

Turkey's Invasion of Syria, Made in the U.S.A.



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William D. Hartung, Director, Arms and Security Project, Center for International Policy

What's At Issue

After essentially giving a green light to Turkey's invasion of northern Syria to attack the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) forces, President Trump took a slight turn when he declared that there would be severe economic consequences for Turkey's economy if the intervention was not carried out in a "humane" fashion. If the president were to take action to try to stem a military incursion that he helped facilitate, he could start by cutting off support for Turkey's military, which is heavily dependent on U.S.-supplied equipment.

Overview of U.S. Weapons in Turkey's Arsenal

Decades of U.S. assistance and sales have helped create a Turkish military that relies heavily on U.S.-made weaponry. Some key examples, drawn from the most recent edition of the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *Military Balance*, are below. ¹

Air Force:

The Turkish Air Force's stock of combat aircraft is composed entirely of U.S.-supplied fighter and fighter/ground attack (FGA) planes. Of 333 combat aircraft possessed by Turkey, 53 are older generation F-5 fighter planes, and 280 are fighter/ground attack planes that are all variants of the F-16, which is co-produced in Turkey. Turkey also has 31 U.S.-origin C-130 transport aircraft.

Army:

The United States has supplied the majority of Turkey's more than 2,400 Main Battle Tanks, including over 900 variants of the M-1 and 850 older generation M-48s, which were purchased in the 1960s and 1970s and modernized in the mid-1980s. In addition, over two-thirds of Turkey's more than 3,600 armored personnel carriers are U.S.-made M-113s.

Policy Options

U.S. arms sales are often justified on the grounds that they create "interoperability" with key allies so they can fight alongside the U.S. in a crisis. It is less often noted that arms sales also pose substantial risks that U.S.-supplied weapons may be used to abuse human rights, attack civilians, or otherwise act in a fashion contrary to U.S. interests. The most egregious recent example of this phenomenon has been Saudi Arabia's use of U.S. arms to bomb civilians in Yemen and spark the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Turkey's invasion of Syria is another example of U.S. arms being misused. The Turkish action should be a cautionary tale for Congress as it grapples with how best to monitor and control U.S. arms transfers.

Additional Info

The Center for International Policy's Security Assistance Monitor has done fact sheets on U.S. aid and arms transfers to both the [Syrian opposition](#) and the [Turkish military](#). For additional information in this issue brief, contact William D. Hartung, the director of CIP's Arms and Security Project, at williamhartung55@gmail.com.