

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*:

- President Erdoğan's visit to the United States and his meeting with President Trump are attracting widespread attention. We analysed the trip in depth with Yusuf Erim, editor-at-large at TRT World.
- The Global Sumud Flotilla, which set out to break Israel's illegal blockade of Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid, came under attack by Israel, sparking strong reactions across Türkiye.
- The new parliamentary year has officially begun.

Interview with TRT World Editor-at-Large Yusuf Erim on President Erdoğan's U.S. Visit and Meeting with President Trump

We conducted an insightful interview with TRT World Editor-at-Large Yusuf Erim, discussing key issues surrounding President Erdoğan's visit to the United States.

President Erdoğan described his recent meeting with Donald Trump and other leaders as "productive and positive." In your view, what significance might these engagements hold for addressing the situation in Gaza, both from a humanitarian perspective and in terms of regional politics?

First of all, it is a positive sign when you can bring together Muslim world leaders with the United States president, especially on a platform like the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. The meeting in itself is already a very positive thing, getting everyone together. After the Israeli strike on Qatar, the necessity for this meeting became a high-priority, urgent event. It was therefore very beneficial that the investigation was conducted so promptly after the Qatar attack. I think the Qatar attacks broke a new threshold not only for the Arab world, which now questions even Gulf security, but also for the United States, which is trying to understand whether there are any red lines for Israel. I don't think the United States was happy at all with the attack. Whether they allowed it, did not allow it—their level of complicity is questionable—but I do think they were very uncomfortable. They showed their discomfort. Their Arab allies indicated that they were uncomfortable. Their NATO ally, Türkiye, showed that it was uncomfortable. So again, it was good to have everyone come together.

Observations indicate that Trump now understands that the level of tolerance for Israel is zero in the Muslim world and that Netanyahu is probably the most disliked world leader right now—probably the most disliked world leader of this new century. Any further support for him is just leading to Israel's isolation and also distancing these countries from the U.S., as they lose confidence in their relationship with Washington. American adversaries, such as Russia and China, are finding new opportunities. I think that President Trump understands very clearly, after this face-to-face with Arab allies and his NATO ally, that everything from here will lead to local solutions from local actors.

I also thought it was very interesting that the Egyptian foreign minister proposed a collective-defence-style cooperation among regional countries that would have included Egypt and Türkiye together. Obviously, if the Egyptian foreign minister is proposing something involving Türkiye, he must have received a green light from the Turks as well. So, Türkiye seems warm and receptive to some type of collective defence understanding, especially to limit Israel's offensive actions in the region. Unfortunately, it was not accepted. But even this conversation and proposal are very important. There is reason to believe the U.S. has received the message and feels a greater sense of urgency than before—that they must find a solution. And every day that a solution is not reached, or at least feasible proposals are not made, is just another day of distance between themselves and their Muslim partners.

How would you assess the recent LNG agreement and memorandum of understanding on nuclear cooperation between the United States and Türkiye? What potential effects could these have on Türkiye's broader geopolitical positioning?

There are two products that Trump is very interested in selling in the energy sector. One of them is LNG, and the other is modular nuclear reactors. Türkiye needs both, and it wants both. It was therefore no surprise that modular atomic energy reactors and LNG sales were specifically discussed during this meeting.

Over the past five to six years, Türkiye has sought to establish itself as a regional energy hub. To be an energy hub, first of all, you need to have multiple varieties of energy on store and on offer to regional actors—natural gas, oil, LNG, the full spectrum of energy. This is exactly what Türkiye is trying to do with Russian gas, Turkmen gas, Azerbaijani gas, oil from Iraq and northern Iraq, and oil from Iran. They are trying to provide a portfolio of different oils and gases of various grades for both sale and domestic consumption.

This LNG purchase by Türkiye with the U.S. is not only an important economic tie, strengthening one of the bonds in the relationship from an energy perspective, but also crucial for Türkiye's energy hub ambitions—to have access to different types of energy from various sources and across the full spectrum.

With the Akkuyu power plant, Türkiye took a big step with Russia, but we see how long a large nuclear power plant takes to build—it can be decades. Modular reactors are much quicker to set up, cheaper to manufacture, and, although smaller in capacity, they offer faster results.

And we are only going to see bigger demand for energy as time goes by, as Türkiye's population increases, and as new technologies, such as EVs, demand more electricity. Türkiye is becoming increasingly involved in AI, possibly also exploring quantum computing and big data centres in the future. These are all projects and initiatives that will create a tremendous demand for energy. Nuclear energy is currently one of the best and cleanest sources of energy that we have. So, I am confident that nuclear energy is a very, very smart area where the U.S. and Türkiye can cooperate.

Do you see the outcomes of this meeting creating conditions that could influence Türkiye's future role in the F-35 program?

Well, regarding the F-35, the Turks say they want it, and Trump says he wants to give it. First of all, Türkiye does not need the F-35 as much as it did five to ten years ago. Back then, it was a tremendous option. Now, does it still need it? Does it still want it? It can be argued that the F-35 would be a luxury. It would be nice if Türkiye could get it, but only under favourable conditions. Anything outside of favourable conditions is no longer a necessity.



(Celal Güneş - Anadolu Agency)

We're only a couple of years away from the domestic fighter jet project KAAAN. We're also a couple of years away from the unmanned fighter jet Kızılelma. There's already an offer for Eurofighter Typhoons on the table, and a possible modernisation of the F-16. So, Türkiye now has many alternatives—both stopgap solutions and long-term national solutions with the KAAAN. The main challenge is creating a sustainable supply chain, especially an engine, until the local engine is ready for the KAAAN inventory.

But outside of that, again, as I said, it would be nice if Türkiye could have the F-35s, especially if it's part of a mixed deal where there are 40 modernisation kits with the F-16 Vipers, F-35s, and Eurofighter Typhoons because it is clear that Türkiye has learned the lesson that it needs to hedge its bets and diversify its procurement regarding these fighter jets. Otherwise, it gets held hostage, just as it did with the F-35. And for a country as important as Türkiye, which wants to be a security provider and is critical to NATO's southeastern flank, a country like this cannot be held hostage. As part of its plan to free itself from such dependency, Erdoğan developed a domestic defence industry.

But if it is going to turn into another long-term soap opera, Türkiye can move forward without the F-35. Ultimately, it is a significant loss for Lockheed Martin. Türkiye is the largest buyer of F-16s and would likely have been a substantial buyer of F-35s as well.

Again, Trump wants to give it to them. But at the end of the day, that requires congressional approval. So even Trump promising Erdoğan doesn't really mean anything. It's something we will have to follow closely.

On Syria, how do you evaluate the current dynamic between U.S. recognition of Türkiye's role and its ongoing support for the YPG/SDG? What developments, if any, might be expected in U.S. policy toward Syria going forward?

Ever since November, with the liberation of Syria, and almost ten months later, the new al-Sharaa administration has done very well to show that it can provide stability. It has demonstrated an effort to be an inclusive government. It has shown that it wants to be a peaceful government, especially vis-à-vis Israel. It has been attacked over 800 times by Israel and has not retaliated once. It no longer wants war, and it has demonstrated this clearly.

There are some attempts to create an internal struggle or insurgency, but al-Sharaa has not fallen for these traps. He is trying to remain calm, solve problems diplomatically, and maintain internal peace. Many Western countries are pleasantly surprised. They view this as a very good sign and understand its significance. Hence, sanctions are being lifted because they want to give the new Syrian government a chance to succeed. For that chance to succeed, sanctions must be lifted, rebuilding must begin, and there must be investment. Türkiye will play a big role there.

Trump's assignment of Tom Barrack, the ambassador to Türkiye, also as a Syria envoy, shows that Trump understands the importance of Türkiye in Syria's future. Barrack's dual role creates good synergy for the American side, with Turks, Syrians, and Americans working together. Trump has also stated that he is preparing to make a significant announcement regarding Syria soon.

Currently, I believe Türkiye and the United States on Syria are probably as positive as they have ever been, or at least the future looks more optimistic than it has in the past. I consider that the disbanding of the PKK has dealt a huge blow to the YPG. Assessment suggests the U.S. understands that the YPG is not a feasible partner anymore—that was an Obama-era mistake. There is reason to believe Trump's designation of Antifa as a terror organisation in the United States is also a very important signal to the YPG, because let's not forget, the YPG trained that group, which the U.S. itself has now designated as a terror group. These are extremely important signals for the future. And one can conclude the U.S. will slowly but surely phase out any cooperation with the YPG.

Of course, there are elements inside CENTCOM that have been very sympathetic to the YPG over the years. But at the end of the day, these are elements within a military, not the Commander-in-Chief or Washington, D.C. Again, it is going to take some patience because this mistake wasn't built in one year, so it cannot be solved very quickly. But I do see it being solved. More crucial than the YPG issue, analysis suggests that Washington's relationship with Damascus carries greater significance. Because if Washington and Damascus have a good relationship, Damascus will likely resolve the YPG problem on its own anyway. I believe that's the most important part.

I think Türkiye needs to be a little patient with this, as long as the YPG is not creating an urgent national security problem for Türkiye. I believe a local solution from Damascus will probably be better for everyone—better for Türkiye, better for Syria, and more acceptable to the international community. However, if the YPG does create some destabilisation, while Türkiye obviously has to protect its own national security, there is a strong likelihood the United States will be much more understanding if that situation arises in the future.

Israel's Illegal Detention of the Global Sumud Flotilla Condemned by Türkiye

This week, one of the most closely followed issues in Türkiye has been Israel's unlawful interception of the Global Sumud Flotilla. The convoy, which carried humanitarian aid and activists bound for Gaza, was stopped in international waters, with ships seized and supplies confiscated. Among those on board were 56 Turkish citizens, a fact that has heightened the visibility of the incident in Ankara and across the wider Turkish public. Ankara strongly condemned Israel's unlawful assault in harsh terms, describing it as a terrorist act under international law.



(Silvia Bazzicalupo - Anadolu Agency)

At the same time, Türkiye continues to engage diplomatically on the so-called "Trump plan" for Gaza. Intelligence chief İbrahim Kalın's meetings in Qatar reflect Ankara's effort to assess the viability of a deal that Washington presents as a path forward. Yet scepticism runs deep in Türkiye's domestic debate: questions abound over whether such a framework could be either just or enforceable, particularly in light of the ongoing blockade and civilian suffering in Gaza.

The flotilla raid has not only drawn condemnation but also ignited protests inside Türkiye. Beginning on the night of October 1, demonstrations spread rapidly from Istanbul and Ankara to cities across the country. Crowds denounced Israel's actions against both the flotilla and Gaza itself, framing the episode as yet another chapter in what many Turkish citizens view as the systematic dispossession and suffering of the Palestinian people.

Türkiye today finds itself at a crossroads: a regional power seeking to shape international responses while also managing the intense domestic resonance of the Gaza issue. The blockade, the war, and the genocide against Palestinians remain defining political concerns inside Türkiye, ensuring that Ankara's every move on this front will be scrutinised not just by world capitals, but by its own citizens.

New Parliamentary Year Opens with President Erdoğan's Speech

The Turkish Grand National Assembly convened on October 1, with President Erdoğan delivering the inaugural speech, setting the tone for the upcoming legislative session. In his address, the president highlighted several central themes, including a "Terror-Free Türkiye," the ongoing situation in Palestine, the importance of national unity, and measures to ensure economic prosperity. These points underscored the administration's priorities and framed the broader political and social agenda for the coming period.

The session also revealed significant political dynamics within the opposition. Notably, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Turkish Workers' Party (TİP) chose to boycott the opening, abstaining from attending Erdoğan's speech. This decision reinforced the perception of ongoing distance between these parties and the ruling administration, signalling that tensions over policy direction and parliamentary cooperation remain unresolved.

At the same time, Erdoğan's interactions with other opposition parties drew attention. Warm exchanges and greetings with deputies from the pro-Kurdish DEM Party were viewed



(Emin Sansar - Anadolu Agency)

positively, signalling potential progress in the Terror-Free Türkiye agenda. In contrast, photographs with deputies from the DEVA and Future Parties—both former allies of the CHP—prompted questions about whether strategic challenges a period of relative isolation, highlighting strategic challenges for the party within the broader opposition landscape.

Highlights

■ The large-scale money laundering investigation, initially targeting Can Holding, has now been extended to Ciner Holding. Known for its long-standing presence in the media sector, Ciner Holding is under scrutiny, and further developments are expected as more details of the investigation emerge.

■ Turkey's official foreign exchange reserves reached a record high of \$183 billion as of September 26, according to figures released by the Central Bank on Thursday.

■ Auto sales in Türkiye remained robust in September, rising 25.7% year-on-year to 110,302 units, according to the Automotive Distributors' and Mobility Association (ODMD). Passenger cars alone jumped 26.8% to 88,274 units, while light commercial vehicles rose 21.7% to 22,028 units. Year-to-date through September, total vehicle sales increased 9.2% to 927,647 units.

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