

Sample Affirmative Case

Impose Global Magnitsky Act Sanctions on Turkey

Introduction

On October 7, 2016, Pastor Andrew Brunson and his wife were arrested by the Turkish police.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom notes that, No publication date, (The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan legislative branch agency created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), as amended. USCIRF monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) abroad; makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress; and tracks the implementation of these recommendations.) United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Pastor Andrew Brunson,” (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://www.uscifr.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/released-rpocs/pastor-andrew-brunson>

Although he was a U.S. citizen, Brunson was denied legal counsel and held for 18 months without a trial, sometimes in solitary confinement. When he finally got his day in court, he was found guilty despite a lack of any credible evidence.¹

This story is continued by Agathe Demarais, a Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, who wrote in November of 2022, (Agathe Demarais is a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Her areas of interest include the global economy, US-EU-China economic relations and economic statecraft. Before joining ECFR, Demarais was the global forecasting director of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the research arm of The Economist. She led the EIU’s global economic and geopolitical analysis, with a particular focus on trade developments, emerging markets and economic statecraft. Demarais is the author of “Backfire”, a book on the global ripple effects of US sanctions and export controls. The book draws on her experience as an economic policy adviser for the diplomatic corps of the French treasury in Russia and Lebanon. She also previously worked in investment banking in Russia and the US.) Journal of Democracy, “Why Sanctions Don’t Work Against Dictatorships,” (Accessed January 15, 2026) <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/why-sanctions-dont-work-against-dictatorships/>

“First, effective sanctions typically have a narrowly defined objective. In 2018, the United States slapped sanctions on Turkey to protest the detention of Andrew Brunson, an American pastor, who allegedly had links to groups that the Turkish government deems “terrorists.” (He denied those allegations.) Just two months later, Turkey bowed to this pressure and released him, prompting the United States to lift the related penalties. While Turkey isn’t a democracy, it isn’t a full-blown autocracy either.”

Brunson’s story exhibits a troubling reality: Turkey engages in the illegal hostage-taking of American citizens to gain leverage over the U.S. Unfortunately, he is not the only American victim of this practice. Because we must defend the rights of our citizens abroad, my partner and I stand

¹ The original text of the article reads: “Andrew Brunson, 50, is an American citizen who has lived in Turkey for 23 years. He is a pastor for the Izmir Diriliş (Resurrection) Church, a small evangelical Presbyterian congregation in the city of Izmir. Andrew filed an application to renew his residence visa in April 2016. On October 7, 2016, the local police department summoned him for what he assumed to be a routine meeting to discuss his visa renewal. However, he was taken into custody upon his arrival at the station and told he would be deported within 15 days. 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 U.S. 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. Pastor Brunson was not allowed contact with other prisoners and was held incommunicado in the Harmandali Detention Center. A court document released at a December 9, 2016 hearing indicated that Pastor Brunson had been charged with “membership in an armed terrorist organization.” The judge reportedly mentioned allegations that Pastor Brunson is linked to the Gülen movement, which the Turkish government accuses of planning the failed July 2016 coup. [. . .] Pastor Brunson’s first court hearing of his trial occurred on April 16, 2018, after 18 months in detention. His second hearing took place on May 7; then USCIRF Vice Chair Sandra Jolley and USCIRF staff attended in person. His third hearing, which Vice Chair Arriaga and USCIRF staff attended, took place on July 18. Pastor Brunson was released to house arrest on July 25 due to health concerns. His fourth and last hearing took place on October 12, 2018, with Commissioner Tony Perkins and USCIRF staff present.”

Resolved: The United States Federal Government should significantly reform its foreign policy toward the Republic of Turkey (Türkiye).

Facts

Fact 1: The President Can Sanction Foreign Human Rights Abusers

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 Human Rights Accountability Act (Global Magnitsky Act; Title XII, Subtitle F of P.L. 114-328, as amended; 22 U.S.C. §§10101 et seq.) authorizes the President to impose economic sanctions and deny entry into the United States to foreign persons identified as engaging in human rights violations or corruption. Enacted in December 2016, the law's authority to impose sanctions was originally scheduled to terminate six years after enactment, and was then permanently reauthorized in April 2022 (Section 6 of P.L. 117-110). The executive branch has used Executive Order (E.O.) 13818 of December 2017 as the framework for implementing the Global Magnitsky Act."

Global Magnitsky Act (GMA) sanctions empower the President with crucial foreign policy leverage to protect our citizens from abuse. Unfortunately, as mentioned by Demarais, the U.S. withdrew these sanctions from Turkey after Brunson's release, leaving other American hostages in Turkish custody. This brings us to...

Fact 2: Turkey Engages in Hostage Diplomacy

According to the U.S. Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council on August 21, 2025, (The U.S. Department of State's OSAC keeps Diplomatic Security Service representatives connected with private-sector security professionals from U.S. organizations operating abroad for ongoing threat awareness and crisis support. Through trusted peer network groups, consultations, trainings, events, alerts, and analysis, OSAC works together to protect U.S. interests overseas. OSAC's public-private partnership currently consists of over 5,400 organization and 18,000 individual members. Any corporate, non-profit, academic, faith-based or other U.S.-incorporated organization of any size with operations outside the United States may apply to join.) **Overseas Security Advisory Council, "Türkiye Country Security Report"** (Accessed February 9, 2026) <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkey/Content/Detail/Report/4ac42c15-5cca-4897-b471-1ce4004bf192>

"The Turkish government has unjustly detained several Turkish citizens employed by the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul, and the U.S. Consulate in Adana as well as other dual-national U.S.-Turkish citizens on specious charges or without any charge at all. Security forces have detained tens of thousands of individuals, including U.S. citizens, for alleged affiliations with terrorist organizations based on scant or secret evidence and grounds that appear to be politically motivated. U.S. citizens have also been subject to travel bans that prevent them from departing Türkiye."

While the exact number of Americans in Turkish custody is classified, according to the Foley Foundation in 2025, we know that several remain there. Why does Turkey want them? For use in hostage diplomacy.

Drs. Danielle Gilbert and Gaëlle Piché defined “hostage diplomacy” for the Texas National Security Review in the Winter of 2022, (Danielle Gilbert is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. Her research explores the causes and consequences of hostage taking in international security including projects on rebel kidnapping, hostage recovery policy, and hostage diplomacy. Her current book project examines why and how armed groups kidnap. It is based on her PhD dissertation, which received the American Political Science Association’s 2021 Merze Tate Award for the Best Dissertation in International Relations, Law and Politics. Gilbert’s scholarship has been published in the American Political Science Review, Comparative Political Studies, International Studies Perspectives, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Terrorism & Political Violence, the Texas National Security Review, and the Journal of Political Science Education. Dr. Gaëlle Rivard Piché is a strategic analyst with Defence Research and Development Canada where she works closely with the Canadian Armed Forces, providing direct decision-making support through evidence-based research on a wide range of topics. She is currently a fellow at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (Carleton University) where she completed her Ph.D. in International Affairs in 2017. She is also a guest lecturer at the Canadian Forces College and works as a consultant for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on security sector reform and peace operations. During her doctoral studies, Dr. Rivard Piché was a Fulbright research fellow in the International Security Program at the Harvard’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (2014-2015). She conducted extensive field research in Haiti and El Salvador between 2012 and 2015, looking at the consequences of security sector reform on public order and violence. Her research has been published in International Journal, Études internationales, Canadian Foreign Policy Journal, and the Canadian Naval Review.) *Texas National Security Review*, Vol 5, Iss 1, “Caught Between Giants: Hostage Diplomacy and Negotiation Strategy for Middle Powers,” (Accessed January 16, 2026) <https://doi.org/10.15781/4n39-ja85>

“And yet, these same countries make frequent concessions to hostile regimes that have arrested their citizens. In the last six years alone, Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump have made substantial concessions — offering prisoner swaps, diplomatic recognition, cash payment, and withdrawal of American troops — to bring imprisoned Americans home from Cuba, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Turkey.⁵ These prisoners might be caught up in broader, ongoing negotiations, like former Washington Post Tehran Bureau Chief Jason Rezaian and other Americans who gained their freedom as part of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.⁶ More often, however, states have targeted and arrested foreigners for use as standalone diplomatic leverage. Though exercised through a state’s criminal justice system, these arrests aim to extort concessions, much like kidnapping would. This is “hostage diplomacy” — the taking of hostages under the guise of national law for diplomatic purposes — and it’s becoming a favored tactic of Chinese foreign policy.⁷”

When Turkey arrests American citizens on contrived charges, it uses them as bargaining chips to pressure the U.S. to cave to their demands on certain foreign policy issues. This practice is an unacceptable threat to American interests for two reasons:

Harms

Harm 1: Violates the Rights of American Citizens

International human rights lawyer Beatrice Lau wrote for the Georgetown Journal of International Law in the summer of 2022, (Beatrice Lau is a humanitarian professional and an international lawyer from Hong Kong. She has worked in Niger, Haiti, Tajikistan, Malaysia, Libya, Tunisia, and Belarus, specialising in humanitarian actions for refugees and migrants in detention facilities. She holds an LL.M in Advanced Studies in Public International Law from Leiden University, and an LL.B in England and Wales.) *Georgetown Journal of International Law* Volume 53, Number 3, ““Hostage Diplomacy”—A Contemporary State Practice Outside the Reach of International Law?” (Accessed January 16, 2026) <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/international-law-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2023/03/GT-GJIL230010.pdf>

““Hostage diplomacy” loosely describes a phenomenon where states detain foreign nationals under the guise of national law as a means to coerce the foreign policy of another state. The practice violates the human rights of the individual victim and the right of sovereign states to decide their affairs free from any coercive interference.”

Treating American citizens as hostages is a clear violation of the basic rights to due process and liberty. When it does this, Turkey harms the individuals involved, breaks international law, and challenges American sovereignty.

Harm 2: Gives Turkey Unjust Leverage

The reason Turkey takes American hostages is to extort foreign policy concessions from the U.S. government.

Drs. Gilbert and Piché comment that, (Danielle Gilbert is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. Her research explores the causes and consequences of hostage taking in international security including projects on rebel kidnapping, hostage recovery policy, and hostage diplomacy. Her current book project examines why and how armed groups kidnap. It is based on her PhD dissertation, which received the American Political Science Association's 2021 Merze Tate Award for the Best Dissertation in International Relations, Law, and Politics. Gilbert's scholarship has been published in the American Political Science Review, Comparative Political Studies, International Studies Perspectives, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Terrorism & Political Violence, the Texas National Security Review, and the Journal of Political Science Education. Dr. Gaëlle Rivard Piché is a strategic analyst with Defence Research and Development Canada where she works closely with the Canadian Armed Forces, providing direct decision-making support through evidence-based research on a wide range of topics. She is currently a fellow at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (Carleton University), where she completed her Ph.D. in International Affairs in 2017. She is also a guest lecturer at the Canadian Forces College and works as a consultant for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on security sector reform and peace operations. During her doctoral studies, Dr. Rivard Piché was a Fulbright research fellow in the International Security Program at the Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (2014-2015). She conducted extensive field research in Haiti and El Salvador between 2012 and 2015, looking at the consequences of security sector reform on public order and violence. Her research has been published in International Journal, Études internationales, Canadian Foreign Policy Journal, and the Canadian Naval Review.) Texas National Security Review, Vol 5, Iss 1, "Caught Between Giants: Hostage Diplomacy and Negotiation Strategy for Middle Powers," (Accessed January 16, 2026) <https://doi.org/10.15781/4n39-ja85>

“And yet, these same countries make frequent concessions to hostile regimes that have arrested their citizens. In the last six years alone, Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump have made substantial concessions — offering prisoner swaps, diplomatic recognition, cash payment, and withdrawal of American troops — to bring imprisoned Americans home from Cuba, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Turkey.⁵ These prisoners might be caught up in broader, ongoing negotiations, like former Washington Post Tehran Bureau Chief Jason Rezaian and other Americans who gained their freedom as part of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.⁶ More often, however, states have targeted and arrested foreigners for use as standalone diplomatic leverage. Though exercised through a state's criminal justice system, these arrests aim to extort concessions, much like kidnapping would. This is “hostage diplomacy” — the taking of hostages under the guise of national law for diplomatic purposes — and it's becoming a favored tactic of Chinese foreign policy.⁷”

This betrayal becomes even starker when we recall that Turkey is a part of NATO. It is our formal ally – legally obligated to help support our shared goals – but is instead acting more like an adversary by unlawfully holding our citizens for ransom.

This unlawful practice must end, which is why my partner and I propose the following plan:

The Plan: Impose GMA Sanctions on Turkey

Mandate

Immediately upon an affirmative ballot, the President will extend GMA sanctions to Turkey's Minister of Interior, Minister of Justice, and any other senior Turkish officials whose departments are responsible for the hostage-taking of any U.S. citizens, until all U.S. citizens are released from Turkish custody.

Agency and Enforcement

This plan will be enacted by the President, implemented by the Treasury and State Departments, and enforced by any other necessary federal bodies.

Funding

No funding will be needed, as this plan uses an existing administrative process.

Clarifications

The affirmative team reserves the right to clarify the details of this plan in future speeches.

By implementing GMA penalties, the U.S. will put pressure on Turkey to release all U.S. hostages and make it clear that we will not accept hostage diplomacy. Our plan will yield at least two advantages:

Advantages

Advantage 1: Defends American Citizens

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. 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> [brackets and ellipses in original]

"But an Obama administration official criticized the strategy to tie sanctions to just one person, noting that Turkey has proved highly responsive to sanctions: "Every time we have been bold enough to use a stick, [Turkish leaders] respond within a few months' time. ... They respond [to sanctions] every single time, no matter who it is, where it is, when it is."

When we sanctioned these two Turkish ministers in 2018, the government released Brunson almost immediately. With our plan, we are restoring this incentive for Turkey to release their other hostages and end the violations of their rights. Instead of giving Turkey more concessions, we will project American strength to bring our people home.

Advantage 2: Removes Undue Leverage

When Turkey knows that it cannot take our citizens hostage, then it will have no choice but to end the kidnapping that taints our alliance.

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. The Administration can and will continue to utilize this tool to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law globally.”

Conclusion

Protecting the lives and liberties of our citizens from foreign threats is among the most basic obligations of government. GMA sanctions on Turkey proved their effectiveness in 2018, but they were removed too soon. American hostages remain. To protect these citizens, we must restore sanctions. Thank you.