

**Drexel GPS Geopolitical Update**  
**From Strategic Partners to Potential Adversaries? The Complex Evolution of U.S. -  
Turkish Relations**  
**09/09/24**

There was an attack on two U.S. Marines who were on leave in Izmir, Turkey last week by an anti-U.S. political group. Politically, the attack is being treated as an isolated incident. However, when viewed in a broader context - with a lens focused on the historical relationship between the two NATO allies - it reflects how Turkish President Erdoğan's increasingly brazen and "non-aligned" behavior regarding U.S. policies has likely influenced this attack (which occurred in broad daylight).

The geopolitical relationship between Turkey and the U.S. has seen a marked decline in recent years, highlighting a significant rift between the two nations. Historically, Turkey and the U.S. have shared a robust partnership, but recent developments have strained this alliance. President Erdoğan has increasingly adopted an anti-U.S. slant to his rhetoric, aligning more closely with countries like Russia and China, which contrasts sharply with American foreign policy goals.

Erdoğan's shift towards conservative religious values has further distanced Turkey from U.S. secular democratic ideals. This ideological divergence is mirrored in Turkey's strategic actions, such as its acquisition of Russian S-400 missile systems, which have led to U.S. sanctions and exacerbated tensions.

The attack on two U.S. Marines in Izmir by a mob, reflects rising anti-American sentiment in Turkey. This growing animosity can be partly attributed to Erdoğan's anti-U.S. rhetoric and Turkey's divergent geopolitical stance.

Turkey's strategic geographic location in the region undoubtedly means it will maintain a considerable degree of value as an asset to the U.S. going forward in the short-term. However, when combined with Erdoğan's increasingly overt anti-U.S. actions, along with the U.S.'s current shift toward a more Indo-Pacific-centric strategy, that value may need to be reevaluated.

Given these developments and Turkey's strategic importance, it may be prudent for the United States to reconsider its policies and support for Erdoğan's government. The shifting dynamics suggest that Turkey may no longer be as reliable an ally, prompting a reassessment of its role in U.S. foreign policy strategy moving forward.

**Recent and Historical Examples of Geopolitical rifts between Turkey and the United States:**

- 2024: Attack on U.S. Marines in Izmir – Two U.S. marines were attacked by a mob in Turkey, reflecting growing anti-American sentiment.

- Turkey's Role in Ukraine Conflict (2022-Present): Turkey's nuanced stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, including maintaining relations with both Russia and Ukraine, has created tensions with U.S. policy supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression.
- Sanctions on Turkey over Halkbank (2020): The U.S. imposed sanctions on Turkey's state-owned Halkbank for its alleged involvement in circumventing U.S. sanctions on Iran.
- Disputes over Libya (2019-Present): Turkey's military involvement in Libya and support for the Government of National Accord (GNA) has conflicted with U.S. interests and its alignment with rival factions.
- Turkey's Military Operation in Northern Syria (2019): Turkey's Operation Peace Spring against Kurdish forces in northern Syria, which were U.S. allies in the fight against ISIS, led to a U.S. withdrawal and condemnation from Washington.
- Purchase of Russian S-400 Missile Systems (2017-2019): Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 air-defense systems from Russia has led to significant tensions, resulting in the U.S. expelling Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet program and imposing sanctions.
- Turkey's Shift Toward Authoritarianism: Increasing authoritarian measures under Erdoğan, including crackdowns on political dissent and media freedom, have drawn criticism from the U.S. and affected bilateral relations.
- Support for Syrian Kurdish Groups (2014-Present): The U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish groups such as the YPG, which Turkey views as affiliated with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and a terrorist organization, has caused friction between the two nations.
- Detainment of U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson (2016-2018): The detention of U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson on charges of espionage and terrorism, followed by his release amid significant diplomatic pressure, strained U.S.-Turkey relations.
- 2016: Failed Coup Attempt - Turkey's demand for the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, a cleric living in exile in the U.S., whom Turkey accuses of masterminding a 2016 coup attempt, has strained relations.
- 2013: Reza Zarrab Case – Turkey's involvement in a money laundering scandal with Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab led to tensions, as the U.S. pursued legal actions against Turkish officials.
- 2008: Turkey's Role in the Iraq War – Disagreements over Turkey's limited support and role in the Iraq War, particularly in terms of troop deployments, created friction with the U.S.
- 1996: U.S. Sale of F-16s to Greece – The U.S. decision to sell F-16 fighter jets to Greece, despite Turkey's objections, marked the beginning of strains in the relationship, particularly over regional military balances.

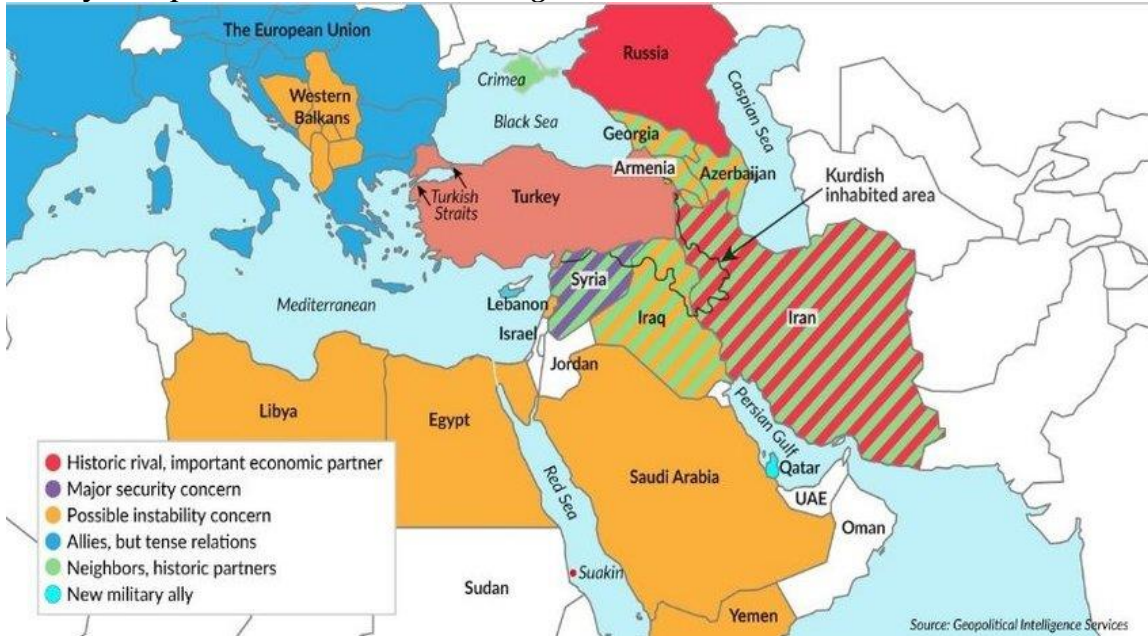
## GPS Assessment:

Despite their NATO alliance, Turkey's strategic importance to the U.S. is being overshadowed by its erratic policies and shifting loyalties, raising legitimate concerns about its reliability as an ally in the future.

### *U.S. Marines Attacked by Anti-U.S. Mob In Izmir Turkey*



### *Turkey's Geopolitical Location in the Region*



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