



By: TA | AP Insight

# Lifting a ban on F-35 procurement is an important step forward for the Turkish-American partnership



US and Turkish Presidents Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdogan met at the White House after six years. This meeting could remove deadlocks in mutually important fields such as the war in Ukraine and tensions in the Middle East.

President Donald Trump held talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the White House on Thursday and signaled that the United States might soon lift its hold on sales of advanced fighter jets to Ankara.

During Trump's first term, the U.S. **removed** Turkey, a NATO ally, from its flagship F-35 fighter jet program after Turkey purchased an air defense system from Russia.

U.S. officials worried that Turkey's use of Russia's S-400 surface-to-air missile system could be used to gather data on the capabilities of the F-35 and that the information could end up in Russian hands.

Trump started his two-hour meeting with Erdogan by offering hope that a resolution to the matter could be found during the leaders' talks.

"He needs certain things, and we need certain things, and we're going to come to a conclusion. You'll know by the end of the day," Trump said. The president added to Erdogan, "And I think you'll be successful with buying the things" you would "like to buy."

The president, in a brief exchange with reporters as he bid farewell to Erdogan, called it a "good meeting" but did not offer further details.

## Erdogan's first trip to the White House since 2019

It was Erdogan's first trip to the White House since 2019. They forged what Trump has described as a "very good relationship" during his first White House term.

Over the years, U.S. officials have cited

concerns about Turkey's human rights record under Erdogan and the country's ties with Russia. Tensions between Turkey and Israel, another important American ally, over Gaza and Syria have made relations difficult with Turkey at times.

Trump in remarks before reporters focused his concerns on Turkey's continued economic relationship with Russia.

Turkey has been one of the biggest buyers of Russian fossil fuel since the European Union announced in early 2023 it would boycott most Russian seaborne oil.

**The best thing he could do is not buy oil and gas from Russia - Trump said of Erdogan**

Since January 2023, Ankara has **purchased** more than \$90 billion in Russian oil, coal and natural gas. Only China and India have bought more from Russia in that period.

"The best thing he could do is not buy oil and gas from Russia," Trump said of Erdogan.

Trump added that Erdogan is respected by both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"I think he could have a big influence if he wants to," Trump said.

The push on Erdogan to become more engaged in pressuring Putin comes after Trump earlier this week **said** he believed Ukraine could win back all territory lost to Russia in the war. It was a dramatic shift from Trump's repeated **calls** for Kyiv to make concessions to end the war.

Erdogan has made clear he is eager to see the hold on F-35s lifted, telling Trump that he came prepared to "thoroughly discuss" the issue.

The Turkish president was even blunter in a television interview this week. "I don't think it's very becoming of strategic partnership, and I

don't think it's the right way to go," Erdogan said in an interview this week on Fox News Channel's "Special Report with Bret Baier."

## Past reluctance to engage with Turkey

Democratic President Joe Biden's administration kept Erdogan, who has served as president since 2014 and was prime minister for more than a decade before that, at an arm's length during Biden's four years in office.

The reluctance to engage deeply was borne out of Turkey's record of democratic backsliding as well as Ankara's close ties to Moscow.

Opposition parties and human rights organizations have **accused** Erdogan of undermining democracy and curbing freedom of expression during his more than two decades in power.

International observers say that baseless investigations and prosecutions of human rights activists, journalists, opposition politicians and others remain a persistent problem in Turkey.

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The Republican's administration is also largely in sync with Turkey's approach to Syria as both nations piece together their posture toward the once isolated country after the fall of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad in December.

Trump and European leaders have followed Erdogan in embracing Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who once commanded a rebel group that was designated a foreign terrorist

organization.

Trump also said that Erdogan deserves credit for backing the rebel forces that ousted Assad from Syria.

"I think President Erdogan is the one responsible for Syria, for the successful fight in ridding Syria of its past leader," Trump said. "He doesn't take the responsibility, but it's actually a great achievement."

Trump's chief diplomat, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, **met** with al-Sharaa on Monday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly.

## Erdogan sees a key role for Turkey

Erdogan has sought to position his country as a point of **stability** in a tumultuous moment.

He believes Turkey can play an essential role for European security and is able to span geopolitical divisions over Ukraine and Syria as well as U.S. tariffs, which have sparked a global trade war.



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Turkey is influential in neighboring Syria. The rebel groups it supported during the civil war

took power in December. But the fall of Assad aggravated tense relations between Turkey and Israel.

Trump has urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be “reasonable” in his dealings with Ankara.

Erdogan on Tuesday took part in a group meeting hosted by Trump on the sidelines of the General Assembly, when Trump gathered the leaders of eight Arab and Muslim countries to discuss the war in Gaza.

Erdogan has been **critical** of Israel's handling of the war, which was launched after Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 people captive.

More than 65,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, and about 90% of homes in the territory have been destroyed or damaged.

Erdogan, in his U.N. address, alleged that Israeli forces have committed genocide, an allegation contested by Israel and United States.