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Policy Resolution Background Paper

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

Background

The land now occupied by the Republic of Turkey (Türkiye) has changed hands and names many times: Asia Minor, Anatolia, the Persian Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the Ottoman Empire.

Modern Turkey was established in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in the aftermath of the First World War and considers itself a politically secular country, although most citizens are Sunni Muslim. Turkey's capital is [Ankara](#), while [Istanbul](#) (once known as Constantinople) is its largest city and seaport ([source](#)).

Turkey occupies several of the world's most critical [geopolitical crossroads](#). The map below from [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) tells the story:



Lying astride the European and Asian continents and sandwiched between multiple major (often warring) powers, Turkey is strategically important to both the East and the West. While Turkey is a North American Treaty Organization (NATO) ally and a European Union (EU) candidate, it also maintains close trade ties with Russia and China in a “balanced neutrality” ([source](#) and [source](#)). Its proximity to the Middle East makes it a central player in dealings with Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Israel, often to the chagrin of the United States. Turkey also maintains a critical control over international access to the Black, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas ([source](#)).

Resolution Definitions

Major Terms

- United States Federal Government: “To ensure a separation of powers, the U.S. Federal Government is made up of three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. To ensure the government is effective and citizens’ rights are protected, each branch has its own powers and responsibilities, including working with the other branches.” ([source](#))
- Foreign Policy: “The policy of a sovereign state in its interaction with other sovereign states.” ([source](#))
- Turkey: “Turkey, also called Türkiye, country that occupies a unique geographic position, lying partly in Asia and partly in Europe. Throughout its history it has acted as both a barrier and a bridge between the two continents.” ([source](#))

Limiters

- The United States Federal Government: The sole actor of the reforms under this resolution must be the United States federal government. No U.S. state can reform its specific policies that may affect Turkey, and no other country or international body can be the reforming actor.
- “Foreign Policy” and “toward:” These terms limit reforms to U.S. foreign policy regarding the country that is the object of the preposition “toward.” The Republic of Turkey, as an official nation, must serve as the receiving body of these policy reforms.
- Turkey (Türkiye): Both the western and official names are included in the resolution because Turkey officially changed their name to Türkiye in 2022. Policies that would apply to the region as a whole or countries in addition to Turkey would be extra-topical.

Resolution Analysis

This resolution provides significant educational value for two major reasons. First, studying a key global swing state is important for understanding the complexity of foreign policy. The Center for a New American Security states:

“Policymakers should focus on six global swing states—Brazil, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Türkiye—that together will exert disproportionate influence over the future of international order. Each of the six is multi-aligned, maintaining simultaneous ties with the United States, Russia, and China. None wishes to be forced into a strategic alignment with one great power alone, and all seek meaningful changes in international rules and institutions. Each of the global swing states plays a dominant role in its region and takes actions with worldwide repercussions. They possess sufficient collective geopolitical weight for their policy preferences to sway the future direction of the international order” ([source](#)).

Because Turkey is one of the “multi-aligned” states with a “disproportionate influence” over the world, students must deal with Turkey’s outsized geopolitical importance and its relations with other great powers that the United States would prefer to see countered. Turkey embraces its ambiguous position relative to a “multipolar” world to preserve its political independence and has both regional and global strategic aspirations ([source](#)). It maintains complex relationships with Russia, China, and Iran, and considers itself a member of the Global South, even though it is a NATO member and has a “customs union” trade agreement with the European Union ([source](#)).

The intricacy of determining the delicate balance of United States foreign policy “carrots” and “sticks” that aligns not only with our policy goals but also Turkey’s is the essence of [realpolitik](#) with a global swing state. The [Brookings Institution](#) reprised a Richard Holbrook quotation from 30 years ago that resounds today: “Turkey sits ‘at the crossroads of almost every issue of importance to the United States on the Eurasian continent.’”

Second, current events make Turkey a timely yet not overwhelming topic. While NCFCA has studied topics previously (International Terrorism 2018-2019 and EU Immigration 2020-2021) that touched on Turkey, recent major changes in the region warrant focused study. [Post-Assad Syria](#), the [Russia-Ukraine war](#), and the [Israel-Hamas war](#) are all arenas where Turkey is playing a significant role. Experts are saying that it is time to revisit Turkey policy ([one example](#) and [one opposing view](#)). Recent political events also indicate that U.S.-Turkey relations are significantly improving in President Trump’s second term ([source](#)).

Reform Goals

Regarding the foreign policy history between Turkey and the United States, the Congressional Research Service comments drily that relations have “alternated between close cooperation and notable division” and that the U.S. and Turkey have “differed sharply on some major

issues,” yielding multiple reform goals across a number of geopolitical issues ([source](#)). Throughout these varying fields, several broad foreign policy objectives remain constant:

- Prying Turkey away from the political, economic, and military orbits of major U.S. adversaries like Russia, China, and Iran ([source](#))
- Further integrating Turkey into NATO and the EU ([source](#))
- Addressing Turkey’s political and human rights abuses, especially of American citizens ([source](#))
- Contributing to joint counterterrorism efforts ([source](#))
- Rebuilding Syria without abandoning American allies ([source](#))
- Peacefully overseeing the Israel-Gaza ceasefire ([source](#))
- Ensuring the security of U.S. military assets in the region ([source](#))
- Actualizing the potential of a robust economic relationship between the U.S. and Turkey ([source](#))

Complicating these objectives is President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s vision of a politically nonaligned Turkey. Nevertheless, the two nations have persistently—and with some major successes—attempted to work together to achieve shared goals.

Affirmative Topics/Resources

Cases Increasing American Engagement With Turkey

- Lift the ban on F-35s to Turkey ([Washington Institute](#))
- End CAASTA sanctions on Turkey ([Brookings](#))
- Commission joint military exercises with Turkey ([German Marshall Fund](#))
- Renew the Generalized System of Preferences for Turkish imports ([California Chamber of Commerce](#))
- Support pro-democracy nonprofits in Turkey ([Center for American Progress](#))
- Recognize and assist the Syrian National Army, contingent upon Turkey halting its campaigns against the Syrian Kurds ([CFR](#), [U.K. House of Commons](#))
- Conduct joint naval patrols in the Black Sea with Turkey ([Center for Strategic & International Studies](#), [European Council on Foreign Relations](#))
- Pressure Turkey to end its boycott of Israel ([The Times of Israel](#))

Cases Decreasing American Engagement With Turkey

- Remove U.S. nuclear weapons from Turkey ([International Affairs Review](#), [Brookings Institute](#))
- Remove U.S. tariffs on Turkey ([Business and Public Administration Studies Journal](#))
- Impose sanctions on Turkey until it joins the embargo on Russian oil and gas ([Associated Press](#))
- Retaliate for Turkey's failure to enforce intellectual property laws to protect American businesses ([2025 National Trade Estimate Report](#))
- Impose Global Magnitsky Act sanctions on Turkish officials for arbitrary detentions of U.S. citizens ([CSCE](#))
- Remove foreign aid from Turkey for repressing freedoms of religion, press, and speech ([Stockholm Center for Freedom](#), [Foundation for Defence of Democracies](#))
- Extend the "Khashoggi Ban" to Turkish visas ([American Enterprise Institute](#))
- Decommission the Incirlik Air Base in Turkey ([Center for European Policy Analysis](#))
- Withhold foreign aid from Turkey for attacking U.S. Marines in 2024 ([House of Representatives](#))
- Pressure Turkey to disown Hamas ([National Interest](#))

Negative Topics/Resources

Arguments Against Increasing Engagement With Turkey

- Turkey supports Hamas in the war against Israel ([FDD](#))
- Turkish government forces have been connected with human rights abuses ([Amnesty](#))
- Turkey has betrayed U.S. interest in the region before ([AEI](#), [Washington Institute](#))
- Turkey is establishing stronger ties with China and Russia ([Congress.gov](#))
- Changes to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East could lead to war ([Foreign Policy Research Institute](#))
- Supporting Turkey strains U.S.-Israel relations ([AEI](#))
- Turkey does not cooperate with the U.S. well ([War on the Rocks](#))
- It will be difficult to ensure that a reform will have sufficient effect ([GMF](#))
- Turkey does not trust the U.S. ([Quincy Institute](#))

Arguments Against Decreasing Engagement With Turkey

- The U.S. has strong influence through military power or sanctions ([Congress.gov](#))
- U.S.-Turkey military tensions are decreasing ([Congress.gov](#))
- Intergovernmental disagreement on handling arms sales ([Congress.gov](#))
- Turkey is a key anti-terrorism fighter in the region ([State.gov](#))
- Turkey is important to Syrian stability ([Congress.gov](#))
- Turkey is a major NATO partner ([Atlantic Council](#))
- Turkey exerts significant influence in the Middle East ([U.S. Department of State](#))
- Turkey has demonstrated the will to align with U.S. peace interest ([Arab Center Washington, D.C.](#))