



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Ankara as a mirror of pragmatism – the new relationship between Turkey and the United Kingdom



The visit of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, **Keir Starmer**, to Ankara and his meeting with the President of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have opened a new phase in relations between the two countries.

Central to the agreement is the purchase of 20 **Eurofighter Typhoon** fighter jets, worth around eight billion pounds, but its political and strategic significance extends far beyond a commercial transaction.

The agreement reflects the aligned interests of London and **Ankara** in defence, industry, and security and demonstrates how the balance within the NATO and the European defence structure is shifting.

During the talks in Ankara, the two leaders confirmed the agreement on the delivery of Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft and created opportunities for broader cooperation in defence, training, and industrial cooperation.

For London, this is the first major export deal in this sector after several years and an opportunity to reactivate its role within the European consortium comprising Germany, Italy, and Spain.

For Ankara, it marks the start of a modernisation process that will connect Western technical capabilities with Turkey's aspirations for greater strategic independence.

Shared interests form the foundation of the agreement between London and Ankara. Turkey secures continuity in the modernisation of its air force, while the United Kingdom sustains its **defence industry** and demonstrates its ability to conduct complex export operations within the European framework.

For the rest of Europe, the agreement confirms that joint projects in security can succeed outside the formal structures of the European Union.

Strategic necessity for Turkey,

strategic gain for Britain

For Turkey, this contract is a strategic necessity. Since its exclusion from the US F-35 (Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II) programme in 2019 due to the purchase of the Russian S-400 air defence system, Ankara has been trying to compensate for the loss of a key component of its air power.

The **KAAN** domestic fighter programme (also known as TF-X) is still in the early stages of development and cannot be relied upon for prompt deliveries.

The Turkish Air Force therefore found itself facing both a technological gap and political conditionality. The acquisition of Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft alleviates both issues.

First, it fills a critical gap in operational capabilities between the retirement of the older F-16s and the arrival of the KAAN. Second, it demonstrates to the United States that Ankara is not solely dependent on American decisions to modernise its air force.

The Eurofighter Typhoon serves as a bridge – technically, politically, and symbolically

Erdogan does not abandon the alliance but rather uses its framework. At a time when Washington is delaying approval of the sale of modernised F-16s and making every delivery conditional, Ankara's purchase of European aircraft shows that it can modernise its fleet while remaining within allied procedures and ensuring interoperability.

In this context, the Eurofighter Typhoon serves as a bridge – technically, politically, and symbolically. It restores operational capability and Turkey's status as a full-fledged air power in a region that in recent years has relied on temporary improvisations.

For the United Kingdom, the deal with Turkey represents both an economic and strategic gain. For **BAE Systems** and the British military-industrial complex, it ensures the continuity of

the Eurofighter production line until the commencement of production of a new generation of combat aircraft within the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), a joint project of the UK, Italy, and Japan.

On the political front, the Starmer government confirms with this deal the return of foreign policy pragmatism – one that prioritises economic interests, jobs, and military-technological cooperation over rhetorical claims about "ideal partners".

Beyond political symbolism: economic and strategic results

The meeting between Starmer and Erdogan clearly indicated this approach. While human rights and democracy were relegated to the sidelines, negotiations were conducted with cold realism – without public pressure or attempts at political mentorship.

London thus assumed the role of a channel through which European industry can act quickly and efficiently, outside the bureaucratic constraints of Brussels or the political calculations of Berlin.

Britain is not seeking political symbolism with this deal but rather economic and strategic results. London's role is operational: to provide delivery, financing, and political support within the European production system, thereby maintaining real influence in a sector where there appeared to be no room for action after Brexit.

This contract demonstrates that the British defence industry still has the capacity to connect European technology with allied needs within NATO.

Europe still possesses the necessary industrial infrastructure and is capable of acting pragmatically once internal obstacles are removed

Germany's approval to support Eurofighter exports to Turkey marked the end of years of resistance within the consortium, removing the final obstacle for the contract to gain industrial and political legitimacy.

For the European Union, although not formally part of the contract, the effect is evident. The European defence industry has demonstrated that it can operate in a coordinated manner and deliver projects even outside the Union's institutional framework.

At a time when Europe is facing its first serious test of strategic autonomy, the fact that Turkey – a country whose ties to the West have been volatile over the past decade – has chosen a European product carries political significance.

It proves that Europe still possesses the necessary industrial infrastructure and is capable of acting pragmatically once internal obstacles are removed.

A bridge to the next generation of combat systems

The real risk lies primarily in price and pace: the value of the contract is already prompting objections in Ankara, and any delay in interim deliveries of second-hand Typhoons from Qatar and Oman can easily become a political issue.

This is further complicated by political uncertainty within Turkey itself – any tightening could reactivate export control mechanisms in Berlin and London, prolonging the licensing process, slowing the entire project, and altering cost dynamics.

By 2030, Turkey will have a fleet capable of maintaining regional balance until its KAAN programme matures

The technical aspect is equally demanding. Integrating the Typhoon into the existing

structure of the Turkish Air Force requires adapting command and logistics systems and pilot and technician training, as well as additional investment.

If this process is slow or inconsistent, the benefits of the contract will remain limited and its strategic value diminished.

If implementation proceeds as planned, by 2030, Turkey will have a fleet capable of maintaining regional balance until its KAAN programme matures. Britain, meanwhile, will sustain the vitality of its industrial base and create a bridge to the next generation of combat systems through the GCAP.

Politics and industry acting in concert

For NATO, the arrangement has significance: Ankara is restoring the full operation of its air force, thereby strengthening the alliance's southern wing, which for years has existed in a grey zone between political tension and technical limitations.

For Washington, the treaty is not a provocation but a rational solution. Since 2019, American policy towards Turkey has been based on the principle that there can be no **F-35 delivery** while the S-400 systems remain in Turkish possession.



The Eurofighter Typhoon enables Ankara to modernise its aviation without opening a new transatlantic dispute

The Eurofighter Typhoon enables Ankara to modernise its aviation without violating this

principle and without opening a new transatlantic dispute.

For Europe, the contract confirms that its industry still has political relevance. The sale to Turkey, despite differences and tensions, demonstrates that the European defence base can serve as an instrument of politics, not merely the market.

The Ankara agreement does not signal a change in alliances but indicates a new phase within NATO itself – one in which members increasingly act autonomously, yet within the framework of common interests.

Turkey, therefore, does not alter its strategic orientation but utilises the space the alliance provides. Britain does not extend its influence beyond Europe but confirms that it possesses the means to keep European industry relevant.

This contract shows that security is no longer measured by political statements but by the capacity to make decisions and deliver technology.

The Eurofighter Typhoon in the Turkish Air Force will not symbolise a new policy, but it will serve as practical proof that NATO and Europe can function through varying degrees of pragmatism without undermining unity.

The agreement between London and Ankara demonstrates that politics and industry can act in concert when there is a clear interest.

Decisions based on a realistic assessment of cost, benefit, and time have greater value than the political messages that usually accompany them.