

**Testimony of Undersecretary Victoria Nuland
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Hearing on U.S. Policy on Turkey
July 21, 2021**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to discuss the U.S.-Turkish relationship. We welcome the Committee's engagement on Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean, and we want to work together to advance U.S. interests and values in this region and beyond.

As this Committee knows well, the United States has a multi-faceted and complex relationship with Turkey, a NATO Ally for over 68 years. There are areas where we are firmly aligned in policy and outlook and working well together; there are areas where we don't see eye-to-eye and we are working to close the gaps; and there are areas where we have profound disagreements with the Turkish government, including with regard to Cyprus yesterday. In these last two categories, President Biden and all of us who work for him are frank with our Turkish counterparts when we disagree, as are Turkish officials with us.

To start with areas of strong cooperation, Turkey makes crucial contributions to NATO missions around the world. Our partnership with Turkey – which has the second largest standing military in NATO – enables us to project power in the region and defend NATO's eastern and southern flanks.

The United States also has an important economic relationship with Turkey, one that generates upwards of \$20 billion in annual bilateral trade. Roughly 1,700 U.S. companies operate in Turkey and 60 firms maintain regional headquarters in the country. U.S. liquefied natural gas exports to Turkey increased 305 percent between 2019 and 2020, a trend that if continued, will diversify Turkey's sources of natural gas supply and reduce reliance on pipeline gas from Russia and Iran. Since January, Turkey and Greece have also resumed exploratory talks on energy and other issues. Resource development in the Eastern Mediterranean should promote cooperation and provide a foundation for durable energy security and economic prosperity throughout the region.

Washington and Ankara share priorities in countering terrorism and deterring Russian and Iranian malign influence in the Middle East. Turkey is a staunch supporter of Ukraine's and Georgia's territorial integrity and vocally supports their accession to NATO.

In Libya, Turkey joins the United States and others in supporting the Libyan-led, UN-facilitated political process, including elections on December 24 this year. And we are discussing how to reduce the presence of foreign fighters and mercenaries there before the elections.

In Syria, Turkey's presence in the northwest protects some 4 million Syrians from indiscriminate targeting by the Assad regime; new attacks there would be both a humanitarian catastrophe and likely launch a new wave of refugees into Turkey and Europe. We are also grateful for Turkey's ongoing efforts to support the four million refugees, including 3.6 million Syrians, making Turkey the largest refugee-hosting country in the world.

Most recently, Turkey has expressed interest in maintaining a robust force at Kabul's airport as the U.S. and NATO military missions in Afghanistan come to an end. This contribution is vital to ensuring we and our Allies and partners can maintain a strong diplomatic presence in Kabul after our troops withdraw. Following discussions between Presidents Biden and Erdogan at the NATO summit last month, technical teams on both sides are working together to finalize this critical arrangement.

Even as we work closely with Ankara on these issues, President Biden has been clear with President Erdogan when we disagree, as have all members of our team with their counterparts. We continue to object to Turkey's purchase and deployment of the Russian S-400 air defense system and have made clear that any new major arms purchases from Russia risk triggering additional CAATSA sanctions. Sale and co-production of the F-35 will remain suspended.

We also press Turkey to avoid entanglements in regional conflicts that threaten long-term stability. The role played by third parties, including Turkey, in last year's fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict exacerbated regional tensions. We have pressed Turkey to urge Baku to release all detainees immediately, to support the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and to help the sides work towards a sustainable, long-term political solution to the conflict.

We also urge Turkey's leader to address disagreements in the region through diplomacy, rather than through provocative actions or rhetoric. We condemn yesterday's announcement by Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar and Turkish President Erdogan to allow Turkish Cypriots to take control of parts of Varosha. This move is inconsistent with UN Security Council resolutions 550 and 789, which explicitly call for Varosha to be administered by the United Nations. The United States views this action as provocative, unacceptable, and detrimental to the prospects for the resumption of settlement talks. We are urging a reversal of this decision and are working with like-minded partners in the UN Security Council. A Cypriot-led comprehensive settlement to reunify the island as a bizonal, bicomunal federation is the only path to lasting peace and stability.

President Biden has also made clear that supporting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law is a central priority for his administration. Protecting these freedoms is critical for Turkey to be a stable, democratic, and reliable Ally and partner. We have been clear with all levels of the Turkish government, and in the Department's annual Human Rights Report, about our specific concerns. The President expressed his disappointment over Turkey's recent withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against women, and the administration has continued to urge the Turkish government to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. We will continue to engage the Turkish government on individual human rights cases; media freedom; freedom of expression, assembly, and association; and judicial independence and fair trial guarantees. In this regard a top concern remains the release of local employees of U.S. Mission Turkey who have been unjustly detained.

We believe the best way to resolve these concerns and advance our agenda is through robust and regular engagement at all levels, and by candor and clarity with our Turkish counterparts. The Administration welcomes the opportunity to stay in close coordination with this Committee and

others in Congress on all these issues. We would also welcome regular direct engagement by Members with Turkish leaders and Congressional visits to Ankara, as conditions allow.

I would like to make one final point about the national security imperative of having our Senate-confirmed team of Department senior leaders and Ambassadors in place as soon as possible. I was pleased to see the President's announcement of your former colleague, Senator Flake, as the nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, and look forward to the Committee's consideration of him. I know the Committee is exploring how to expedite consideration of more than 20 other nominees in the weeks ahead of the August recess. We are grateful for this effort, and I just want to underscore that the strength of American diplomacy and the Department's role in the policy process will be greatly enhanced by moving these nominees expeditiously to full Senate confirmation before the recess.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

