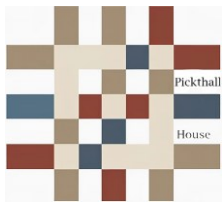


Türkiye as a Middle Power and Mediator in a Multipolar Order

Part 1: The Mediterranean, Europe and the West

Abstract

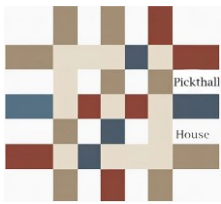
This paper explores Türkiye's evolving role as a middle power and mediator in the emerging multipolar order, focusing on its relations with Europe, NATO, the United States, the Black Sea region and the Mediterranean. Rooted in Ottoman decline and republican secularism, Türkiye's identity has shifted under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) toward a more Anatolian, nationalist, and Islamist orientation, shaping its foreign policy posture. Türkiye's economic interdependence with the European Union, anchored in the 1995 Customs Union, remains central, though accession talks have stalled amid democratic backsliding and disputes over Cyprus and Greece. Despite political friction, Türkiye continues to act as a critical partner in energy transit, migration management, and defence exports, notably its Bayraktar drones. Within NATO, Türkiye's strategic geography and military weight make it indispensable, even as its pursuit of strategic autonomy complicates alliance dynamics. These underscore Ankara's transactional diplomacy and convening power, positioning it as both partner and competitor in Europe's security architecture. Overall, this paper argues that,



following Brexit and war in Ukraine, structured UK-Türkiye cooperation on maritime security, energy, migration, and post-conflict reconstruction is both a necessity and an opportunity.

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Introduction

In recent years, Türkiye has increasingly entered the new era of multipolar competition, balancing its crucial role within NATO while courting BRICS membership,¹ thereby actively hedging between the Western and non-Western blocs. Meanwhile, it is actively expanding its regional influence through transactional diplomacy, convening power and mediation, in order to assert its strategic autonomy in Africa, Asia and Europe. This shift reflects a shrewd calculation by Ankara that middle powers such as itself can multiply their leverage by brokering deals and keeping multiple alignment options open, even while retaining vital economic relationships, such as Turkish interdependence with Europe and the Atlantic security framework.^{2 3} Ankara has framed this domestically to nationalist audiences as a response to the erosion of the unipolar world order, as Erdoğan stated in April 2025:

“It is clear that the world is moving towards a transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world. Türkiye is already in such a situation that no country can determine a role for us in the new order. From this perspective, the establishment of a new world order is impossible without Türkiye.”⁴

In its turn to global middle power leadership, Türkiye has made significant advances in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia through partnering with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and Organisation of Turkic States (OTS). These developments are fast-moving: as recently as 6-7 October 6-7, the OTS Gebele summit saw discussion of the OTS+, and suggestions of a greater OTS+ alliance with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and BRICS, pre-eminent international organisations driving the multipolar shift.⁵

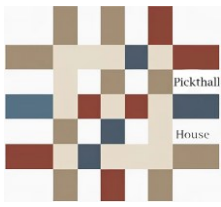
¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10220461.2025.2497869>

² https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/turkiye_en

³ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-economic-surveys-turkiye-2025_d01c660f-en.html

⁴ <https://report.az/en/region/Erdoğan-establishing-new-world-order-without-turkiye-is-impossible>

⁵ <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/10/11/is-the-organization-of-turkic-states-entering-a-new-phase-with-ots/>



This series of three papers by Pickthall House will first catalogue and analyse Türkiye's wide-ranging diplomatic, military, cultural and economic ties in the modern multipolar context, before offering our conclusions on what this means for British foreign policy.

The first paper shall focus on Turkish relations, policy and activity in its immediate vicinity, around the Black Sea and Mediterranean, and particularly with the various modern Balkan states which were once ruled from Istanbul up until 1912, and with which Türkiye maintains an important relationship. Further afield, the paper will address Turkish relations with the EU, the wider West (including NATO, of which Türkiye is a core member), and Russia, before addressing the Black Sea, Mediterranean and Balkans in detail.

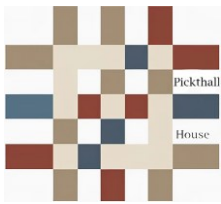
The second paper will address increasing Turkish relations with and presence in countries to its east and south, in Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Sub-Saharan Africa, and key eastern powers such as India, Pakistan and China. The third paper will then address the history, context and prospect of UK-Turkish relations. As Britain continues to reassert its strategic autonomy outside of the European Union, albeit firmly within the Western bloc, after Brexit, opportunities arise for British partnership, collaboration and competition with Türkiye.

1. Türkiye and the West

1.1 Summary

Türkiye's relationship with the EU is anchored in deep economic interdependence and Türkiye's long-standing presence on the European periphery. Despite centuries of characterisation of "the Turk" as the principal foe of Christian Europe, Türkiye as she has played an undeniable role as a major player in European geopolitics ever since its rise as the Ottoman Empire from the turn of the 14th century, with the peak of its influence falling between Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) in 1453 until the failed siege of Vienna in 1683 and the loss of Azov to Russia in 1700 spelt its decline.

Following the empire's fatal defeat in the First World War to the Entente of Britain, France and Russia, and despite having lost almost all its former European holdings in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, Türkiye's European identity was arguably nonetheless strengthened. The 1920 Treaty of Sèvres threatened a humiliating partition of Anatolia. The plan proposed the creation of independent Kurdish and Armenian states on much of eastern modern-day Türkiye, with the cession of Thrace and Smyrna (İzmir) to Greece,

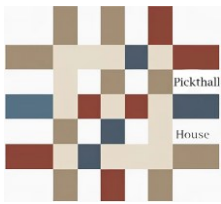


the creation of an international zone at Istanbul and the Bosphorus, and extensive Italian, French and British zones of influence throughout southern Anatolia.

Humiliated and irate, the recently-established provisional government in Ankara, led by Brigadier General Mustafa Kemal Pasha stripped the signatories of their citizenship, adopted a new republican constitution in 1921, and continued waging what would become known as the Turkish War of Independence. Following his success in driving out Allied forces, Mustafa Kemal was granted the title “Atatürk” (“Father of the Turks”) and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne finalised Türkiye’s post-war borders. Having abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922, the Thessaloniki-born Atatürk and fellow European-born and westward-looking officers abolished the caliphate in 1924 and led a Turkish nationalist and Europeanist push.

This saw the establishment of a secular republic under the Republican People’s Party (CHP), founded on the ideology of the “Six Pillars”, which were added to the constitution in 1937: republicanism, populism, nationalism, laicism, statism and reformism. Other reforms enforcement of European-style dress codes, and the replacement of the Ottoman Perso-Arabic script be replaced with the modern Turkish Latin script, amongst others. The CHP went on to dominate the first three decades of Türkiye’s government with effective one-party rule until 1950. The party made fleeting returns in the 1960s and 1970s before being banned from 1981 until its re-establishment in 1992. Since the victory of the neo-Ottomanist Justice and Development Party (AKP), currently led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in 2002, the CHP has constituted the major secular opposition party.

Indeed, the relocation of Türkiye’s capital to Ankara in Anatolian heartland also foretold more recent developments in Turkish identity. Despite the prominence of the Turkish republic’s secular, Europhile and westward-looking élite in middle of the 20th century and strong resistance to any religious influence on politics, demographic change and urbanisation saw the Anatolia’s more conservative and religious rural population first expand and then move to the larger cities for work. This potent combination of modern Turkish nationalism and Islamism has been exemplified by the rise of the AKP. Emerging in 2001 from the Welfare Party, the AKP has ruled Türkiye since 2002. Erdoğan, first coming to prominence as Mayor of Istanbul for the Welfare Party in 1994, became Prime Minister in 2003, before becoming President in 2014. Surviving an pro-democracy, secularist military coup attempt in 2016, Erdoğan consolidated power in a narrowly-won 2017 referendum, replacing the parliamentary system with an executive presidency and presidential systems, 51.41% to 48.59%. Inspecting the results of this referendum,



reveals opposition in European Türkiye, along the western and southern coasts, and in Kurdish-majority south-eastern Türkiye, while support for Erdogan's executive presidency is centred clearly in the Anatolian heartland.⁶

The last two decades have thus seen a more uniquely Anatolian Türkiye, in touch with its Turkic, Islamic, Ottoman and European identities. This change has been apparent in Turkish foreign policy, as while being an early member of NATO since 1952 and applying for EU membership in 1987, Türkiye has increasingly sought to assert itself as a Middle Eastern, and more recently, an African power. Türkiye's unique status as the most integrated Muslim-majority nation in the Western security system, with its own strong historic, economic and security ties to Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, therefore positions it as a valuable, if increasingly self-confident and autonomous, partner for Europe in addressing the modern challenges of mass migration, terrorism and energy security.

1.2 European Union

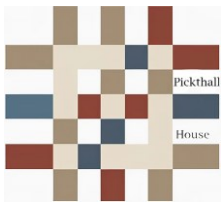
The EU is Türkiye's largest trading partner, and accounts for over 3% of the bloc's total trade in goods, with Türkiye ranks seventh among EU trade partners.⁷ The 1995 EU-Türkiye Customs Union remains the backbone of this exchange, though Ankara has long sought the deal's modernisation in order to include services, agriculture, and public procurement. EU accession talks, formally opened in 2005, have been frozen since 2018 due to democratic backsliding under Erdoğan and disputes with Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean, not to mention Cyprus' continuing *de facto* partition.⁸ Despite this, Türkiye remains a critical partner in European security, particularly in balancing Russia. As noted, Türkiye condemned Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, has supplied drones to Kyiv, and brokered the Black Sea grain deal, albeit while refusing to join EU sanctions and facing criticism for sanction circumvention. Energy security is another shared interest as Türkiye's role as a transit hub for Caspian, Middle Eastern, and Eastern Mediterranean gas into Europe aligns with EU diversification goals, even as political tensions complicate cooperation.

⁶ <https://cilekagaci.com/2017/04/26/how-did-erdogan-win-an-analysis-of-the-turkish-referendum-results/>

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https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751442/EPRS_BRI%282023%29751442_EN.pdf

⁸ <https://www.cer.eu/insights/eu-and-turkiye-relationship-adrift>



Politically, Türkiye's engagement in the Western Balkans, such as through platforms like the Balkan Peace Platform, intersects with EU enlargement policy, both complementing Brussels' stabilisation efforts and competing for influence. EU policymakers have been particularly concerned that the deterioration of the Dayton Agreement and EU influence in Bosnia has opened the door for Turkish influence to supplant it and threatens the rule of law.⁹ Ankara's advocacy for Muslims in Europe, including Bosniaks, Albanians, and immigrant communities, is framed as cultural solidarity but can be viewed warily by some EU states, with concerns that Türkiye's "long-arm" influence seeks to polarise immigrant Muslim communities in Europe.¹⁰ The refugee crisis meanwhile remains a defining pillar of relations: the 2016 EU-Türkiye Statement and subsequent funding under the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye have made Ankara a gatekeeper for migration flows into Europe. Looking ahead, post-Brexit trade with the UK and ongoing EU market access will be shaped by whether the Customs Union is upgraded and by Türkiye's ability to navigate political disputes. Both London and Brussels see value in maintaining open trade and coordinated security dialogue, particularly in energy, migration management, and supply chain resilience.

Beyond the structural issues of accession and the Customs Union, Türkiye's economic and defence ties with individual EU member states have deepened in recent years, underscoring Ankara's dual role as both partner and competitor. The stalled modernisation of the 1995 Customs Union remains a major frustration for Turkish policymakers and business leaders, who argue that the agreement no longer reflects the realities of 21st-century trade.¹¹ Turkish officials at the 2025 EU-Türkiye Business Summit in Brussels reiterated that the inclusion of services, agriculture, e-commerce, and public procurement is essential, with estimates suggesting modernization could raise Türkiye's GDP by up to 2.5% and attract €25-35 billion in new FDI.¹² At the same time, Türkiye has leveraged its defence industry to build new bilateral bridges: Poland became the first NATO and EU member state to purchase Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones in 2021, completing delivery of 24 systems worth \$270 million by May 2024.¹³ These

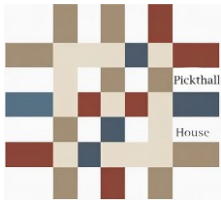
⁹ https://kirj.ee/wp-content/plugins/kirj/pub/TRAMES-1-2024-3-21_20240225192917.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024C20/>

¹¹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/somethings-wrong-turkiye-frustrated-over-eu-customs-union-impasse>

¹² <https://ebsummits.eu/our-summits/eu-t%C3%BCrkiye-business-summit/eu-turkiye-business-summit/programme/>

¹³ <https://www.trtworld.com/article/12765773>



drones have since been deployed in NATO missions, including Polish units stationed in Türkiye under the Tailored Assurance Measures program.¹⁴ Latvia has also expressed interest in Bayraktar systems, with Baltic states viewing Turkish UAVs as cost-effective tools to bolster deterrence against Russia.¹⁵ Such defence exports not only strengthen Türkiye's economic footprint in Europe but also symbolically mark Ankara's transition from a security consumer to a security provider within the Western alliance. Alongside energy transit and migration management, these defence and trade linkages highlight how Türkiye's pragmatic engagement with the EU is increasingly transactional, balancing political disputes with tangible cooperation in areas of mutual strategic interest.

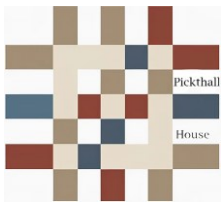
1.3 NATO

Before the existence of the EU or even its predecessor, the European Economic Community, Türkiye joined NATO in 1952, only three years after the alliance's founding, as part of the Cold War effort to contain Soviet expansion. Its accession was driven by its strategic geography as control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits facilitates full blockade of the Black Sea, while proximity to the USSR, and a large conscript army made Türkiye NATO's southeastern bulwark. Throughout the Cold War, Ankara hosted key NATO bases and radar systems, and its forces fought alongside allies in Korea, cementing its reputation as a reliable military contributor. Nonetheless, Türkiye's relationship with NATO has not been without strain. As will be covered further below, disputes with Greece over Cyprus and the Aegean in the 1970s led to temporary suspension of U.S. military aid, indicating the persistent peripherality of Türkiye as the furthest eastern member of the alliance.

When the Soviet Union deployed nuclear missiles to Cuba in 1962, the presence of American Jupiter medium-range ballistic missiles stationed in Türkiye played an important role in the Western response. These missiles, only deployed in 1961, had a range capable of striking Moscow and other Soviet cities. Therefore during the crisis, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev explicitly linked the removal of missiles from Cuba to reciprocal withdrawal of US missiles from Türkiye. Although the Kennedy administration

¹⁴ <https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/aerospace-news/2025/poland-deploys-bayraktar-tb2-drones-in-tuerkiye-to-strengthen-nato-security>

¹⁵ <https://www.baykartech.com/tr/press/latvia-hints-becoming-second-nato-ally-buy-turkish/>



publicly rejected this linkage, a secret deal was struck, without consulting Türkiye, indicating its limited agency within NATO decision-making.

The Jupiter withdrawal, completed in 1963, left a lasting imprint on Turkish strategic thinking, reinforcing the perception that NATO's collective security sometimes came at the expense of Ankara's autonomy. Such incidents have no doubt encouraged a greater push for Turkish strategic autonomy beyond Europe, while Türkiye's growing importance in the NATO system can be seen by its effective veto on NATO-Israel cooperation following Israel's invasion of Gaza in 2023. Today, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War, Türkiye continues to leverage this Cold War legacy and remind allies that its territory remains central to deterrence against Russia and to NATO's southern flank.

Indeed, in the 21st century, Türkiye has become NATO's second-largest military power after the U.S., hosting Allied Land Command (LANDCOM) headquarters in Izmir and contributing to missions from Afghanistan to Kosovo.¹⁶ Its drones and defence industry exports bolster NATO's eastern flank, while its geography remains critical for monitoring Russia and Middle Eastern conflicts. However, Ankara's pursuit of strategic autonomy under President Erdoğan has complicated relations: Türkiye purchased Russian S-400 missile systems in 2019, prompting U.S. sanctions and exclusion from the F-35 programme.¹⁷ At the same time, Türkiye has played a broker role, mediating between Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea grain deal, discussed in more detail later. At the same time, Türkiye maintains NATO commitments such as deploying troops in the Baltics and supporting Ukraine with Bayraktar drones. This dual posture has led some analysts to describe Türkiye as NATO's "reluctant power broker".¹⁸

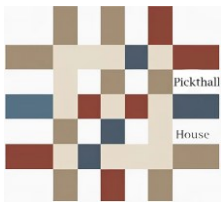
Looking ahead, Türkiye's NATO role is likely to remain transactional and pivotal, as Türkiye continues to develop its strategic autonomy and integrate itself into wider African, Middle Eastern and Central Asian diplomatic and security frameworks. Ankara insists that NATO must adapt to hybrid threats such as migration, terrorism, and disinformation, areas where Türkiye claims unique expertise.¹⁹ While tensions over

¹⁶ <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/turkiye/turkiyes-growing-influence-in-nato-the-telegraph-reports-shifting-security-landscape-131669/>

¹⁷ <https://carleton.ca/eetn/2025/turkiyes-evolving-strategic-posture-regional-interventions-amidst-shifting-nato-dynamics/>

¹⁸ <https://www.geopol.uk/turkeys-role-in-nato-2025-the-alliances-reluctant-power-broker/>

¹⁹ <https://www.trtworld.com/article/2ec0e18ed2d9>



democracy, human rights, and defence procurement persist, Türkiye's geography, military weight, and convening power ensure that it cannot be sidelined.

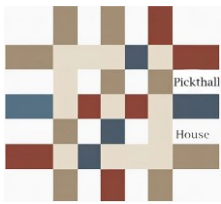
1.4 USA

The United States first established diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire in 1831 and formally recognised the Republic of Türkiye in 1927. Today, a Turkish-American community numbering well over a quarter of a million people, of whom over a fifth reside in New Jersey and the New York City metro area, maintains cultural organisations, business networks, and lobbying groups that occasionally influence bilateral discourse, particularly on issues such as the Armenian genocide resolution and US policy toward the PKK. Over the last 15 years, relations have been marked by both close NATO cooperation, such as through American use of Incirlik Air Base in Türkiye for operations against ISIS, joint work in Afghanistan, and coordination against Russia on Black Sea security. This period has also seen deep tensions, especially after Washington was accused by some in Ankara of tacitly harbouring Fethullah Gülen following the failed July 2016 coup attempt.²⁰ Disputes over US support for Syrian Kurdish forces, Türkiye's 2019 purchase of the Russian S-400 system, and diverging approaches to the Eastern Mediterranean have strained rhetoric, while economic ties remain significant, with bilateral trade exceeding \$30 billion in recent years and defence sales continuing despite political friction.²¹ At present, the relationship is a mix of strategic interdependence, anchored in shared NATO commitments and regional security interests, alongside a persistent mistrust.

In the United States, Türkiye's Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) operates primarily through the Diyanet Center of America in Maryland, opened in 2016, and a network of affiliated mosques and cultural associations, serving both as a religious hub for the Turkish-American community and as a conduit for Ankara's soft power. These institutions promote Turkish language and culture, host official delegations, and maintain close links with the Turkish embassy and consulates. Critics, including some US think tanks and diaspora dissidents, have alleged that the Diyanet's overseas branches can also function as channels for political messaging aligned with the Erdoğan government, and in some cases for monitoring or influencing diaspora opinion. This broader concern over political influence has been amplified by high-profile cases such as the ongoing investigations into New York City Mayor Eric Adams' campaign

²⁰ <https://2021-2025.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-Türkiye/>

²¹ https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R44000/R44000.71.pdf



fundraising. US federal and city authorities are probing whether Turkish state-linked business interests and individuals with ties to Ankara used straw donors and other means to channel funds into Adams' 2021 mayoral bid, with reports citing benefits from Turkish consular entities and expedited approvals for the high-profile "Turkish House" building in Manhattan.^{22 23 24}

While such allegations remain under legal scrutiny, they highlight Ankara's active cultivation of political relationships in US cities with large diaspora communities, alongside American political figures' willingness to engage with Turkish state-linked networks for cultural, economic, or electoral gain. Conversely, US influence in Türkiye operates through defence cooperation, business investment, educational exchanges, and lobbying by American firms and NGOs, but is often constrained by nationalist sensitivities in Ankara. For Britain, these developments illustrate how Türkiye blends cultural diplomacy, diaspora engagement, and political networking to project influence abroad. The UK, home as noted to a smaller but politically active Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot community, could face similar influence-management challenges, such as through Turkish support for the Aziziye Mosque in Stoke Newington, London, or the Cambridge Central Mosque. However, Britain also has the opportunity to harness these legitimate diaspora links for trade, cultural exchange, and soft-power projection, provided transparency and compliance safeguards are robust.

2. The Black Sea

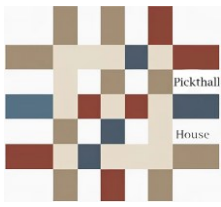
2.1 Summary

Türkiye's Black Sea posture demonstrates its definitive balancing act. For example, Türkiye is a NATO ally and key supporter of Ukraine's sovereignty, having closed the Straits to Russian warships, supplying Bayraktar drones, and having hosted the 2022 Istanbul peace talks. Simultaneously, Türkiye maintains economic back-channels with Moscow in energy and trade, and allows Türkiye to position itself as a mediator rather than an outright opponent to Russia. In Georgia, Ankara combines strong economic and transit investments with military training and NATO exercises, though its informal links

²² <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/11/23/eric-adams-Türkiye-scandal-00128318>

²³ <https://nordicmonitor.com/2025/08/new-york-watchdog-puts-a-new-spotlight-on-Türkiyes-meddling-in-us-elections/>

²⁴ <https://www.cityandstateny.com/opinion/2024/10/opinion-adams-indictment-highlights-growing-turkish-influence-us/400260/>



with Abkhazia complicate its pro-sovereignty stance. In the Eastern Balkans, Türkiye's ties with Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, and Hungary in infrastructure, minority diplomacy, and joint naval drills, reinforce its role as the largest Black Sea naval power. For the UK, these dynamics mean that engaging Türkiye in the Black Sea is essential: London can leverage Ankara's intermediary role to press for tighter sanctions enforcement against Russia, coordinate on Black Sea maritime security, and co-invest in Ukrainian reconstruction and regional energy diversification projects. Thereby, both can reduce Russian leverage and align Türkiye more closely with the Euro-Atlantic.

2.3 Russia & Ukraine

Türkiye's role as a mediating power can perhaps most clearly be seen in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War, wherein it has maintained its role as a NATO ally and forward base, formally supporting Ukraine's sovereignty.²⁵ Simultaneously, Türkiye has retained back-channels to Moscow, and hosting high-visibility political forums to keep diplomacy alive, beginning in 2022 and renewed in May this year.²⁶ Türkiye's position in the Russia-Ukraine war has been shaped by its NATO commitments and historic role dominating the southern Black Sea coast. Türkiye also holds strong cultural ties to Ukraine's Crimean Tatar community, which numbers several hundred thousand in Türkiye and whose plight Ankara has repeatedly raised since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.²⁷

Alongside its NATO allies, Türkiye has consistently affirmed its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including during high-profile meetings with President Zelenskyy in Istanbul in July 2023, where Erdoğan went as far as to call for NATO membership for Ukraine.²⁸ Militarily, Türkiye has supplied Ukraine with their tactical Bayraktar TB2 drones since early in the conflict, immediately closed the Turkish Straits to most Russian warships under the Montreux Convention at the war's outbreak,²⁹ and has provided humanitarian aid. Economically, however, Türkiye along with other Turkic, post-Soviet states, has refrained from joining Western sanctions on Moscow and has continued to provide an economic back-channel to Russia. Indeed,

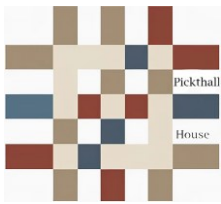
²⁵ <https://eng.obozrevatel.com/section-politics/news-Erdoğan-Türkiye-supports-sovereignty-and-territorial-integrity-of-ukraine-18-02-2025.html>

²⁶ <https://www.trtworld.com/article/901c1df56578>

²⁷ <https://www.hudson.org/security-alliances/understanding-Türkiyes-role-russia-ukraine-war-zineb-riboua>

²⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/8/ukraine-deserves-nato-membership-Türkiyes-Erdoğan-says>

²⁹ <https://news.usni.org/2022/02/28/Türkiye-closes-bosphorus-dardanelles-straits-to-warships>



Ankara has even expanded trade with Russia, particularly in energy and agriculture, in an effort to cushion its own inflation-hit economy, resulting from Erdoğan's insistence on retaining low interest rates in an attempt to stimulate production and exports.³⁰ However, this has drawn sharp criticism of Türkiye, alongside Slovakia and Hungary, for enabling Russian revenue streams and purchasing Russian oil.³¹

Militarily too, Türkiye has received criticism from its Western partners in this context too, particularly following its 2017 \$2.5 billion purchase of Russian S-400 air defence systems,³² delivered in 2019. This saw Türkiye's removal from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter programme and sanctions from the US. Although Türkiye has not opted to use the air defence systems, this continues to impede Türkiye's integration into the Western defence framework as concerns remain that the use of Russian systems would compromise F-35 stealth technology. Türkiye had planned to buy 100 F-16 jets and Russia has even offered to buy the systems back in September 2025 in the context of its rising inventory shortages, which would open the door for Turkish re-entry to the programme. Nevertheless, as of 12 December 2025, the Turkish defence ministry has stated that there have been no recent developments regarding the S-400 systems and continues to consider the sanctions unjust.³³

Diplomatically, Türkiye has positioned itself as a key intermediary, hosting the March-April 2022 Istanbul peace talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations.³⁴ These talks produced the Black Sea Grain Initiative which allowed Ukrainian agricultural exports to pass through the Black Sea and Bosphorus unmolested.³⁵ Ankara has also staged high-visibility state visits more recently, including receiving Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in February 2025, and has used these forums to argue for more inclusive negotiations rather than Moscow's diplomatic isolation.

³⁰ <https://www.politico.eu/article/end-recep-tayyip-Erdoğan-economics-Türkiye-double-interest-rate-inflation/>

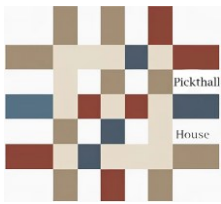
³¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/americas/20250913-trump-calls-all-nato-countries-to-stop-buying-russian-oil-and-slap-tariffs-on-china>

³² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-41237812>

³³ <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2025/12/12/turkey-says-no-change-in-russian-s400s-amid-us-talks-on-f35s>

³⁴ https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op_ed/2025/03/05/Türkiyes-balancing-act-in-the-ukraine-conflict-again/

³⁵ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1126811>



This balancing act goes back as far as Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014, and has not been without crisis. For example, in 2015 Türkiye shot down a Russian Su-24 jet over Syria.³⁶ This saw Russia accuse Türkiye of a "stab in the back" with high-level political contacts suspended, sanctions imposed, joint projects temporarily frozen, and charter flights and visa-free travel halted. The incident still looms in the background as a reminder of how quickly tensions can escalate. Meanwhile, before the full-scale war broke out, Putin criticised Ukraine on a call with Erdoğan in December 2021 for using Turkish Bayraktar drones on the frontlines in the Donbass.³⁷ Public sentiment in Türkiye has generally favoured Ukraine's right to self-defence, with a surge in support for the EU and NATO,³⁸ albeit alongside a strong current of pragmatism about preserving economic stability and avoiding direct confrontation with Russia, a major energy supplier and tourism market.

Most recently, on 12 December 2025, a Russian drone allegedly struck a Turkish car ferry in the Ukrainian port of Odessa.³⁹ This came only hours after Erdoğan reiterated calls for a ceasefire directly to Putin and a day after Ukraine blew up a Comoros-flagged tanker from Russia's "shadow fleet" in the northern Black Sea.⁴⁰ Putin has threatened to cut off Ukrainian access to the Black Sea, while Türkiye's foreign ministry has called for an agreement to guarantee "the security of shipping and suspending attacks against energy and port infrastructure in order to prevent escalation in the Black Sea". This only goes to illustrate Türkiye's inevitable involvement in the Black Sea theatre and necessity as a Western partner in Eastern European security and peacemaking, intra-NATO disputes notwithstanding.

2.3.1 What does this mean for London?

For Britain and the wider West, elements of the Russo-Turkish relationship warrant close attention including the cooperation on the Russian-built Akkuyu nuclear power

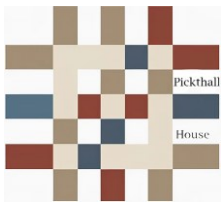
³⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/25/Türkiye-and-russia-in-war-of-words-over-downed-jet>

³⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/ukraine-uses-turkish-drones-donbass-conflict-zone-putin-tells-Erdoğan-2021-12-03/>

³⁸ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkish-public-support-join-eu-nato-surged-after-ukraine-war>

³⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yjj2epvlro>

⁴⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-russia-shadow-fleet-sea-drone-strike-b2882415.html>



plant on Türkiye's southern coast since 2010,⁴¹ which has allegedly been used as cover for Russian capital flows worth billions of dollars through American banks,⁴² and selective export of dual-use goods to Russia, although these have dropped sharply in November 2023 following a visit by the US Treasury Undersecretary.⁴³ These ties risk undermining sanctions regimes by giving Moscow breathing space, such as through re-exporting Russian oil products.⁴⁴ This certainly complicates Ankara's role as a British and Western ally and intermediary. The UK should continue to push for full Turkish economic disengagement from sanctioned Russian businesses. Indeed, although early December 2025 has seen Türkiye announce that it is extending Russian gas import contracts (making up just under 40% of imports) for a year as it plans major investments and diversification in the US sector, there is little guarantee that supplies of Russian gas may continue through other means, such as via Central Asia.^{45 46}

Although Russo-Turkish ties have declined under US pressure,⁴⁷ to continue to address them will require sustained UK-Türkiye dialogue that recognises Ankara's mediator role while pressing for tighter controls on sanction-busting, expanding joint maritime security in the Black Sea, and leveraging shared interests in Ukrainian reconstruction. Coordinated Anglo-Turkish investment in post-war Ukrainian infrastructure and Turkish energy diversification - such as through supporting the expansion of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline's (TANAP) capacity for Azeri gas or upgrading the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline could both reduce Russian leverage over Türkiye and reinforce its alignment with Euro-Atlantic security priorities. Turkish and UK defence consultations already repeatedly underline joint support for Ukraine's territorial

⁴¹ <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-09-03/Türkiyes-nuclear-power-plant-old-problems-new-solutions>

⁴² <https://kyivindependent.com/russia-used-us-banks-to-send-billions-to-Türkiye-dodging-sanctions-wsj-reports/>

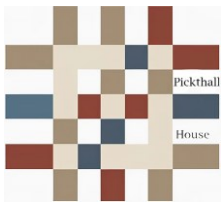
⁴³ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/Türkiye-russia-reduce-export-military-linked-goods>

⁴⁴ <https://jamestown.org/program/turkiye-russia-trade-declines-amid-western-sanctions/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-12-04/turkey-eyes-us-gas-field-investments-after-wave-of-lng-deals>

⁴⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/turkey-extended-russia-gas-contracts-by-year-eying-us-gas-investment-2025-12-04/>

⁴⁷ <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/07/turkiye-russia-fragile-partnership?lang=en>



integrity while continuing NATO engagement on Euro-Atlantic security and escalation management.⁴⁸

2.4 Georgia

To the southeast, serving as a buffer between Türkiye and the Russian North Caucasus, Georgia shares centuries of cultural and political interaction with Türkiye, entrenched during Ottoman rule over parts of western Georgia between the 16th and 19th centuries. Modern diplomatic relations were established in 1992 upon Georgian independence from the Soviet Union, while since the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Ankara has been one of Tbilisi's most important economic partners, ranking among its top trading counterparts at 13.8% of Georgia's trade.⁴⁹ Türkiye invests heavily in energy transit projects running through Georgia from Azerbaijan, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. Thus, Georgia serves as a connection to Central Asia, circumventing Armenia.

As a NATO member, Türkiye has voiced support for Georgia's sovereignty and Euro-Atlantic geopolitical aspirations, and provided military training and equipment,⁵⁰ and participated in joint military exercises with Georgia alongside the US,⁵¹ although avoiding confrontation with Russia. The sizeable Circassian and Abkhaz diaspora in Türkiye, meanwhile, descendants of refugees from 19th-century Russian genocide and ethnic cleansing in the North Caucasus, maintains strong cultural and familial links to breakaway Abkhazia, creating a complex dynamic. While Ankara does not recognise the independence of the Russian-backed separatists, it tolerates limited but increasing trade and travel, even as it officially backs Georgia's territorial integrity.⁵² ⁵³ Growing

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-at-heart-of-nato-talks-on-strengthening-euro-atlantic-security-and-support-for-ukraine>

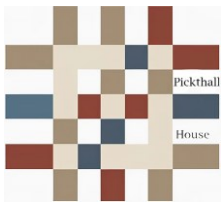
⁴⁹ <https://bm.ge/en/news/Türkiye-remains-a-key-economic-partner-for-georgia-despite-mixed-trends-in-investment-trade-and-tourism>

⁵⁰ <https://civil.ge/archives/612500>

⁵¹ <https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/ArticleViewPressRelease/Article/4234364/press-release-us-georgia-trkiye-begin-black-sea-exercise/>

⁵² <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/trade-turnover-between-separatist-abkhazia-and-Türkiye-increases-by-142.html>

⁵³ <https://arvak.am/en/%D0%B0bkhazia-and-russian-turkish-confrontation/>



Turkish influence in Abkhazia is another aspect of the state's growing self-assertion against Russian in the eastern Pontic.

Strategically, Türkiye's proximity to Georgia's Adjara region and its port city of Batumi, lying only 20 kilometres from the Turkish border, gives it a stake in the region's stability and economic vitality, with Turkish businesses active in the quarter-Muslim city's tourism, construction, and retail, representing 80-90% of foreign capital.^{54 55} However, sensitivities do occasionally flare as nationalist rhetoric in Türkiye referencing Batumi or historic borders of the Ottoman Empire has caused unease in Georgia. Meanwhile other Georgians have considered Ankara's informal economic links with Abkhazia as undercutting its proclaimed stance against Russian occupation. Russian military entrenchment in Abkhazia remains a point of concern for both countries, but Türkiye's balancing act between Moscow and Tbilisi limits the scope of effective counter-measures. Nonetheless, shared interests in Black Sea security, energy transit, and regional connectivity give the partnership a strong strategic foundation, with scope for deeper coordination if both sides can manage these sensitivities.

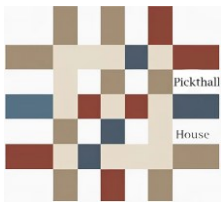
2.4.1 What does this mean for London?

Supporting Georgia against further Russian encroachment is certainly in British interests as well, especially as the European bloc and NATO seek to welcome Georgia into the fold. In addition to England and Georgia sharing a patron saint, Britain and Georgia signed a strategic partnership in 2019,⁵⁶ although relations have since strained as the ruling Georgian Dream party in the last two years has moved towards Russia and clamped down on civil liberties. Britain would do well to encourage Türkiye to use its more direct financial and defence influence to affect a shift back to the West. Meanwhile, although Britain also refuses to recognise Abkhaz independence, anti-Russian protests in Sukhumi in November 2024 and Russia's subsequent withdrawal of most of Abkhazia's external funding open a window for Britain, Türkiye and the wider European bloc to counterbalance Russian dominance through existing Turkish channels and ideally facilitate Abkhaz reintegration into Georgia.

⁵⁴ <https://geghard-saf.am/en/496/turkish-policy-adjara/>

⁵⁵ <https://eurasianet.org/georgians-wary-of-Türkiyes-rising-influence-in-batumi>

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukgeorgia-strategic-partnership-and-cooperation-agreement-cs-georgia-no12019>



2.5 Eastern Balkans

In the Eastern Balkans, Ankara has invested in transport and energy infrastructure as its entrance to Europe, including upgrades to Black Sea ports and road corridors feeding into the Trans-European Transport Network. Turkish companies are active in construction, manufacturing, and retail in both Bulgaria and Romania, and bilateral trade with each has grown steadily over the past two decades. Publicly, Turkish officials have framed the region as part of a wider “strategic hinterland” in the Balkans, with President Erdoğan and foreign ministry statements emphasising their shared history, minority rights, and Black Sea security as pillars of policy, alongside joint naval drills with Bulgaria, Romania, the US, UK, France and Ukraine since October 2023, with the most recent iteration concluding last month.⁵⁷

Maritime authority and naval balance in the Black Sea are central to Türkiye’s regional posture. Ankara, Sofia, and Bucharest cooperate under NATO frameworks and, since January 2024, through a bespoke trilateral Mine Countermeasures Task Group to address drifting mines threatening shipping lanes.⁵⁸ While Romania, historically on the frontline of Russian expansion, views Russia as the primary threat and pushes for greater NATO presence, Bulgaria has historically been more cautious and retained closer pan-Slavic ties. Türkiye, meanwhile, although the largest Black Sea naval power among the three, prefers to balance deterrence with its economic ties to Moscow.⁵⁹

2.5.1 Bulgaria

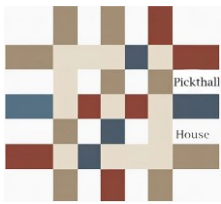
Türkiye’s engagement is most visible in Bulgaria, where ethnic Turks constitute around 10% of the population as an officially recognised minority with established political representation through the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). Bulgaria is also home to a smaller Bulgarian-speaking Pomak Muslim community concentrated in the Rhodope Mountains of Western Thrace. Ankara has provided cultural and educational exchanges and support and religious infrastructure funded by the Diyanet,⁶⁰ and

⁵⁷ <https://www.c6f.navy.mil/Press-Room/News/Article/4301796/exercise-sea-breeze-2025-concludes-in-constantia-romania/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/Türkiye-ap-ukraine-black-sea-romania-b2476894.html>

⁵⁹ <https://defenceredefined.com.cy/bulgaria-romania-and-turkey-commit-to-a-closer-defence-relationship-to-guarantee-security-in-the-black-sea/>

⁶⁰ Öztürk, Ahmet & Bekir Sözeri, Semiha. (2018). Diyanet as a Turkish Foreign Policy Tool: Evidence from the Netherlands and Bulgaria. *Politics and Religion*. 11. pp.1-25.



political outreach, which Sofia has at times welcomed as community support and criticised as interference.

2.5.2 Romania

Romania has emerged as a hub for NATO engagement in the Black Sea. British-Romanian defence ties were formalised most recently in the UK/Romania Defence Cooperation Agreement of November 2024,⁶¹ building on a decade of joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and UK investment in naval infrastructure at Constanța. Türkiye has also deepened its presence, with joint naval drills and trilateral coordination with Romania and Bulgaria, while Turkish firms have invested in energy and construction projects linked to the Southern Gas Corridor and Black Sea offshore exploration.⁶² Ankara's defence industry has supplied Romania with equipment and training packages, reinforcing NATO interoperability.

2.5.3 Moldova

Beyond Bulgaria and Romania, Türkiye maintains cultural links with the Gagauz Turks of Moldova's autonomous Gagauzia region, using language, religious, and development programmes to reinforce ties while providing most of the region's imports.⁶³ Bilateral ties have expanded through trade agreements, collaborative energy projects, and Turkish investment in transport and public works.⁶⁴ Moldova's Black Sea access and its role in regional energy transit make it relevant to Ankara's maritime posture, which seeks to balance NATO priorities with a degree of autonomy in Black Sea security with non-NATO partners.⁶⁵

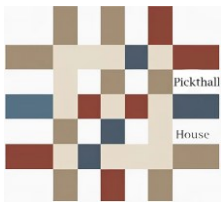
⁶¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukromania-agreement-on-defence-cooperation-cs-romania-no12025>

⁶² <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2025-06-26/romania-bulgaria-and-Türkiye-black-sea-region-increased>

⁶³ <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/between-russia-and-europe-gagauzias-autonomy-under-threat/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.straturka.com/moldovas-path-ahead-balancing-eastern-and-western-ties-with-turkiyes-support/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/12/Türkiyes-evolving-geopolitical-strategy-in-the-black-sea/>



2.5.4 Hungary

In Hungary, meanwhile, Türkiye's engagement is framed by NATO and the wider Black Sea-Danube corridor. Ankara and Budapest have cultivated a notably warm political relationship over the past decade, underpinned by mutual support in multilateral forums and growing trade, particularly in defence, energy, and construction. Though only an observer, Hungary has positioned itself as the "European outpost" of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), calling upon "Turanist" ideas of Turkic, Mongol and Uralic shared heritage. Budapest has hosted OTS summits,⁶⁶ amplifying Ankara's influence within the EU's eastern flank. Readers will also note parallels between Orbán's and Erdoğan's authoritarian strongman personae and conservative socioreligious politics. Hungary has backed aspects of Türkiye's EU engagement and participates alongside Ankara in regional energy diversification projects, including gas import arrangements that also involve Romania and Bulgaria.⁶⁷

2.5.6 What does this mean for London?

For London, Romania represents a natural partner in anchoring Black Sea security, as seen through large-scale investment in Constanța and exercises such as Exercise Sea Breeze.⁶⁸ Coordination with Türkiye in Bucharest offers a platform to align Euro-Atlantic priorities with Ankara's regional balancing act. Meanwhile, careful navigation is required of the sensitivities around Russian influence and EU integration in both Hungary and Moldova.

3. The Mediterranean

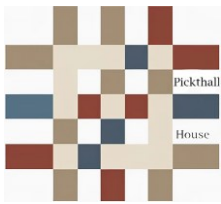
3.1 Summary

In the Mediterranean, Türkiye's strategy is also defined by a mix of historic legacies and contemporary power projection. Ankara leverages cultural and religious ties in the Western Balkans to reinforce influence alongside NATO training and peacekeeping, converging with UK interests in Bosnia and Kosovo for regional stability. To the south,

⁶⁶ <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/news/informal-summit-of-the-heads-of-state-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-ots-to-be-held-in-budapest-hungary>

⁶⁷ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/part-4-Türkiyes-geopolitical-role-in-the-black-sea-and-european-energy-security-from-pipelines-to-liquefied-natural-gas/>

⁶⁸ <https://centraleuropeantimes.com/romania-strategic-infrastructure-development-at-constanta-port/>

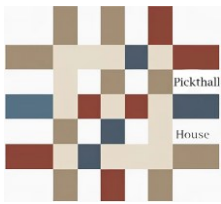


Türkiye manages a volatile but currently thawing relationship with Greece, where disputes over maritime boundaries, energy exploration, and Cyprus remain flashpoints. Nonetheless, there is scope for UK peace facilitation, as like Türkiye, Britain has a guarantor role and its sovereign bases on the island make UK-Türkiye coordination essential to avoid escalation.

In Syria, Türkiye's decisive role in shaping the post-Assad order positions it as the primary gatekeeper of stability, creating opportunities for UK-Türkiye cooperation on reconstruction, counter-extremism, and refugee management. Nevertheless, concerns remain regarding the risk of over-empowering Ankara in the Eastern Mediterranean. In neighbouring Lebanon, Türkiye's soft-power activism intersects with UK commercial and diplomatic interests but requires careful navigation of sectarian rivalries and growing interest from the Gulf.

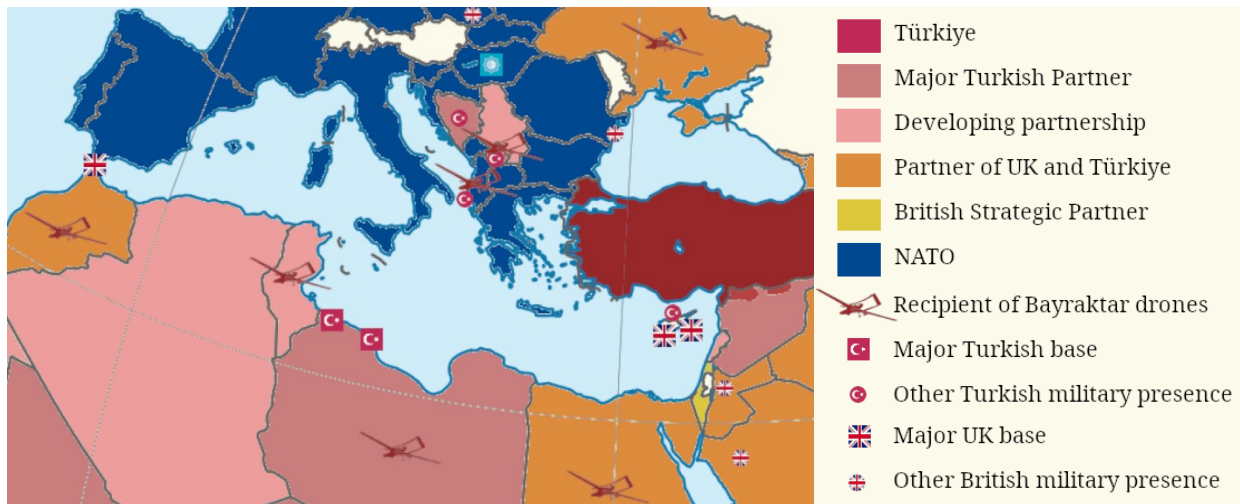
On the surface, Turkish ties with Israel since October 7 have collapsed into open hostility, with Türkiye blocking Israeli NATO cooperation and positioning itself as a champion of Palestine. Alongside Britain's recent recognition of Palestinian statehood and Turkish guarantorship of October's Gaza Peace Plan, this opens space for joint humanitarian and stabilisation frameworks in Gaza. Meanwhile, Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement has produced trade expansion and Bayraktar drone sales, offering opportunities for coordination with the UK on infrastructure and security while balancing Libya's contested maritime politics and the flashpoint of Türkiye's 2019 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) deal.

Lastly, across the Maghreb, Türkiye's growing economic and cultural footprint in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco parallels UK interests in energy diversification, counterterrorism, and mediation. For Britain, with its key bases in Gibraltar and Cyprus, the prospectus is clear: Türkiye is a pivotal Mediterranean actor whose activity will either destabilise or complement Euro-Atlantic priorities. Therefore, structured UK-Türkiye cooperation on



maritime security, energy, migration, and post-conflict reconstruction is both a necessity and an opportunity.

3.2 Western Balkans



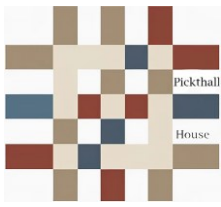
3.2.1 History

In the Western Balkans, the presence of the Ottoman Empire from the late 14th century to 1912 saw the embedding of enduring Muslim populations, notably Bosniaks, Albanians, Gorani, as well as Turkish communities in North Macedonia and Kosovo, who continue to shape local identities and politics today. Since the Cold War, Türkiye has cultivated links with Balkan Muslim communities through religious, educational, and cultural initiatives by institutions, such as the Yunus Emre Institute, the Turkish Red Crescent and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA).⁶⁹ The Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has funded mosque construction, imam training, and religious education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia since the 1990s.⁷⁰ This approach has coupled Turkish soft power with economic activity and is also seen in an influx of investors, mediation efforts in Bosnia, and episodic trilateral diplomacy between Ankara, Sarajevo and Belgrade.

Militarily, Türkiye has used NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework since 1994 to conduct joint exercises, officer training, and defence modernisation programmes,

⁶⁹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-aims-for-regional-solutions-as-it-brings-together-balkan-countries>

⁷⁰ <https://alonben-meir.com/writing/diyanet-erdogans-islamic-vehicle-to-the-balkans/>



notably with Albania, North Macedonia, and Bosnia, which has since seen Albania and North Macedonia join NATO in 2009 and 2020 respectively. Like the UK's contributions, Türkiye's contributions to NATO peacekeeping in Bosnia (EUFOR Althea) and Kosovo (KFOR) have cemented its role as both a security provider and a political stakeholder in the post-conflict order and it and the UK have both backed trilateral diplomacy involving Bosnia, Serbia and Türkiye to help ease ethnic tensions.^{71 72}

3.2.2 North Macedonia

In North Macedonia, Turkish organisations have worked with the country's sizeable Albanian and smaller Turkish minorities, sometimes prompting nationalist pushback over perceived interference in domestic politics. Notably, despite the Ohrid Agreement of 2001, the 4% Turkish minority in North Macedonia continues to demand greater administrative representation.⁷³ Turkish-language education is another area of friction with Skopje, where TİKA has sought to support efforts across 28 municipalities where Turks exceed 20% of the population.⁷⁴ As a fellow NATO member, North Macedonia presents openings to the UK and Türkiye for coordinated engagement to promote minority rights.

3.2.3 Albania

In Albania, cooperation with Türkiye has focussed on defence training, economic partnerships, and shared NATO commitments, with Türkiye also using its influence to bolster regional Muslim solidarity. This has ramped up in the last five years, with high-level strategic dialogue on COVID-19 and the Aegean Sea earthquake in 2020, followed by Türkiye's emergence as one of Albania's largest trading partners in 2023/24 with a trade volume of nearly \$1 billion.⁷⁵ Since then, Presidents Erdoğan and Rama have signed four cooperation agreements on education, agriculture, communications and strategic partnership in October 2024, followed by a Defence Cooperation Protocol in

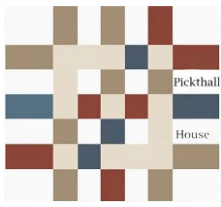
⁷¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_233660.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁷² <https://www.trtworld.com/article/91bf63de69c5>

⁷³ <https://www.milletnews.com/balkans/turk-ethnic-minority-still-denied-rights-in-north-macedonia-under-ohrid-agreement-even-after-23-years>

⁷⁴ <https://tika.gov.tr/en/tika-continues-to-support-turkish-education-in-north-macedonia/>

⁷⁵ <https://businessdiplomacy.net/the-growing-economic-partnership-between-turkiye-and-albania/>



July of this year, expanding cooperation on training and logistics and agreeing to equip Albanian forces with 105mm artillery systems.^{76 77}

3.2.4 Bosnia & Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkish and British interests converge in supporting the Dayton framework, strengthening state institutions, and countering secessionist pressures from Republika Srpska. Türkiye remains a notable troop contributor to NATO's EUFOR Althea mission, guaranteeing Bosnia's post-conflict order. Security ties have deepened with the signing of a defence procurement deal in December 2024 to supply Kirpi II armoured personnel carriers to Bosnian forces.⁷⁸ Both the UK and Türkiye have publicly opposed the secessionist moves and nationalist agitation by Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska (Serb Republic)⁷⁹ from 2022 until his term's cancellation in June of this year, though Dodik continues to dispute this.^{80 81} The UK has framed Dodik's actions as in direct violation of the Dayton Agreement and a threat to European security while Türkiye has sought to use its historic ties and trilateral diplomacy to counter agitation. In March of this year, President Erdoğan hosted Bosnian Presidency Chair, Denis Bećirović, in Istanbul and stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina's unity and territorial integrity carry "fundamental" importance and called separatist approaches in the country "unacceptable."⁸²

3.2.5 Kosovo

As for Kosovo, Ankara, like London, was among the first to recognise Kosovar independence in 2008 and Türkiye has since maintained a strong NATO KFOR peacekeeping contingent since 1999, aligning with the UK's commitment to Kosovo's

⁷⁶ <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/turkiye-and-albania-sign-four-cooperation-agreements>

⁷⁷ <https://www.mod.gov.al/eng/newsroom/1935-albania-and-turkey-sign-defence-cooperation-protocol>

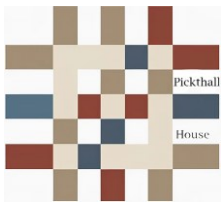
⁷⁸ <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/region/bosnia-turkiye-kirpi-ii-deal-2025-94885/>

⁷⁹ One of Bosnia and Herzegovina's two federal entities, with an 83% Serb population, the other being the 70% Bosniak-populated Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁸⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/developments-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-uk-statement-to-the-osce-march-2025>

⁸¹ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10013/>

⁸² <https://www.trtworld.com/article/871bc0c838fc>



sovereignty and Euro-Atlantic integration.⁸³ Notable Diyanet investment came in 2012 with the financing of Priština Central Mosque which is set to be the largest mosque in the Balkans, and a strong statement of Kosovar Muslim identity against Christian Orthodox Serbia's continuing claims to the territory to the southeast of Kosovo Field where Ottoman and Serbian forces famously clashed in 1389. Since 2020, both the UK and Türkiye have signed partnership deals with Kosovo, with the 2020 UK/Kosovo Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement reaffirmed in 2024,⁸⁴ and multiple agreements on business, trade and defence cooperation, including Turkish supplies of military equipment and training, signed since 2021. Most notable of these was the 2024 Military Framework Agreement covering training, logistics and procurement of military equipment such as Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones.⁸⁵ As recently as 3 October 2025, Kosovar Defence Minister, Ejup Maqedonci, explicitly described the relationship with Türkiye as a strategic partnership, after meeting with General Selçuk Bayraktaroğlu, Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces.⁸⁶

3.2.6 Balkan Peace Platform

Most significantly for the region in recent news, July 2025 saw Istanbul hold the first meeting of the Balkan Peace Platform. Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, stated that the Balkans are a "priority area" for Türkiye. The meeting was attended by ministers and officials from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, and is intended to foster dialogue and cooperation. Another common agenda item was how the states could share experiences of the EU accession process, as six out of seven members are EU candidate countries. This also comes alongside increasing Turkish tourism to the Balkans, particularly to Serbia and Bosnia, as the new generation reconnects with Türkiye's Ottoman and Balkan heritage, with Turkish tourists ranking first across six Balkan countries.⁸⁷

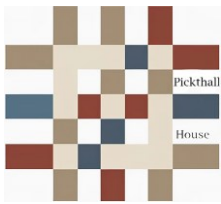
⁸³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_233660.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁸⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukkosovo-partnership-trade-and-cooperation-agreement-ts-no792024>

⁸⁵ <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/turkiye/kosovo-assembly-approves-military-agreement-with-turkiye-1401/>

⁸⁶ <https://indeksonline.net/en/kosova-dhe-turqia-thellojne-partneritetin-strategjik-ne-mbrojtje/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/tourism/interest-of-turkish-tourists-in-balkan-countries-continues-to-grow>



3.2.7 Serbia

October 2025 did see a rare flaring of discontent between the strategic partners, Serbia and Türkiye, over the supply of Turkish Skydagger kamikaze drones to Kosovo, considered a rebel province by Serbia, whose Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, remarking that “It is now completely clear that Turkey does not want stability in the Western Balkans and is once again dreaming of restoring the Ottoman Empire. Serbia is a small country, but we have clearly understood the message!”⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Vučić promptly backtracked, declaring Erdogan: “the man who rebuilt Ankara from its ashes, transformed Istanbul and who, without a doubt, is the greatest Turkish leader since Mustafa Kemal Pasha.”⁸⁹ While the strategic partnership and Turkish ties in the Western Balkans remain strong, it is clear that past and present post-imperial tensions still have a role to play.

3.2.8 What does this mean for London?

Opportunities for UK-Turkish cooperation in the Western Balkans are substantial and include coordinating support for Bosnia and Kosovo, joint training projects, infrastructure and energy connectivity, and leveraging historic ties to bolster trade and governance standards. Strategically, joint initiatives in mediation of secessionist and ethnic tensions, maritime security in the Adriatic and Black Sea, and economic connectivity projects could allow London and Ankara to reinforce stability, protect trade routes, and project a cooperative image. This would pair with work through NATO frameworks to train national security forces, advocate for minority rights, and invest in infrastructure linking the Western Balkans to wider European markets. Risks to British and wider Western interests include increased friction, should Ankara’s activity be read as partisan or revisionist.

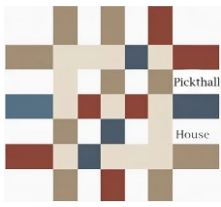
3.3 Greece

3.3.1 History

To the south, Turkish presence in modern-day Greece dates back to Ottoman conquests of the 14th century, remaining dominant until the Greek War of Independence of 1821-

⁸⁸ <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-kosovo-arms-weapons-balkans-un-charter-serbia/>

⁸⁹ <https://www.balkanweb.com/en/jemi-te-vegjel-per-te-kercenuar-turqine-vucic-pendohet-pasi-kritikoi-dergimin-e-droneve-ne-kosove-erdogan-lideri-me-i-madh-pas-ataturkut/#gsc.tab=0>



1829. Here Britain played a decisive role by joining France and Russia in the 1827 Battle of Navarino, forcing Ottoman and Egyptian forces to withdraw, thus paving the way for the modern independent Greek state. After World War I, the Treaty of Sèvres and subsequent Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922 culminated in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which formalised the modern state borders and mandated a compulsory population exchange. Over a million Orthodox Christians were expelled from Anatolia to Greece and some 400,000 Muslims from Greece to Türkiye.

Despite this settlement, disputes have persisted over sovereignty in the Aegean, notably the status of the Imia/Kardak islets, along with broader disputes over the Dodecanese and Eastern Aegean islands, airspace, and later but most significantly their contested Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Britain has historically balanced its support between the two nations, backing Greek independence in the 19th century while maintaining strategic ties with Türkiye, including bolstering the Ottoman state to maintain the European balance of power, as a counterweight to Russian influence in the Balkans and Near East. Both states have been NATO allies since joining the alliance together in 1952 and have since avoided direct confrontation.

3.3.2 Recent relations

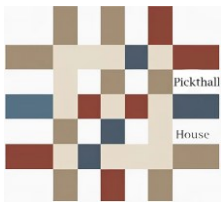
Nevertheless, the above disputes have at times complicated the alliance's cohesion such as in the 1996 Imia/Kardak Islets crisis when war almost broke out.^{90 91} This tension remains a latent obstacle to Türkiye's EU accession, with Athens leveraging its membership to press for concessions on Cyprus and maritime boundaries. For example, following the beginning of Turkish EU accession negotiations in 2005, eight chapters were not to be opened until Ankara extended the Additional Protocol of Ankara's 1962 Association Agreement to Cyprus, which would include opening Turkish sea and airports to Cypriot vessels and aircraft.⁹² Over the last 15 years, Greco-Turkish tensions have also flared over Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration. In 2020, Türkiye's dispatch of the *Oruç Reis* seismic survey vessel into contested waters near Kastellorizo triggered a Greek military alert following the emergence of a Greece-Egypt EEZ agreement,⁹³ with

⁹⁰ <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/background-note-on-aegean-dispute.en.mfa>

⁹¹ <https://www.eiir.eu/strategic-affairs/peacekeeping/turkey-and-greece-what-is-behind-the-dispute-over-aegean-islands/>

⁹² https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye_en

⁹³ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-greece-acrimony-mediterranean-oruc-reis-ship>



Israeli and Cypriot support, in direct competition with the 2019 Türkiye-Libya maritime deal (discussed later).

Nonetheless, there have also been moments of Greco-Turkish cooperation, seen recently in Operation Steadfast Defender in 2024, the largest post-Cold War NATO exercise testing European military response,⁹⁴ coordination on migration management under the 2016 EU-Türkiye deal under which irregular migrants arriving in Greece were returned in exchange for resettlement of Syrian refugees in the EU,⁹⁵ and post-earthquake diplomacy in 2023-24 that helped thaw relations as Greece sent immediate aid and rescue teams.⁹⁶

3.3.3 What does this mean for London?

Economic ties, though modest, include British investment in Turkish energy and infrastructure projects and the UK-Greece Strategic Bilateral Framework, reviewed in 2024, which highlighted the UK's role in supporting regional stability.⁹⁷ The current Greco-Turkish rapprochement following the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquake was formalised by Erdoğan's December 2023 visit to Athens and Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis' reciprocal visit to Ankara in May 2024.⁹⁸ This "new era" of dialogue has included exploratory talks on the Aegean, trade, migration and energy cooperation and offers scope for the UK to act as a discreet facilitator, leveraging historic links and defence relationships to encourage confidence-building while safeguarding its own interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

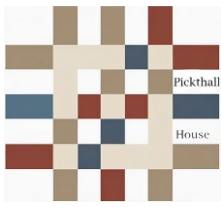
⁹⁴ <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/222847.htm>

⁹⁵ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

⁹⁶ <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1791572/FULLTEXT02.pdf>

⁹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-greece-strategic-bilateral-framework-second-annual-review-2024/second-annual-review-of-the-uk-greece-strategic-bilateral-framework-30-january-2024>

⁹⁸ <https://mecouncil.org/publication/the-turkish-greek-rapprochement-time-for-european-engagement/>



3.4 Cyprus

3.4.1 History

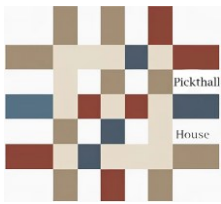
British interests in the Eastern Mediterranean are centred on Cyprus, which despite falling under Ottoman rule for three centuries from 1571, came under British administration in 1878, with formal annexation in 1914. Republican Türkiye only recognised this annexation in 1923, and Cyprus became a British Crown Colony in 1925, until independence in 1960. During the Ottoman period, a distinct Turkish Cypriot community (today 18-20% of the island's pre-1974 population) had developed alongside the Greek Cypriot majority. Under British colonial rule (1925-1960), ethnic tensions rose as Greek Cypriot demands for *enosis* (union with Greece) clashed with Turkish Cypriot calls for *taksim* (partition), straining intercommunal relations and British-Turkish diplomacy. After Cypriot independence, despite the ethnic power-sharing constitution of the London and Zürich Agreements, ensuing interethnic violence and a 1974 Greek-backed coup prompted Türkiye's military intervention, on the grounds of guaranteeing Cypriot independence. This resulted in the occupation of the northern third of the island and the subsequent declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983, after short-lived Turkish Cypriot attempts at federation. Today, the TRNC is recognised only by Ankara and universally considered an illegal occupation. Since then, UN peacekeepers (UNFICYP) have maintained a buffer zone, while the UK retains sovereign base areas at Akrotiri and Dhekelia. The continued occupation will be an ongoing impediment to productive UK-Türkiye cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean until a peaceful resolution is found.

3.4.2 Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)

Türkiye maintains that the TRNC is a sovereign state and has intensified efforts to end its international isolation, framing its development as a national priority. In 2025, Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz reaffirmed this stance, pledging expanded investment in infrastructure, education, and tourism to support the TRNC's economic and political autonomy.⁹⁹ Türkiye also backed the TRNC's 2025-2029 Five-Year Development Plan, which aims to strengthen its institutional capacity and assert its status as a separate state.¹⁰⁰ Regionally, TRNC Foreign Minister Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu has declared the

⁹⁹ <https://www.aneews.com.tr/turkey/2025/08/22/turkiye-highlights-development-of-trnc-as-national-priority>

¹⁰⁰ <https://pio.mfa.gov.ct.tr/en/trnc-introduces-2025-2029-five-year-development-plan/>



breakaway state's readiness to contribute to Eastern Mediterranean security, aligning with Ankara's broader strategic posture and Blue Homeland strategy.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, Türkiye has expressed concern over growing EU-Cyprus influence among Turkic states, viewing it as a challenge to its diplomatic standing on the Cyprus issue.¹⁰² In April 2025, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as observer, Turkmenistan, appointed ambassadors to the internationally recognised Greek Cypriot administration, undermining Türkiye's preferred two-state solution, and this at the recent OTS summit in Gebele, Azerbaijan, President Erdoğan emphasised the issue of TRNC relations with other OTS member states.¹⁰³ These moves reflect Ankara's dual-track approach, to deepen bilateral integration with TRNC while resisting international pressures that uphold UN resolutions rejecting its recognition.

Meanwhile, a sizeable British Turkish Cypriot diaspora, numbering approximately 400,000, has established itself in the North London boroughs of Enfield, Hackney and Haringey, originating from colonial-era and post-1974 migration, and maintains strong cultural and economic links between the UK and Northern Cyprus. Repeated UN-led reunification talks have failed, the most recent in 2017, with former British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, opining that only a partitioned Cyprus would bring the dispute to an end.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, demographic changes on the island due to large-scale Turkish settlement programmes and Greek Cypriot emigration continue to complicate any settlement or plebiscite, as parties differ on who would be eligible to vote. For Britain, any spike in instability or return to the violence of the 1960s and 70s would risk disruption to its Sovereign Base Areas, with knock-on effects for security in the Near East.

3.4.3 What does this mean for London?

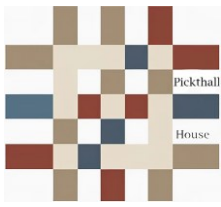
However, within this apparent era of Greco-Turkish rapprochement, there may be further opportunities for the UK to work with Türkiye on confidence-building, trade, and security cooperation in Cyprus. The UK, as a guarantor of Cyprus' independence

¹⁰¹ <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/region/turkish-cyprus-ready-to-contribute-to-eastern-mediterranean-security-trnc-foreign-min-3208084>

¹⁰² <https://nordicmonitor.com/2025/05/turkey-struggles-to-counter-eu-cyprus-gains-among-brother-states/>

¹⁰³ <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/10/11/is-the-organization-of-turkic-states-entering-a-new-phase-with-ots/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/cyprus-turkish-greek-cypriots-partition-eu-international-community-should-act-a7976711.html>



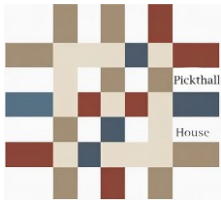
alongside Türkiye under the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee - which served as the pretext for the Turkish invasion - has already deepened its role through the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding on Defence and Security Cooperation with Cyprus, which was renewed in 2024 to expand collaboration on training, capability development, and crisis planning.¹⁰⁵ Ankara meanwhile has signalled readiness for confidence-building measures on the island, including energy cooperation and bi-communal projects, provided that Turkish Cypriot sovereignty is acknowledged. This came in March 2025 with a UN-announced breakthrough seeing both Cypriot leaders agree to open four new border crossing points.¹⁰⁶ Against this backdrop, the UK should leverage its sovereign base areas and NATO membership to encourage dialogue, while aligning its strategic interests in Cyprus with broader goals of regional de-escalation and investment.

The recent election of moderate Tufan Erhurman as President of TRNC on 19 October 2025 has further reignited hopes for reunification as Türkiye's preferred incumbent candidate, Ersin Tatar, who had advocated for a two-state solution, was defeated.¹⁰⁷ Both Erdoğan and Cypriot President, Nikos Christodoulides, have welcomed Erhurman's election as an example of democratic maturity, although some Turkish commentators have continued calls for Northern Cyprus' integration into Türkiye. The results can also be considered a push by more secular Northern Cypriots to distance themselves from Erdoğan's conservative platform. Nevertheless, the election of moderate President Mustafa Akıncı in 2015 also ignited similar hopes before talks broke down in 2017. While a united, fully sovereign Cyprus is in the best interests of Eastern Mediterranean security and Britain's sovereign bases, Türkiye will be watching to ensure that inter-Cypriot rapprochement does not lead to it losing more influence over the contested waters of the Eastern Mediterranean. As the situation in the Levant continues to develop, Britain should use its unique position and history in the region to build confidence and strategic cohesion between the various parties.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-cyprus-agree-to-closer-defence-and-security-ties>

¹⁰⁶ <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/local/cyprus-un-peace-talks-confidence-building-measures/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/19/turkish-cypriots-elect-tufan-erhurman-in-northern-cyprus-polls>



3.5 Syria

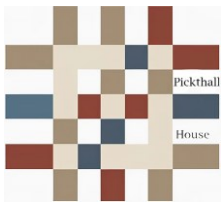
3.5.1 Relations past and present

Back on the mainland, Syria - which shares Türkiye's longest land border at 822 kilometres - has been a crucial factor in, and staging point for, modern Turkish interests in the Middle East, particularly since the outbreak of civil war in 2012 following the Arab Spring. Ever since Türkiye's first military intervention in Syria in 2016, and especially in the last year, as the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army supported the rapid rise of Ahmad al-Sharaa and the new Syrian Provisional Government in December 2024, Syria has remained the crucible for Türkiye's regional Middle East strategy. Along with repeated interventions again in 2018, 2019, 2020, and an ongoing offensive since 30 November 2024, largely marketed as cross-border security interventions against Daesh and Kurdish forces, Ankara has signalled diplomatically that it seeks to create a managed end-state whereby Kurdish militant threats, namely the KPK and YPG, are contained and Syrian state collapse is averted.

Since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 and the rise of the Syrian Provisional Government under Ahmad al-Sharaa - also known by his *nom de guerre*, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani - Türkiye has moved rapidly to formalise both political and economic partnerships with Damascus. Militarily, Ankara has maintained close relations with the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) while opening channels to the new Syrian defence establishment. Turkish political analyst Hamza Tekin has confirmed that a joint defence agreement is under discussion, covering training, armament, and intelligence cooperation, with the aim of embedding Türkiye as Syria's primary security partner in the post-Assad order.¹⁰⁸ Economically, both governments have signed a founding protocol for the Türkiye- Syria Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), reviving and expanding the pre-2011 free trade framework. Turkish Trade Minister Ömer Bolat reported a bilateral trade volume of \$2.6 billion in 2024, with Turkish firms now positioned to lead in reconstruction, infrastructure, and energy projects, including the reactivation of the Türkiye-Syria natural gas pipeline to power a 1,200 MW plant serving 5 million Syrians.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ <https://levant24.com/articles/2025/03/forging-a-historic-alliance-turkish-syrian-relations-post-assad/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkiye-and-syria-seek-to-deepen-economic-ties-with-new-agreements-212216>



In January 2025, Ankara and Damascus agreed to revise punitive Syrian customs tariffs, facilitate Turkish investment in agriculture and industry, and coordinate border management to boost commerce.¹¹⁰ Turkish Energy Minister, Alparslan Bayraktar, also suggested in December 2024 that a shelved project for a Türkiye-Qatar natural gas pipeline could be revived following Assad's fall and Syrian reconstruction.¹¹¹

3.5.2 Refugee crisis

At the same time, Türkiye continues to host the world's largest Syrian refugee population, around 3.5 million people.¹¹² This has made it a pivotal transit and containment state in the wider European migration system. The fall of Assad in late 2024, however, triggered a wave of European policy shifts with at least fifteen EU states, plus the UK, suspending or reviewing Syrian asylum applications, citing uncertainty over security conditions. Amnesty International and migration researchers have warned that such moves risk premature returns and breach non-refoulement obligations.^{113 114} For Britain, Syrian displacement is part of a broader record-high refugee and asylum caseload, with over 50,000 small-boat Channel crossings since mid-2024, many carrying Syrians.¹¹⁵ Britain's Syrian refugee population peaked in 2019 at an estimated 47,270 people, but is since believed to have fallen to around 30,000.¹¹⁶ As in the UK, the refugee issue is a high-salience political faultline within Türkiye, with opposition parties, including the Republican People's Party (CHP) having campaigned on accelerated repatriation. Meanwhile, the government has balanced EU migration management deals with domestic pressure to reduce the refugee burden. Public opinion surveys show rising

¹¹⁰ <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/business/turkiye-and-syria-agree-on-economic-collaboration-including-reevaluation-of-tariffs-110449/>

¹¹¹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/energy-diplomacy/turkiye-qatar-natural-gas-pipeline-could-be-revived-says-turkish-energy-minister/46164>

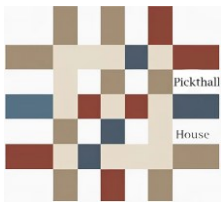
¹¹² <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/a007833298df4b9c3735602711dd9289-0050062023/original/WDR2023-Türkiye-case-study-FORMATTED.pdf>

¹¹³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2024/12/europe-safety-of-syrians-in-europe-must-not-be-sacrificed-to-political-interests/>

¹¹⁴ <https://gh.bmj.com/content/10/8/e019809>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/politics/migration-refugees-small-boats-uk-b2827539.html>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnv3qnzz7rjo>



resentment in host communities, especially in border provinces like Gaziantep and Hatay, where competition over jobs, housing, and services has intensified.

3.5.3 Hatay dispute

Indeed, a historic factor in Turco-Syrian relations in this border region has been the Hatay Dispute, dating back to 1939, when the Sanjak of Alexandretta (then part of the French Mandate for Syria) was transferred to Turkish control at the outbreak of World War, in part to encourage Turkish neutrality. This followed a controversial referendum under Franco-Turkish auspices and came despite the objections of the League of Nations.¹¹⁷ At the time, Arabs made up roughly 45% of the population, alongside Turks (39%), Armenians (13%), and smaller minorities.¹¹⁸ Many Syrian nationalists and Arab residents protested, rejecting the vote as rigged, and thousands fled to Syria after annexation. Damascus never formally recognised the transfer, and official Syrian maps continued to depict Hatay (Liwa Iskenderun) as Syrian territory well into the 21st century. The issue periodically resurfaced during bilateral tensions, notably in the 1958-61 United Arab Republic period when Syria united with Nasserist Egypt, and during the 1998 PKK crisis. However, since thawing Syro-Turkish relations in the 2000s, it has largely been set aside. Today, Hatay remains part of Türkiye, with a diverse population including a significant Arab Alawite community, estimated at 400,000-700,000 people in a province of 1.5 million. While the Syrian state's formal claim has been muted in recent years, the province's Arab heritage has been enhanced by its proximity to the Syrian border, especially amid the refugee influx and cross-border conflict dynamics since 2011.

3.5.4 What does this mean for London?

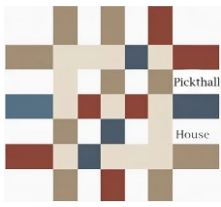
UK-Türkiye dialogues have explicitly covered Syria, as well as conflict-riven Libya and Somalia, where both NATO powers profess their support for UN-led processes and local capacity-building, as covered in past Pickthall House white papers.^{119 120} Complementing

¹¹⁷ <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2014/01/syrias-lost-province-the-hatay-question-returns?lang=en>

¹¹⁸ https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000256977.pdf

¹¹⁹ <https://pickthallhouse.org/files/On-UKs-Strategic-Engagement-with-post-Assad-Syria-and-Turkiye.pdf>

¹²⁰ <https://pickthallhouse.org/white-papers/hope-and-disharmony-on-the-horn-somaliland-recognition-and-its-implications/>



this, Türkiye has built platforms like the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF) to convene rival actors and market an “inclusive diplomacy” brand tailored to a fragmented order.¹²¹

As Ankara deepens its ties with the Syrian Provisional Government and consolidates influence through military and economic channels, Britain faces a shifting landscape wherein Türkiye becomes the primary gatekeeper of Syrian stability. This new dynamic opens the door to UK-Türkiye cooperation on refugee repatriation, counter-extremism, and post-war reconstruction. Britain’s long-standing interest in a unified Syria that is free from Iranian and Russian influence aligns with Türkiye’s goal of preventing Kurdish separatism and state collapse. The prospect of a Qatar-Türkiye natural gas pipeline and the establishment of a Türkiye-Syria-Qatar diplomatic corridor that could accompany it would also offer a window for further NATO influence on Qatar, beyond the US and UK armed forces stationed in Doha.

Despite converging UK-Turkish interests in Syria, an enhanced position in the Eastern Mediterranean for Türkiye, however, risks sharpening British sensitivities around Cyprus. Ankara’s growing leverage in Syria could embolden it in the Eastern Mediterranean, where its maritime claims and military presence near Northern Cyprus remain contentious. For London, a balanced partnership with Türkiye in Syria, supporting regional stability without facilitating greater Turkish power projection, is essential to British interests.

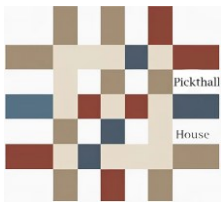
3.6 Lebanon

3.6.1 History

As for Lebanon, Türkiye’s historical role is rooted in four centuries of Ottoman rule that shaped the country’s demographics and institutionalised sectarian governance. The Ottomans relied first on the Druze Ma’n dynasty for the feudal administration, and later the Sunni Shihabs, who then converted to Christianity and under whom the Maronite population grew from higher fertility and reproduction in the 19th century.¹²² Meanwhile the Tanzimat reforms of 1839-1876 led to greater sectarian competition which saw

¹²¹ <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/ups-and-downs-Türkiye-israel-relations-1949-7-october>

¹²² <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/4206150>



massacres and displacement between the Druze and Maronite communities in 1860, further reshaping Mount Lebanon's delicate sectarian balance..¹²³

3.6.2 Modern relations

During Lebanon's civil wars from 1975 to 1990, Ankara maintained a low profile but provided humanitarian aid, supporting Arab League and UN peace initiatives aimed at preserving the confessional system.¹²⁴ In the post-war period, Türkiye has invested in reconstruction projects, port rehabilitation, and education, and has used its ties with Sunni leaders such as Saad Hariri to encourage stability, while avoiding overt interference that could inflame sectarian tensions.¹²⁵ Diplomatic disputes have been rare, though Ankara's growing regional activism, particularly its alignment with Qatar and support for Hamas, has occasionally unsettled Lebanese actors aligned with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or the UAE.¹²⁶

In 2024, Türkiye signed a military cooperation framework agreement with Lebanon, as part of the broader set of 89 defence deals Ankara concluded worldwide, covering training, logistics, and security coordination, many of which are covered throughout this paper.¹²⁷ Meanwhile this year, 2025, Turkish defence officials have confirmed expanded security and counter-terrorism cooperation with Beirut, including training for Lebanese Armed Forces personnel and discussions on naval security in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹²⁸

3.6.3 What does this mean for London?

The UK's Defence Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa (DSAME), Vice Admiral Edward Ahlgren, visited Lebanon in mid-March 2025 and again in mid-October,

¹²³ <https://movingstories.history.ox.ac.uk/article/exit-from-the-unbeloved-empire-ottoman-passports-and-mass-emigration-from-mount-lebanon>

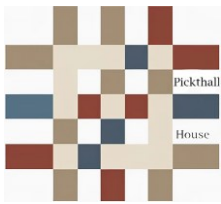
¹²⁴ https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/working_papers/2020-2021/20210707_is_turkey_a_shaper_and_mover_in_lebanon_wp.pdf

¹²⁵ <https://nowlebanon.com/hariri-salam-and-the-sunni-vacuum-in-lebanon/>

¹²⁶ <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2020/10/heir-to-the-ottomans?lang=en>

¹²⁷ <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/turkiye/turkiye-expands-global-defense-cooperation-signs-89-military-framework-deals-in-2024-98968/>

¹²⁸ <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-lebanon-ties-to-strengthen-with-regional-changes-experts-say>



pledging Britain's support for Lebanese security and stability, including along its eastern border with Syria as part of Britain's commitment to support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), over paramilitaries such as Hezbollah in Lebanon's south, in enhancing its ability to respond to illegal cross-border activity.^{129 130} Since 2010, the UK has helped construct over 80 border posts and continues to train and equip the LAF.¹³¹

While Türkiye concerns itself in the country more with strategic depth in the Eastern Mediterranean, balancing against rivals such as Israel and being a protector of Lebanon's Sunni community, much as Iran looks out for Lebanese Shias, and France for Lebanese Christians, it positions itself alongside the UK as a stabilising partner, with both contributing to aid to support reconstruction and the humanitarian refugee crisis, while also expanding cooperation in trade.^{132 133}

3.7 Israel & Palestine

3.7.1 History

In the southern Levant, the Ottoman Empire also ruled historic Palestine for four centuries, from 1516 until the British conquest in 1917, integrating it administratively into the Syrian Eyalet as the Sanjak of Jerusalem until the creation of the Mutasarrifate of Jerusalem in 1872, while its communities retained relative communal autonomy under the *millet* system. After the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Republic of Türkiye became the first Muslim-majority state to recognise it on 24 March 1949, opening diplomatic relations and facilitating Jewish emigration from Türkiye. Early ties included modest trade agreements, including a symbolic July 1950 trade agreement, and cultural gestures, such as when Turkish Jewish settlers in Haifa named a forest after Atatürk.¹³⁴

Relations were periodically strained, however, notably during the 1956 Suez Crisis, when Ankara distanced itself from Israel under pressure from Egypt, Syria and the Arab

¹²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-vice-admiral-ahlgren-visits-lebanons-eastern-border>

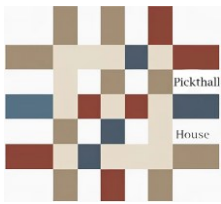
¹³⁰ <https://cmec.org.uk/parliament/latest-parliamentary-diplomatic-news/vice-admiral-ahlgren-reaffirms-uks-support-lebanons>

¹³¹ <https://thxnews.com/uk-lebanon-partnership-strategic-alliance/>

¹³² <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-lebanon.en.mfa>

¹³³ <https://www.geopol.uk/untitled/>

¹³⁴ <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/ups-and-downs-Türkiye-israel-relations-1949-7-october>



League more widely, although never formally severed ties. Throughout Türkiye maintained a cautious balance, preserving security and economic links with Israel, while voicing support for Palestinian rights in multilateral forums, especially after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, including sponsoring multiple UN resolutions in favour of Palestine, such as A/RES/2672, affirming Palestinians' right to self-determination.¹³⁵ Türkiye also supported UN Security Council Resolution 242 calling for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories.¹³⁶ By the 1970s, it had begun strengthening ties with the Arab League and hosting Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) representatives in Ankara. Türkiye formally recognised the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people in 1975 and was the first Western bloc country officially to recognise the State of Palestine, the day the PLO declared independence in November 1988.^{137 138}

3.7.2 Modern Relations

Nevertheless, from the 1990s, Turkish-Israeli cooperation deepened in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, in the face of regional rivals in Iraq, Syria and Iran, and in 1996 the two countries signed military training and defence industry cooperation agreements, alongside expanding trade.¹³⁹ This strategic partnership cooled sharply after Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rise to power in 2003, as his government adopted a more overtly pro-Palestinian and critical stance toward Israeli policy, especially after the 2008–09 Gaza war and the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident in which Israeli commandos killed ten civilians attempting to break the Gaza blockade, many of them Turkish citizens.¹⁴⁰ Following Hamas' 7 October 2023 attack and Israel's subsequent large-scale assault on Gaza, which President Erdoğan described as a "genocide" in October 2024,¹⁴¹ Ankara recalled its ambassador, suspended trade, and called for international sanctions.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ <https://www.palquest.org/en/historic/text/9629/unga-resolution-2672-xxv>

¹³⁶ [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/242\(1967\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/242(1967))

¹³⁷ <https://openaccess.bilgi.edu.tr/server/api/core/bitstreams/59ba8ef6-4c78-4302-ab02-3153ce09eda1/content>

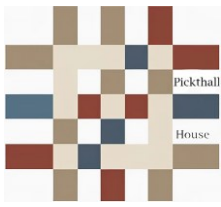
¹³⁸ https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_s-political-relations-with-the-palestinian-national-authority.en.mfa

¹³⁹ <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA414162.pdf>

¹⁴⁰ <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA524280.pdf>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.aneews.com.tr/middle-east/2024/10/10/Erdoğan-gaza-genocide-is-common-shame-for-all-humanity>

¹⁴² <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-sultans-ghost-Erdoğan-and-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>



Significantly, Ankara has blocked NATO-Israel cooperation, including Israeli participation in NATO's "Steadfast Dart 25" exercise in Romania in March 2025,^{143 144} with Erdoğan stating in July 2024: "Until comprehensive, sustainable peace is established in Palestine, attempts at cooperation with Israel within NATO will not be approved by Türkiye."¹⁴⁵

While these punitive measures have reinforced Erdoğan's image as a defender of the Palestinian cause and resonated domestically and in parts of the Global South and Islamic World, their practical impact on Israeli military operations in Gaza have been limited. Rather, these statements have signalled Türkiye's willingness to leverage diplomatic, economic, and alliance channels to isolate Israel and position itself for a post-war role in Gaza's humanitarian and political reconstruction. On 13 October 2025, a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas was signed in Sharm al-Shaykh, with the US, Türkiye, Egypt and Qatar as guarantors, indicating also the recent rapprochement between Türkiye and Egypt.

3.7.3 What does this mean for London?

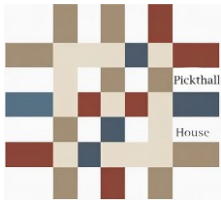
Meanwhile, Britain's recognition of Palestine in September 2025, amid escalating regional tensions, including Israel's bombing of Hamas negotiators in Doha, followed by threats directed at Türkiye,¹⁴⁶ is pivotal for UK foreign policy. For Britain, this has opened a strategic opportunity to coordinate further with Türkiye, now guarantor of peace in Gaza and a regional power broker, on stabilisation, humanitarian access, and diplomatic mediation especially as both countries now formally support Palestinian statehood and territorial integrity. As the only other NATO member guaranteeing peace in Gaza aside from the USA since October, Türkiye's role as a key NATO lever in the Middle East has become more apparent, any intra-alliance disputes notwithstanding. Hereby, alongside the potential formalisation of a diplomatic corridor between Türkiye, Qatar and neighbouring Syria could permit the exertion of further Western and British-aligned influence and interests upon the Gulf state.

¹⁴³ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/Türkiye-blocking-nato-cooperation-with-israel-over-gaza-massacre-officials-say/>

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250311-turkiye-blocks-israel-from-participating-in-nato-military-exercise/>

¹⁴⁵ https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/dis_basinda_turkiye/detay/Erdoğan-says-Türkiye-will-not-approve-nato-attempts-to-cooperate-with-israel

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2025/9/21/is-turkiye-israel-next-target-middle-east>



3.8 Egypt

3.8.1 History

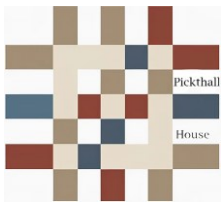
Meanwhile, Türkiye's longstanding rivalry with Egypt is rooted in the 19th-century standoff between the Ottoman Empire and former Ottoman governor, Muhammad Ali Pasha, whose semi-independent Egyptian state challenged Ottoman authority in the Levant and Anatolia before the 1833 Convention of Kütayha, mediated by Russia, restored nominal Ottoman suzerainty - although conflict resumed in the Second Ottoman-Egyptian War in 1839. The 1840 Convention of London then saw Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia force Muhammad Ali Pasha to abandon Syria in exchange for his dynasty's rule over Egypt, which nonetheless fell under British protection following an 1882 invasion against the nationalist Colonel, Ahmad 'Urabi.

3.8.2 Modern relations

Following their formal independence, Türkiye and Egypt established relations in 1925, but relations soured during Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency, with Turkish ambassadors expelled in 1954 and 1961 for criticising the Free Officers' regime and the United Arab Republic (union of Egypt and Syria from 1958 to 1961) respectively. After Nasser's death in 1970, relations generally improved but remained pragmatic during the presidency of Anwar Sadat before an upswing in ties during that of Hosni Mubarak, culminating in a 2005 free trade agreement.¹⁴⁷ Relations sweetened sharply after the 2011 Arab Spring, when Ankara praised the election of Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi, welcomed him to Ankara, and offered economic, financial and political support to his government.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, relations soon soured following the 2013 Rabaa Massacre and subsequent military coup by Egypt's current dictator, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, triggered a decade of hostility, with Türkiye refusing to recognise the new regime, expelling ambassadors, and clashing with Cairo over maritime boundaries and opposing sides in Libya, Türkiye supporting the internationally recognised Government of National Unity in Tripoli and Egypt supporting the House of Representatives-led

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.trade.gov.tr/free-trade-agreements/egypt>

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.azernews.az/region/44247.html>



Government of National Stability in Tobruk, alongside Russia, France, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran.¹⁴⁹

Since 2021, however, following a stalemate in the Libyan Civil War and the end of the 2017-21 Qatar crisis, both Türkiye and Egypt have pursued rapprochement, culminating in President Erdoğan's 2024 visit to Cairo and agreements to boost trade to \$15 billion, alongside a landmark deal for Türkiye to supply Egypt with Bayraktar drones.¹⁵⁰ Turkish contractors have also been active in Egyptian infrastructure, particularly in textiles, manufacturing, and port development, though political volatility has periodically disrupted investment flows. Ankara has sought to ease tensions with Egypt to avoid isolation in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum following Egypt's signing of maritime boundary agreements with Greece and Cyprus alongside Israel. Furthermore, as Türkiye deepens its alliance with Somalia and Egypt's rivalry with Ethiopia over the Grand Renaissance Dam and control of the Nile's waters continues, both powers have restated their support for Somali territorial integrity, with Egypt and Somalia signing a Strategic Partnership in January 2025.¹⁵¹ In October, both Türkiye and Egypt also became guarantors of the Gaza ceasefire deal, enhancing the case for Turkish-Egyptian cooperation in Red Sea and Middle East security.

3.8.3 What does this mean for London?

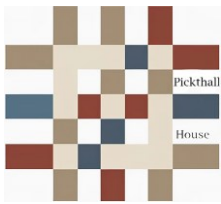
For the UK, this rapprochement reduces the risk of maritime confrontation in the Eastern Mediterranean in the proximity of the Sovereign Bases on Cyprus and facilitates the operation of British energy companies, such as BP, to operate in offshore gasfields. Coordination could also lead to a political settlement in Libya, which the UK supports, and potentially facilitate initiatives to reduce trans-Mediterranean migration pressures. Furthermore, enhanced Red Sea security, with Turkish and Egyptian cooperation supports the aims of British anti-piracy naval deployments in the region. The expansion of Turkish defence exports may create greater competition for British firms, such as BAE Systems, although Russia, France and the US continue to dominate Egypt's defence

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/rabaa-turkey-egypt-symbol-relations-changed>

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/Türkiye-and-egypt-want-better-relations-but-will-libya-doom-the-rapprochement/>

¹⁵¹ see Pickthall House's recent White Paper, "Hope and Disharmony On the Horn: Somaliland Recognition and its Implications", 11 October 2025.

<https://pickthallhouse.org/white-papers/hope-and-disharmony-on-the-horn-somaliland-recognition-and-its-implications/>



imports and the UK and Egypt announced a new Strategic Partnership across trade, security and defence in July 2025.¹⁵²

3.9 Libya

3.9.1 Libya under Gaddafi and Civil War

Before Libya's 2011 revolution, Türkiye enjoyed a robust economic presence in the country under the rule of Muammar Gaddafi, with Turkish contractors dominating infrastructure projects and bilateral trade expanding beyond hydrocarbons.¹⁵³ Ankara maintained cordial political ties, with Erdoğan even receiving the 21st and final "Al-Gaddafi International Prize for Human Rights" in 2010, but Türkiye pivoted rapidly once the uprising began.¹⁵⁴ Initially urging reform, Ankara ultimately supported NATO's Operation Unified Protector, evacuating tens of thousands of Turkish citizens and aligning with the international coalition that helped topple Gaddafi, with Türkiye managing air operations from Izmir.¹⁵⁵ In the fractured post-2014 landscape, Ankara continued to back the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, positioning itself against the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar, which was supported by Egypt, the UAE, and later the Russian Wagner Group. This alignment brought Türkiye into repeated friction with the EU over alleged breaches of the UN arms embargo, including high-profile maritime inspection incidents involving EU naval missions.¹⁵⁶ The UK also participated in Operation IRINI with the EU enforcing the arms embargo until it left the bloc in 2021, and has since supported the enforcement of UN sanctions.¹⁵⁷

3.9.2 Recent developments

The turning point in Libyan-Turkish relations came in November 2019, when Türkiye and the GNA signed two memoranda of understanding (MoU): one on security cooperation

¹⁵² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-egypt-strategic-partnership-22-july-2025>

¹⁵³ <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/updates/2022-SU-SuslerTurkeyLibya-01a.pdf>

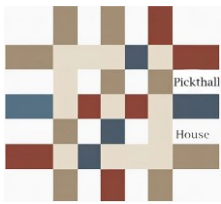
¹⁵⁴ <https://bianet.org/haber/pm-erdogan-receives-human-rights-award-from-libya-126343>

¹⁵⁵ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_71652.htm

¹⁵⁶

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649398/EPRS_BRI%282020%29649398_EN.pdf

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libya-sanctions-guidance/libya-sanctions-guidance>



and another on maritime delimitation.¹⁵⁸ The latter drew an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) corridor between Türkiye's southern coast and Libya's northeast (not controlled by the GNA), cutting across areas claimed by Greece and forming a central plank of Ankara's *Mavi Vatan* ("Blue Homeland") doctrine. This doctrine, articulated by Turkish naval strategists such as Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, asserts expansive maritime rights based on mainland adjacency rather than island projections (which severely limit Turkish waters in the Aegean), challenging interpretations under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to which Türkiye is not a party. Under this framework, Ankara sought to secure offshore resource rights and strategic depth in the Eastern Mediterranean. Militarily, Türkiye's deployment of Bayraktar TB2 drones, electronic warfare systems, and air defences in early 2020 then proved decisive in breaking the LNA's siege of Tripoli, reversing battlefield momentum and halting Haftar's advance at the Sirte-Jufra line.^{159 160}

These gains triggered sharp diplomatic clashes in 2020 with a Greece-Egypt axis that viewed the Türkiye-Libya EEZ deal as illegitimate. Athens expelled the GNA ambassador and signed a partial EEZ accord with Cairo to counter Ankara's claims, while Egypt declared Sirte-Jufra a "red line" and increased support to the LNA.¹⁶¹ Despite a UN-brokered ceasefire later that year, tensions over maritime rights persisted. In 2022, Türkiye deepened its energy linkage with Tripoli through a hydrocarbons exploration MoU premised on the 2019 delimitation, prompting strong objections from Greece, Egypt, and particularly the EU, which warned that drilling in contested waters risked destabilising the region and violating international law.¹⁶² While Ankara's broader

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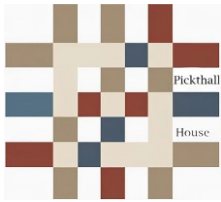
https://www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/Turkey_11122019_%28HC%29_MoU_Libya-Delimitation-areas-Mediterranean.pdf

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.armyrecognition.com/focus-analysis-conflicts/army/analysis-defense-and-security-industry/analysis-the-use-of-drones-by-turkey-in-libya-is-a-game-changing>

¹⁶⁰ <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/policy-briefs/sirte-jufra-line-front-war-or-basis-negotiations>

¹⁶¹ <https://maritime-executive.com/article/egypt-and-greece-reject-turkish-libyan-eez-claim>

¹⁶² https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/libyat%C3%BCrkiye-statement-spokesperson-reported-agreement-hydrocarbons_en



regional diplomacy has since thawed with both Athens and Cairo, the EEZ issue remains a faultline.^{163 164}

3.9.3 What does this mean for London?

For Britain, the implications of potential instability in Eastern Mediterranean energy politics include effects on British investment and shipping interests, as well as opportunities to position itself as a mediator and reconstruction partner in Libya. The UK imported £2.5 billion worth of goods from Libya in 2024, mostly hydrocarbons,¹⁶⁵ and the Libyan-British Business Council has signed cooperation agreements with Libya's National Oil Corporation to expand UK participation in the country's oil and gas recovery.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, in May 2025, the executive director of Libya's National Development Agency visited the UK to promote £5 billion investment for the Libya 2030 Vision.¹⁶⁷ Proactive engagement in the region, balancing relations with Türkiye, Greece, and Egypt while continuing to support the GNA and UN processes would safeguard British strategic access, and could open commercial avenues in infrastructure and energy, enhancing the UK's reputation as a pragmatic, stabilising actor in a contested region.

3.10 The Maghreb

3.10.1 History

To Libya's west, Türkiye maintains cordial partnerships with the three states of the Maghreb: Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. The Ottomans conquered and ruled Tunisia and Algeria from the 16th century, embedding administrative, architectural, and cultural legacies, but never succeeded in bringing Morocco under their control. In the present, Türkiye maintains cordial ties with both Tunis and Rabat, investing in construction,

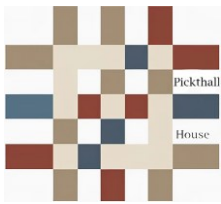
¹⁶³ <https://www.mesp.me/2025/01/17/egypt-turkey-thaw-what-implications-for-the-eastern-mediterranean-energy-landscape/>

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/09/07/turkey-is-escalating-tensions-in-the-mediterranean-again/>

¹⁶⁵ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68c9a2a11eabc899da70847e/libya-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2025-09-19.pdf>

¹⁶⁶ <https://lbcc.org.uk/britain-and-libya-strengthen-oil-and-gas-ties-libya-business-news/>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/libya-vision-2030-uk-businesses-b1228932.html>



textiles, and transport infrastructure, and cultivating tourism and educational exchanges.

3.10.2 Modern day relations

Moroccan-Turkish trade has grown steadily since the mid-2010s, with January 2025 data showing Morocco's imports from Türkiye reaching \$225.3 million, placing Morocco as Türkiye's second-largest North African market.¹⁶⁸ Tunisia also hosts Turkish contractors who have implemented 21 projects worth almost one billion dollars in Tunisia, while bilateral trade reached \$1.6 billion in 2023.¹⁶⁹ Türkiye previously signed free trade agreements in 2004 with both Morocco and Tunisia.¹⁷⁰ ¹⁷¹ Citizens of all three countries can visit Türkiye for 90 days visa-free,¹⁷² but recent years have seen notable Moroccan immigration to Türkiye in particular, with three to four thousand arriving each year, more than Algerian and Tunisian immigration combined.¹⁷³ As in many Arab countries, there has also been a growing cultural exchange through the popularity of Turkish TV series, particularly among women.¹⁷⁴

On Western Sahara, Ankara has taken a middle path, avoiding overtly siding with Morocco's sovereignty claims, and instead backing UN processes to avoid alienating Algeria. Militarily, all three states are US partners, and Morocco in particular has engaged in limited coordination with Türkiye in NATO-linked forums. Although Türkiye already recognises Israel, Rabat's deepening security ties with Israel following its

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/02/174179/morocco-emerges-as-key-north-african-market-for-turkish-exports/>

¹⁶⁹ <https://en.africanmanager.com/turkish-contractors-have-implemented-21-projects-worth-975-million-in-tunisia/>

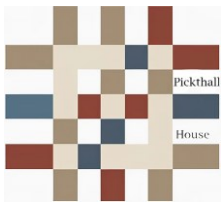
¹⁷⁰ <https://www.trade.gov.tr/free-trade-agreements/morocco>

¹⁷¹ <https://www.trade.gov.tr/free-trade-agreements/tunisia>

¹⁷² <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/visa-information-for-foreigners.en.mfa>

¹⁷³ <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=International-Migration-Statistics-2024-54083&dil=2>

¹⁷⁴ See various studies, including Khedimi, Z. (2021) *A Curse and/or Blessing? Turkish Soap Operas and their Impact on Contemporary Algerian Women: Audience Reception and Audio-visual Analysis of the Historical TV Drama Harim al-Sultan (The Magnificent Century)* [Doctoral dissertation, Canterbury Christ Church University] Repository.
<https://repository.canterbury.ac.uk/download/05e7eee35c66c768c5001ab949cb700e8d0e422288545802bd007dbc428d1aaf/4427638/Khedimi%20Zahra%20corrected%20thesis%20pdf.pdf>



signing of the Abraham Accords in December 2020 contrast with Ankara's increasingly pro-Palestinian rhetoric.

As for Algeria, a semi-autonomous Ottoman province from 1525 until French colonisation in 1830, and this legacy still shapes cultural ties, in architecture, cuisine, and elite lineages. The Algerian diaspora in Türkiye remains small but politically active, while traces of Turkish heritage in Algeria endure in Ottoman-era architecture, culinary influences, and family lineages, especially in coastal cities like Algiers and Oran. During Algeria's war of independence (1954-1962), Türkiye maintained diplomatic caution due to its NATO alignment but expressed moral sympathy for Algerian self-determination, and later became one of the first Muslim-majority countries to recognise the new republic.

Since Algeria's independence in 1962, Türkiye has maintained respectful and cooperative relations, with notable acceleration in the 2000s and 2010s. The two countries have signed multiple agreements in energy, construction, defence, and education, and Türkiye is now one of Algeria's top non-EU trading partners. Politically, both countries share a broadly anti-Western posture in periods of regional crisis, often coordinating in OIC and UN forums, and often align in supporting Palestinian rights, advocating for multipolar global governance, and resisting interventionism.¹⁷⁵ While Türkiye has remained neutral on Western Sahara, Algeria's firm support for the Polisario Front has not disrupted its ties with Ankara. In recent years, President Erdoğan and President Abdelmadjid Tebboune have held frequent high-level meetings and visits, especially since 2023, and Türkiye has invested heavily in Algerian infrastructure and manufacturing and signed cooperation deals on justice.^{176 177}

3.10.3 Western Sahara

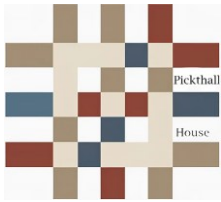
Like Türkiye, the UK had also maintained a deliberately ambiguous position on Western Sahara, officially supporting UN-led efforts for a "just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution" without formally recognising Moroccan sovereignty or endorsing the Polisario Front, although in June 2025 it formally endorsed Morocco's autonomy proposal for the region, falling in step with other European powers.¹⁷⁸ This position

¹⁷⁵ <https://orsam.org.tr/en/yayinlar/algerias-and-turkiyes-relations-with-the-state-of-palestine/>

¹⁷⁶ <https://nesa-center.org/algeria-turkey-consolidating-the-strategic-partnership/>

¹⁷⁷ <https://una-oic.org/en/general-secretaries/2022/12/28/62f9bca0-ae62-4951-9058-b7f525b5bcee/>

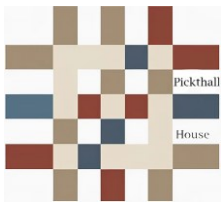
¹⁷⁸ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9906/>



reflects Britain's broader strategic interests in the Maghreb, namely securing energy partnerships, cooperation in the face of terrorism and the migration crisis, and trade access, particularly with Morocco, considered a stable gateway to West Africa. London has also cautiously expanded ties with Algeria, especially in gas diversification and regional diplomacy. In November 2023,¹⁷⁹ Algeria and the UK held the second session of a strategic dialogue initiated in 2021 and in January 2025 a meeting of the Algeria-Britain Business Council represented a fresh push for economic ties and cooperation in renewable energy, infrastructure investment, and industrial capacity-building.¹⁸⁰ Across the Maghreb, Türkiye's moderate but growing infrastructure, defence and cultural influence in both countries adds a new layer and Britain must remain alert to Turkish assertiveness, especially if Ankara's regional posture shifts toward bloc-building or anti-Western alignment.

¹⁷⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/algeria-uk-strategic-dialogue-november-2023-joint-statement>

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.algerianewsgate.com/post/algeria-and-uk-strengthen-economic-relations-amid-diplomatic-optimism>



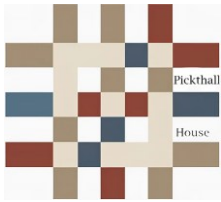
4. Conclusion

To conclude, Türkiye's foreign policy trajectory in this multipolar era has been defined by a series of recent shifts, including a turn towards transactional diplomacy, its transformation from a security consumer to a security provider, and its own pursuit of strategic autonomy even within NATO. These changes have been reinforced by Ankara's cultivation of diaspora and neo-Ottomanist influence abroad as well as strategic and economic pragmatism, such as economic back-channels with Russia. Together, these changes mark Türkiye's further evolution as a rising middle power seeking to assert itself as both indispensable and autonomous within larger Western security frameworks.

For Britain, several key and interconnected dynamics stand out.

1. Türkiye's growing role as an energy transit hub can align with UK priorities on energy diversification as Europe turns from Russian suppliers.
2. Türkiye's role as a maritime security actor in the Black Sea and Mediterranean offers the scope for joint Anglo-Turkish security initiatives based from Akrotiri & Dhekelia. Countries with ensuring stability in countries such as Syria, Libya, Israel and Palestine and a united Cyprus being of particular importance.
3. As the south-eastern gateway to Europe, Türkiye plays a key gatekeeping role in migration management with relevance to the UK's post-Brexit border strategies, especially as Syria begins to rebuild and Türkiye's 3.5 million Syrians return.
4. Türkiye's growing defence industry, symbolised by its diverse array of Bayraktar drone export deals within NATO and beyond, positions it as both a competitor and potential partner for British firms within the defence and procurement industry.
5. Turkish diaspora influence, already visible in the U.S., also has parallels in the UK's Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot communities, potentially requiring careful management of transparency and soft-power engagement.
6. Türkiye's insistence on strategic autonomy, ranging from vetoes on Israel-NATO cooperation to mediation between Russia and Ukraine, signals greater transactionality in Turkish international relations.

In sum, Britain must engage Ankara as a partner of necessity, in the Black Sea, eastern Mediterranean, Balkans and Middle East, as well as increasingly in Africa and Central Asia (as will be covered in the following paper), recognising both the opportunities for and limitations of collaboration. Türkiye's multipolar posture necessitates a pragmatic



and resilient approach to engagement from Britain, resting not so much on ideological affinity but shared interests in energy, migration, defence, and mediation.

The following paper will cover Turkish relations with the remainder of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Pickthall House will then conclude this three-paper series with a wider examination of the history and current state of UK-Türkiye relations.