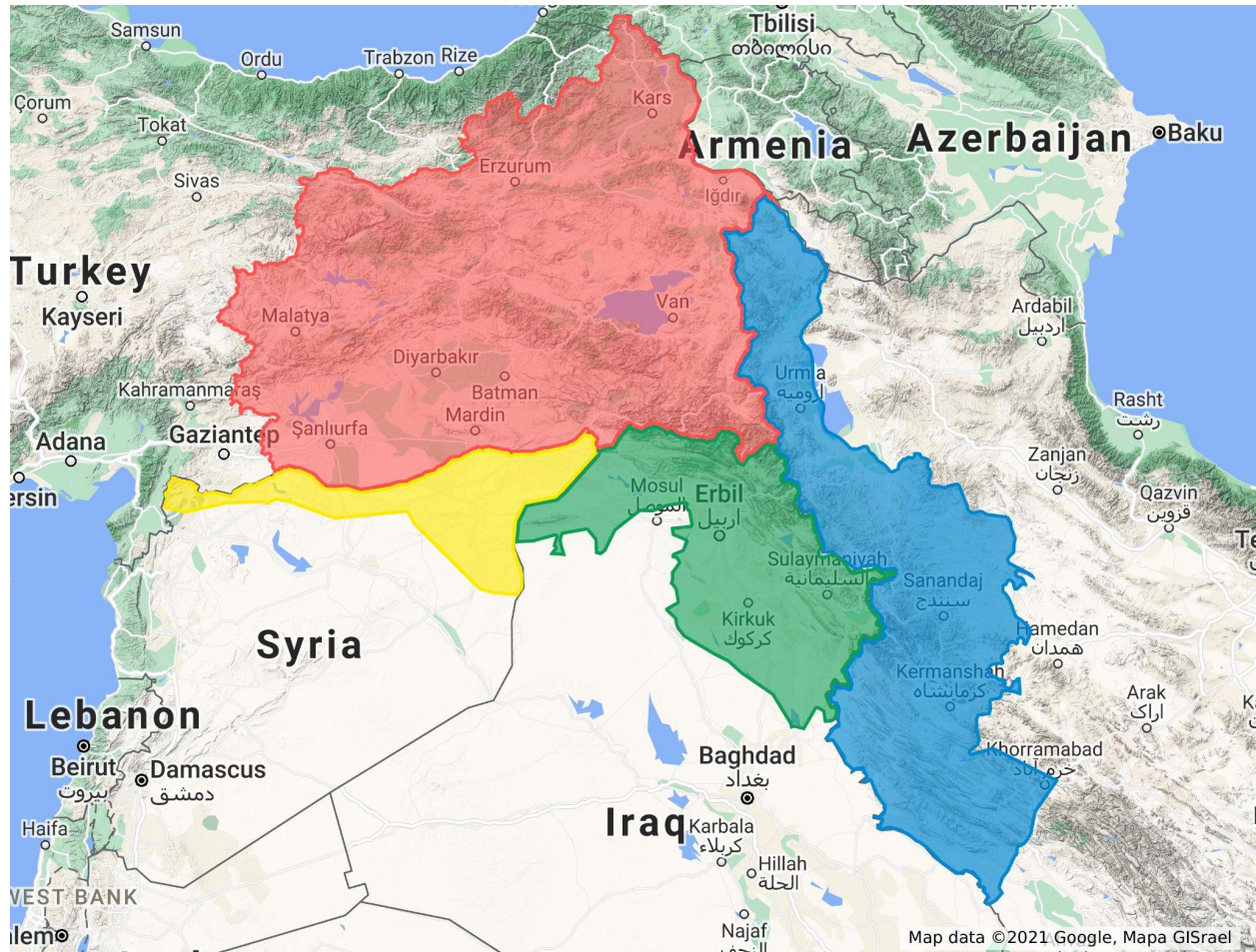


# Why Washington Finds Foothold in Kurdistan:

Four Articles on How U.S. Foreign Policy Interests Are Rooted in Each Region of Greater Kurdistan



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## **Abstract**

Covering each region of Greater Kurdistan, these four articles serve as analyses of various institutions that impact American-Kurdish relations and interests.

The first article for Iraq puts the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) into the perspective of modern U.S. foreign policy and what the National Defense Authorization Act's (NDAA) funding for the Kurds in Iraq truly means for Washington's Middle Eastern policies.

The second article is on Syria and aims to explain why a more permanent mission in Northeastern Syria and greater collaboration with SDF officials would benefit U.S. interests and policy initiatives for the Middle East.

The third article outlines the current state of Turkish-American relations and offers insight on the future of President Erdogan's "strategic autonomy" policies under the Biden Administration. The article closes with points on how to better Turkish-American relations during one of their most tense periods to date.

The fourth article focuses on Iran and the potential threats to U.S. influence that could arise from further Chinese investment. Focusing mostly on the 25-Year Plan, specifics of what hurts and helps China by allying with Iran are synthesized in the American context.

## **Iraqi Kurdistan: Long-standing U.S. Ally in a Land Full of Adversaries**

As of the time of this writing, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal 2022 has passed in [Congress](#) and is headed towards the desk of the U.S. president to be signed into law. The number of amendments to the NDAA per December 18th is 1,030.

Within the NDAA for Fiscal 2022, Iraq is a [centerpiece](#) for the U.S. Defense presence in the Middle East, with an increased budget proposal of 30,000,000\$ USD (Up from last year's 25,000,000\$ USD) for the Office of Security Cooperation in Iraq, and another proposal for 345,000,000\$ USD to Iraq as part of the Counter ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF), which Iraq received 322,500,000\$ USD last year. Other parts of the bill recognized the work of "Iraqi forces in the Nineveh Plains" referring to the Peshmerga of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) and the Iraqi Ground Forces of Baghdad, both of whom contest territorial control of the Nineveh Plains.

One [section](#) of particular interest in the current NDAA is Section #1223 (B), which puts direct emphasis on the Iraqi Kurdistan region:

"[The U.S. advises for] A whole-of-government plan to engage the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government in security

sector reform to professionalize, strengthen, and sustainably build the capacity of Iraq's national defense and security institutions.”

Whether through an increase in funding for US-KRG institutions or Washington’s efforts to establish a more strengthened Iraq through its encouragement of cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil, it is becoming clear that Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan especially, is still very much pivotal in advancing U.S. interests in the Middle East, especially with the fight against the remaining IS terror cells in Iraq and Syria. The Peshmerga [continue](#) to be on the frontlines of the fight against IS since 2014, and receive support from Europe and the United States via the Kurdistan Regional Government. The Peshmerga have remained as the most effective anti-IS forces in Iraq, and while the threat of IS has significantly diminished, U.S. reports have [concluded](#) that IS "remains capable of waging a prolonged insurgency," in both Iraq and Syria. As weakened as IS seemingly may be, the outline of the NDAA suggests that the U.S. is still cautious of an underground IS and will continue to finance and work with the Peshmerga to root out a potential revival of the terror cell.

But U.S. support for the KRG is not a unilateral relationship, as Washington has increasingly begun perceiving threats to the KRG as direct threats to its own interests, especially on the topic of Iranian-backed militias and political proxies.

In the NDAA, section 1224 [titled](#) “Prohibition of Transfers to Badr

Organization” makes it explicitly clear that the Department of Defense is prohibited from funding any Badr-linked militia. Badr militias fall under the Iranian-backed umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which aim to dominate the entire Iraqi political sphere. The United States has since ramped up its efforts to combat the influence of the PMF in Iraq to deter the growth of Tehran’s control over the country. But what more can be done to improve the KRG-U.S. relationship in becoming increasingly close and strategic?

Even the most hard-lined and non-interventionist government officials, like Syrian specialist Robert Stephen Ford, affirm that U.S. commitment to the Kurdistan Regional Government will continue. As a diplomat, Ford is quite vocal against U.S. involvement with Middle Eastern non-state groups and [supported](#) Donald Trump’s policy to withdraw from North Eastern Syria in 2019. But take notice with what the former U.S. Ambassador to Syria [stated](#) in a interview with Erbil on November 17th:

“I don’t think the cooperation with Peshmerga will end; I think it will continue, but I also think the Americans want to reduce their role in Iraq’s defense and give more responsibility to Iraqi security forces, including Peshmerga in the Kurdish region.”

Per Ford, the strength of U.S. and Iraqi Kurdistan is still ongoing, and the U.S. support for the Peshmerga will likewise do the same. But Ford mentions that Washington wishes to reduce its part in solely maintaining the defense of Iraq, and wants to give partial responsibility back to the militaries of the region. While the U.S. has [vacillated](#) on its future plans with its military in Iraq, one of the primary concerns of Washington should be the current condition of the Peshmerga, which is very much divided in its loyalties to the two major Iraqi Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). This divide in the Peshmerga is largely [responsible](#) for the military's struggle to self-operate as efficiently as it could be, especially in comparison to Baghdad's troops and the Popular Mobilization Front.

If Washington wishes to continue working with Iraqi Kurdistan as a geo-political and strategic ally, while simultaneously stepping back as its care-taker, it absolutely must unite the Peshmerga first. Other international organizations, like the U.N., have [expressed](#) extreme importance on the unification process, and such a process only but builds a stronger Iraqi Kurdish front against IS cells and Iranian-backed militias in Iraq. The current state of the Peshmerga, while not completely inefficient, would struggle without U.S. military aid and training that it currently receives to the present, and fears that an Iraqi Kurdistan left

unguarded would allow for other militaries and militias to take control of the region. There have been [calls](#) for the KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, led by Shoresheh Ismail Abdulla, to better maintain the Peshmerga in order to unite the troops, as well as intelligence sharing between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Washington must play a central role in this process beyond public support for unification, and must regularly meet with officials from both parties to begin confidence-building processes. A unified Peshmerga would legitimize Iraqi Kurdistan to a considerable degree and aid in the expansion of its role in the international arena, which also benefits Washington from a bilateral perspective.

Whether in the NDAA or in actionable policy that the U.S. applies to the Middle Eastern region, Iraqi Kurdistan still stands as one of Washington's most prominent allies. Its effectiveness against IS underground cells and Iranian militias is unparalleled in Iraq, and the public support for its political leaders demonstrate that Washington must keep Erbil close, lest U.S. policy initiatives in the Middle East face the possibility of failure. Most importantly, if Washington wishes for Iraqi Kurdistan to stand more on its own, it must put in the effort for Erbil's Peshmerga to be able to reach such a reality.

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## The Case for the Permanent United States Presence in North Eastern Syria

On December 19th of 2018, then president Donald Trump had ordered the withdrawal of all U.S. troops in the Syrian Arab Republic, which was a shock to all parties involved in the Syrian conflict, but Trump was subsequently [convinced](#) to reconsider the withdrawal. However, as the Turkish government continued to pressure Trump in 2019, his Administration decided to fully implement a U.S. withdrawal in Syria. Following the U.S. announcement of their withdrawal, Ankara began their third invasion of North Eastern Syria, known as [Operation Peace Spring](#). The North Eastern Syrian region began to rapidly destabilize, and U.S. troops scrambled to withdraw as soon as possible.

After much blowback from international parties, local Kurdish forces that serve as U.S. allies, and domestic politicians, the Trump Administration began to slowly reverse its drawdown of the troops with waves of policies that were vague in nature, as earlier policies were firm in the withdrawal of Syria, but later were centered around a delayed withdrawal, and then finally a commitment to a [“permanent”](#) presence in North Eastern Syrian to monitor IS cells and maintain fossil fuel interests. The United States had tried to leave, but realized that if it did, Iranian, Russian, and Turkish interests would all but benefit in their



withdrawal, leaving the Syrian Kurds to either face invasion from Ankara, or to strike a deal with Damascus.

In the year of 2020, US troops grew in presence in North Eastern Syria for the [purpose of oil](#) and protection of Kurdish interests, which sparked further [tensions](#) with Moscow. Continuing into 2021 with the Biden Administration, policies became more militarized to defend North Eastern Syria from the expansion of Iranian-backed militias, also known as the Popular Mobilization Front. On the Syrian border, the U.S. carried out [airstrikes](#) on Iranian proxies Kait'ib Hezbollah and Kait'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada on February 25th, 2021. The attack [reportedly](#) killed 17 pro-Iranian fighters. But following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, fears had arisen in North Eastern Syria that similar military drawdowns would occur for the U.S. troops stationed in Rojava, but officials from the Executive Council of the Autonomous Administrations of North Eastern Syria publicly stated that their talks with Washington [confirmed](#) that no such withdrawal is currently in place. But how exactly does the United States benefit from maintaining its presence in North Eastern Syria?

The most central part of a continued presence in Syria is to counter the influence of the Russian Federation, Iran, and Turkey. While no powers involved in Syria exactly agree with each other on all Syrian matters, as Moscow believes

that Assad's government is fit to rule Syria, while Ankara disagrees and sponsors the Syrian Interim Government to conquer Syria and replace Assad's rule in Damascus. Iran invests heavily on militias to fight against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the U.S., and is working to [replace Russia](#) as Damascus's premier partner to then have closer [proximity](#) to threaten Israel. But if there is anything to be agreed upon by these parties, it is the fact that the United States stands as an obstacle between all of them becoming the regional "winner" of the Syrian conflict. Despite the consequences of the 2019 U.S. Withdrawal from Syria, the United States continues to maintain a strong relationship with the Syrian Kurds, who form the majority of the SDF, SDC, and the AANES. With the [US-SDF joint presence alone](#), Russian, Turkish, and Iranian advances have been scarce, but when actively put into combat, the US-SDF militaries have been effective in defending villages that are attempting democratic reform, as well as oil fields and refineries that the U.S. has been using since 2020. Working with the AANES provides a safehold for U.S. foreign policy interests in the Middle East, with its geographical positioning extremely close to adversaries like Iran. Combined with the SDF, U.S. presence continues to [prevent](#) Tehran from establishing a geographic corridor with Lebanon and the Mediterranean. American troops also safeguard Kurdish oil fields and American-Kurdish oil contracts from being [manipulated](#) by Moscow, and curb Turkey's [ambitions](#) to

use Syria as a launching point for its aspirations as a regional Mediterranean power. The cities that fall under AANES rule have seen excellent [democratic reform](#), in terms of cultural, religious, and gender expression, as well as the political empowerment of women and youth. Despite being in one of the world's worst crises, AANES and SDF officials have maintained to achieve progress in Syrian coexistence. But without further U.S. commitment, the AANES would be [likely outmatched](#) by either Moscow, Ankara, or Tehran, and the United States would lose a vital territory in its effort and national interest to stabilize the Middle East. An isolated North Eastern Syria leaves it prey to a power vacuum that Iran, Turkey, and Russia would quickly [move to fill](#), and any of whose rise to greater influence would further destabilize the Syrian Arab Republic.

But a strong U.S. presence does much more than just counter foreign adversaries, it also combats against the growth of the IS in Syria and Iraq, as joint SDF-US operations successfully diminished IS forces in 2019. Of course, the U.S. withdrawal of Syria hurt the coalition's efforts to further disengage IS, and during the brief period of U.S. withdrawal and the lack of necessary troops that was provided during the drawback had [allowed](#) IS forces to regrow and re-expand their terror cells in 2019 and 2020. Into 2021, analysts have agreed that the complete elimination of IS forces in Syria and Iraq will [not likely be](#) a short-term goal, and seeing that Washington is seeking to defeat the Caliphate,

long-term U.S. operations must be put into place as IS terror cells transition deeper underground. Being that the regrowth of IS in war-torn Syria and politically unstable Iraq would be [catastrophic for the regional stability](#) of the Middle East, as well as the U.S.'s national interests in the region, working with Kurdish forces is a must to curb an IS resurgence. The Kurdish forces from North Eastern Syria, such as the Peoples's Defense Units (YPG) and the Women's Defense Forces (YPJ), have had the most success against IS forces and [consistently](#) outmatch them when alongside the US military. Not to forget that North Eastern Syrian officials are also [responsible](#) for the aftermath of combat with IS forces, as the SDF and its political wing, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) have safeguarded and monitored the refugee camps that ex-IS fighters are displaced to, despite the Kurdish groups [lacking](#) the proper manpower and funding to sustainably manage them. Without the United States, a stronger IS in Syria and Iraq means a stronger IS around the world, seeing as the global terror cell stems from the Levant area. Being the one force from allowing the resurgence of IS in all corners of the world, as well as curbing influence from Russia, Iran, and Turkey, the U.S. would benefit in its efforts to [maintain](#) its position as the hegemon of world security. This can only be done with the United States strengthening its permanent presence in North Eastern Syria,

working alongside the Syrian Kurdish peoples of Rojava and North Eastern Syria.

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## **In the Shadow of the Crescent: The Current State of Turkish-U.S. Relations**

Since the signing of the Truman Doctrine by Washington and Ankara in 1947, Turkey has been a geostrategic partner of the United States for decades. But Turkey has seen almost a decade of [democratic backsliding](#), as President Recep Erdoğan continues to strengthen his authoritarian advances in Ankara and seek further expansionism in the Mediterranean and the Near East. With Erdoğan's political party actively ignoring and decreasing democratic initiatives, as well as pursuing stronger ties with President Vladimir Putin and Russia at large, where exactly does Ankara's relationship with Washington stand?

Trust is the most concerning flashpoint between the United States and Turkey, as Washington and Ankara continue to disagree with each other on their foreign policy objectives. Turkey's policy ambitions of "[strategic autonomy](#)" have given the Western world much concern on where Ankara's dependence has shifted to. Is Turkey a NATO country, one that promotes democratic ideologies and greater social reform? Or is Turkey a country that executes foreign policies

that delineate democratic values and purchases missiles from Moscow?

Strategic autonomy does much of the latter, and has been the source of tension between Washington and Ankara ever since its implementation in the mid-2010's. Worse yet, strategic autonomy will continue to stagnate Turkish-U.S. relations until either side decides to properly recognize that their relationship needs to be redefined.

The emblematic issue facing Turkey's "strategic autonomy" is Erdoğan's recent advances towards Russia. Moscow and Ankara have been back and forth on many issues, especially on Syria and Libya, but President Erdoğan--nonetheless the criticism raised by both Europe and Washington--has continued to entertain the idea of [purchasing another round](#) of Moscow's S-400 missiles. The first purchasing round resulted in the United States banning Ankara from permanently acquiring any F-35s, as well as [implementing CAATSA sanctions](#) on Turkey from 2020. The Biden Administration has confirmed that both the F-35 ban and CAATSA sanctions will [stay in place](#) during Biden's term as U.S. president, meaning that if Ankara wants more weapons, it has to either double down with Russia, or alleviate its pushback on the West. Publicly, Erdoğan has rebuked such actions by Trump and Biden as hurtful to the Turkish-U.S. relationship and that Turkey's purchase with Moscow should be no business of Washington's. In the context of buying additional S-400 missiles and the

Turkish-Russian relationship at large, Erdoğan has even gone as far as [to say](#) that:

“In the future, nobody will be able to interfere in terms of what kind of defence systems we acquire, from which country, at what level ... Nobody can interfere with that. We are the only ones to make such decisions.”

It is clear that Turkey wishes to strengthen its power in the region, and for years Ankara has [foreseen](#) a stronger relationship with Russia as a path towards achieving that goal, all withstanding its balancing act with Europe and Washington. Its “strategic autonomy” initiative, which is symbolic of Erdoğan’s talks of another S-400 deal, is a continued threat to their permanent relations with the United States as Turkey does not have the proper foundations to truly “autonomize” itself and will only result in a strategic failure for Erdoğan, as well as further political collapse with Washington. This is because the primary component of strategic autonomy operating effectively is Turkey balancing the powers that may very well give them greater power (i.e. Russia, China, Iran) but also the powers that have allowed them to prosper over the years (i.e. The West). When Washington and Europe fail to safeguard Turkish advances, Turkey excels in its foreign policy efforts as it has much less to balance diplomatically. When left unchecked via the proper enforcing institutions, Ankara oftentimes concedes. In the context of U.S.-Turkish relations, the Trump presidency was the

primary cause for most of the Turkish military and political gains from 2016 to 2020, as Erdoğan was given free reign from Washington during that time. But the more traditionalist, institution-enforcing ideology of the Biden Administration will cause strategic autonomy to struggle [quite dramatically](#). As mentioned before, President Biden has kept much of the sanctions imposed by Trump that have hurt Turkey to a degree, but when combined with the heavy emphasis Washington has put towards rebuilding European ties and enforcing democratic norms, Turkey can no longer rebuke Greece in the Mediterranean, or so easily invade Syria and attack U.S.-Kurdish allies, as two examples. In other words, strategic autonomy will fail under the conditions that Turkey is to be held accountable for its actions and advances.

And this shift towards an ineffective strategic autonomy has already begun to play out in the global world, as when President Erdoğan attempted to flex his muscles and [threatened](#) to expel ten Western ambassadors from Turkey in mid October, he [recanted](#) on his remarks just two days later and allowed the diplomats to stay in Ankara. This isn't to mention that the Turkish lira [tanked](#) the day of Erdoğan's announcement to expel the diplomats and most likely influenced his decision to cede his criticism of the West. With its current economic debt [crisis](#), strategic autonomy is entirely unsustainable for Turkey as it cannot stand on its own economically, nor politically. While Ankara may



indeed be attempting to foster better relations with Russia, Russia has continued to implement [policies](#) that ensure Turkey is beneath them, rarely beside them. Erdoğan continues to lose political support domestically due to the [poor state](#) of the Turkish economy, heavily [threatening](#) the AKP's hold on Ankara with the upcoming elections in 2023. If Turkey truly does somehow rid itself of the West, but cannot trust Russia nor properly manage itself independently, strategic autonomy will do nothing to Turkey but haphazardly isolate itself from the global arena. Combined with the Biden Administration's promises to enforce greater global liberalization, Turkey's strategic autonomy may work well in public presentation and rhetoric, but cannot be effectively materialized at this period in the international arena.

But this development is news to neither Ankara nor Washington, and the awkward global positioning of Turkey is the dominating feature of the current relationship between both countries and will continue through the Biden Administration. The S-400 Missile dispute, really the sale of Russian weapons and military vehicles to Turkey overall, is emblematic of how much Washington is willing to push Turkey into a corner, and how Turkey sees itself in less of a corner and more in a rock and a hard place; as the Russian option exists, but it is not yet entirely feasible. For now, Erdoğan is likely to ease his breaching of NATO and Washington, but just as much publicly condemn them for as much as

he can distract the Turkish public from the deterioration of Turkey's economy and democratic institutions. But what exactly can the Biden Administration do to mend relations with Ankara? One potential point has much to do with the F-35 fighter jets, as Russia continues to [pressure](#) Turkey to purchase its own fighter jets instead of Washington's, and seeing that Turkey's F-16s are much too outdated, Turkey continues to consider purchasing the jets from Moscow. The Biden Administration can very well find a way to convince Biden and Congress to allow for a [workaround](#) of the [CAATSA](#) sanctions on Turkey in order for them to re-enter the F-35 program, perhaps in exchange for Ankara to include Washington in joint intelligence and surveillance on the S-400s. The use of the S-400s must also be heavily limited to pass NATO requirements of proper security and defense parameters. The Biden Administration must realize that the sale of the S-400 missiles is over and done with, and the most they can do to maintain a positive relationship with Turkey is to ensure that the missiles deployment are regulated to specific use, and that they pose no threat to American intelligence in the Turkish-U.S. bases that they are stationed in. If both countries can work together and concede on this issue, the ground that has begun to divide them will shrink a sizable amount.

The other issue plaguing the Turkish-U.S. relationship is the United States' support of the SDF in Syria, one such debacle that President Erdoğan continues

to be infuriated over. Turkey sees the U.S. arms sales and exercises alongside the SDF as a direct threat to its internal stability, as the YPG is a group under the SDF umbrella and is considered to be a terrorist group in Turkey due to their supposed connections to the PKK. The SDF has continued to maintain their separation from the PKK, despite Ankara launching multiple attacks in North Eastern Syria to cease further growth of Kurdish influence, with another [possible](#) attack on the horizon. Tensions have run high between Washington and Ankara on this matter, but one clear solution that Washington can take, as a sign of good will, is the return of its policy to publicly list all the U.S. weapons sold to the SDF, with Ankara having access to said documents. This further [defines](#) the SDF as a security asset to Turkey, rather than a security threat. If received well in Ankara, the United States could also reaffirm its promise to have all weapons returned from the SDF once conflict has been officially ceased, only if Turkey ceases its active operations in Syria against unarmed Kurdish civilians, as well as taking steps towards recognizing the growing political legitimacy of the SDF in a post-war Syria. Both sides have things to gain from such policies, however far-fetched they may be. For now, barring any concessions from either Washington or Ankara, the state of Turkish-U.S. relations will continue to stagnate and head towards a direction that is beneficial for neither party involved.

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## The Sino-Iranian 25-Year Plan and its Consequences in the U.S. Interests

In March of 2021, the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Regime of Iran finalized their 25-Year Strategic Comprehensive Agreement that laid out the groundwork for increasing bilateral cooperation between the two countries. While first drafted in 2016, and [subsequently leaked](#) to multiple media outlets in 2020, it was effectively signed into order on March 27th of 2021. While the specifics of the final deal are not exactly public, the [foundation of the agreement](#) as written in 2016 was released publicly by the President of Iran and comprises what is estimated to be the majority of the finalized deal.

On June 28th of 2021, the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission released a [report](#) titled “China-Iran Relations: A Limited but Enduring Strategic Partnership”, that detailed the trajectory of Sino-Iranian relations following the release of their new 25-Year Agreement, and the specifics of the deal that U.S. government officials have had executive access to review. Within the U.S.C.C. report, several factors concluded that Sino-Iranian relations are indeed expanding but are not exactly formalized in the agreement, nor are both nations entirely co-dependent on each other, as the Islamic Regime has much more of a bilateral reliance on Beijing than Beijing does on Iran. But it

did mention that closer cooperation between the two nations is a threat to U.S. regional influence.

Starting in 2016, the People's Republic of China has increasingly invested in maintaining its role as Iran's premier trade and economic partner, accounting for much of Iran's economic survival since the United States' re-entering of Iranian sanctions in 2018. Beijing sees both the geographical position of Iran and its abundance of natural resources--mainly fossil fuels--as economically beneficial for its Belt and Road Initiative. The U.S.C.C. report mentions a [specific](#) Sino-Iranian economic policy outlined in the 2020 leaked version of the 25-Year agreement that was strangely absent from the 2021 finalized draft: "China's government promised to increase investment in Iran by \$400 billion in sectors such as transportation, ports, and telecommunications in return for discounted oil". The report also alleges that some Chinese oil companies are [interested](#) in investing and reinvesting in Iranian oil, but that the direct economic benefits that China receives from Iran is minimal, being that investments in Iran since 2016 have failed to meet Beijing's expectations both in 2018 and 2020. This led the report to conclude that the \$400 billion policy will never come into fruition for Iran, as China is still skeptical on Tehran's ability to return on their investments, and is most likely why the exact numbers in the finalized agreement are absent, in addition to avoid the agitation of other oil-producing

nations like Saudi Arabia. However, the ability for China to eventually have complete dominance over Iranian oil is an idea that is becoming more appealing to Chinese investors and Beijing at large, and more worrying for U.S. sanction efforts on Iran. But according to [certain sources](#), Tehran has begun pushing back on the idea of China dominating their oil industry and economic land ownership, but this is not to downplay the role that China has in relation to direct economic control over Iran, as the increase of Chinese spending is linked to Tehran's lack and absence of criticism towards Beijing's most controversial policies--the attacks and genocide of the Uyghurs, as one example. The more that China spends and integrates Iran into its BRI and bilateral trade policies, the more that Tehran lessens in political autonomy over Near East affairs, as an effort to please Beijing.

But the grounds of the 25-Year Plan that both countries can stand more confidently together on is their military and intelligence policies. The shared interest of limiting U.S. involvement and influence in the Near East, whether in Iraq, Israel, the Caucasus, or Syria, calls both nations to come together in their efforts to curb Washington advances in the region. China funds much of Iran's ballistic missile and weapon programs, and Beijing was one of the main funders of the Iranian 2020 missile attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq. The clear reliance that Tehran has on China for its purchasing and developing of weapons

has been solidified since 2007, when [reports released](#) that China had been selling arms to Iran, who then re-sold the arms to the Taliban in Afghanistan to profit. As the years continued in 2014, Tehran continued dialogue with Beijing about potential purchases of Chinese fighter jets, anti-air missiles, and frigates. But it was in 2019, as the UN Embargo on Iranian Arms was in its last year in effect, when China and Russia [reportedly](#) approached Iran about potential sales of fighter jets and tanks. But due to the poor economic state of Iran in 2021, [no purchases](#) of fighter jets have been made, despite the much needed advancements to the Iranian air forces, with their last development period being 1979. While Beijing and Moscow have offered sales, Iran cannot produce the amount required, and even when offered oil as a replacement to capital, Russia and China have [rejected](#) such deals and have continued weapons sales. China also has been in collaboration with Iran about the advancement of its GPS systems and sale of UAVs, as Tehran's telecommunications network is far behind what Moscow and Beijing currently expect from the Islamic Regime. In terms of Sino-Iranian intelligence, the relationship grew close in 2012, when China and Iran were [accused](#) of collaborating on the exposure of U.S. counterintelligence agencies in both countries. In 2020, the Trump Administration [declassified](#) unconfirmed intelligence that Beijing had communicated with non-state actors in Afghanistan that associate with Iran, and offered them bounties to attack

American soldiers. Similarly in 2020, the State Department [sanctioned](#) five Chinese individuals and entities for their involvement in the development and sale to the Iranian missile program, which had targeted U.S. troops in Iraq. The more that the Chinese pours into Iran military investment, the more that the American military pays the price of their growing alliance. Beijing's interests in the Iranian military is clear, while direct collaboration may not be in China's interest, decreasing U.S. presence via the sale of weapons to Iran most definitely is.

The 25-Year plan is emblematic of how both countries are unsure how to establish concrete goals for short and long term benefits, both militarily and economically. But China's attempts to add Iran to its direct area of influence is not only met by Iranian obstacles as previously mentioned, but also by other Belt and Road Initiative members that are adversaries to Iran, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. The more economic assistance and weapons sales that Tehran demands from Beijing, the more that other Arab nations become increasingly displeased and potentially weaken Beijing's plan of dominating the regional area of the Near East, which is primarily why China is so vague in its economic and military commitments to Iran. However, the more that the two nations grow closer, the more that U.S. interests in Iraq and the Gulf will be threatened by Sino-Iranian cooperation. While the 25-Year Plan lacks substance



and dedication from Beijing's end, further cooperation with China only creates a more dangerous Iran to U.S. interests alone.

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