson

Sarah Hunter, the Attorney-Adviser at the U.S. Department of State, wrote for the U.S. Court of International Trade on October 19, 2023, (Sarah Hunter is an accomplished legal professional with extensive experience in international law and human rights. Currently serving as an Attorney-Adviser at the U.S. Department of State since February 2021. Sarah previously held the position of Law Clerk at the U.S. Court of International Trade from August 2018 to September 2020. Additional roles include serving as a Clinic Intern at the International Human Rights Law Clinic at UC Berkeley and as Chapter Co-Director for the International Refugee Assistance Project at Berkeley Law. Sarah’s internship experience encompasses litigation at Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and legal work at Alliance for Justice and the International Rescue Committee, where the focus was on economic empowerment. Sarah Hunter earned a Juris Doctor from the University of California, Berkeley - School of Law, a Master of Arts in Political Science from Boston University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and English from Boston University. The U.S. Court of International Trade (CIT) is an Article III specialized federal court established in 1980 by the Customs Court Act. Located in New York City, it serves as the primary judicial forum for civil actions arising from U.S. customs and international trade laws. The CIT, composed of nine lifetime-appointed judges, has nationwide jurisdiction to interpret these laws, including the Tariff Act of 1930.) U.S. Court of International Trade, “Stealing Congress’s Authority: Turkish Steel and National Security,” (Accessed February 9, 2026) https://www.cit.uscourts.gov/sites/cit/files/Stealing%20Congress%E2%80%99s%20Authority_Turkish%20Steel%20and%20National%20Security.pdf

“In October 2016, Andrew Brunson, an American pastor who had spent over two decades living in Turkey, was arrested by Turkish police on charges of espionage and terrorism. Over vigorous U.S. objection, his detention continued for over two years. On August 10, 2018, a Turkish delegation left Washington D.C., having made little headway on discussions of Brunson’s release. That same day, President Trump tweeted that he had just authorized doubling the tariffs against aluminum and steel from Turkey. Mr. Brunson was released less than two months later. U.S. media was quick to seize upon the correlation between these two events. But in Proclamation 9772, the Trump Administration disavowed any connection, citing instead the Steel Report published by the Department of Commerce earlier that year. The Trump administration asserted that Turkish steel imports threatened national security and, as such, Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 allowed the imposition of tariffs. President Trump’s use of Section 232 was unusual, as were the facts of this case in particular, but this case nonetheless illustrates a broader point about national security concerns in trade and the attendant separation of powers issues that arise in this area.”

30b. Link: Tariffs Were Specific to National Security

According to the Congressional Research Service on August 31, 2018, (The Congressional Research Service (CRS) works exclusively for the United States Congress, providing policy and legal analysis to committees and Members of both the House and Senate, regardless of party affiliation. As a legislative branch agency within the Library of Congress, CRS has been a valued and respected resource on Capitol Hill for more than a century. CRS is well-known for analysis that is authoritative, confidential, objective and nonpartisan. Its highest priority is to ensure that Congress has 24/7 access to the nation’s best thinking.) Congressional Research Service, “Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations,” (Accessed February 9, 2026) https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R41368/R41368.68.pdf

“On August 15, 2018, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders drew a distinction between the Treasury Department sanctions and the new tariff levels on steel. She said that the sanctions were “specific to Pastor Brunson and others that we feel are being held unfairly,” but that the tariffs that are in place on steel are specific to national security and “would not be removed with the release of Pastor Brunson.””

“New EO Already Authorizes Sanctions”

31. No Countries Yet Designated – Turkey Not Cited

Reporter for the Associated Press Michelle Price explained on September 5, 2025, (The Associated Press (AP) is a renowned independent, not-for-profit global news cooperative founded in 1846. Owned by its American newspaper and broadcast members, the AP operates in over 100 countries, delivering fast, accurate, and unbiased news, photos, video, and audio to thousands of media outlets worldwide. Michelle L. Price is a White House reporter at the Associated Press. She previously covered the 2024 presidential campaign and politics, government and other news in New York, Nevada, Utah and Arizona. She is based in Washington.) Associated Press, “Trump signs order to designate nations that hold Americans as sponsors of wrongful detention,” (Accessed February 25, 2026) <https://apnews.com/article/trump-wrongful-detention-nations-executive-order-16b9533227d86592f6618506425324e8>

“WASHINGTON (AP) – President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Friday that would let the U.S. designate nations as state sponsors of wrongful detention, using the threat of associated sanctions to deter Americans from being detained abroad or taken hostage. The designation, similar to the state sponsors of terrorism designation that the U.S. already imposes on some nations, will allow the State Department to target countries falling under the label with penalties such as economic restrictions, restrictions on visas for those involved and travel restrictions for Americans to those countries. “Like the State Sponsor of Terrorism determination, no nation should want to end up on this list,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement. It’s aimed at making it easier to impose penalties on nations that block or restrain Americans, and impose a major penalty on countries that don’t release those U.S. nationals. “With this EO you are signing today, you are drawing a line in the sand that U.S. citizens will not be used as bargaining chips,” Sebastian Gorka, senior director for counterterrorism on the National Security Council, told Trump as he signed the order at the White House on Friday afternoon. The designation is designed for Rubio to be able to lift the penalties if a nation changes its practices. It wasn’t immediately clear when the U.S. might begin applying the new label and to which countries, but two senior administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of the order being signed cited China, Afghanistan, Iran and Russia as nations that could potentially face penalties under the new designation.”

Impact: The new Executive Order authorizes the Secretary of State to make a determination that a wrongful detention has taken place and to recommend sanctions. The problem is that the Executive Branch hasn’t wielded that authority – or its separate sanction authority under the GMA – in relation to Turkey. It can impose sanctions, but has failed to do so, despite the major human rights abuses and illegitimate leverage gained by Turkey’s hostage-diplomacy.