



BEHIND THE DEFENSE EXPENDITURES: WHAT PROMPTS TÜRKIYE TO ADVANCE ITS DEFENSE PURCHASES AND EXPENDITURES IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES?

ABSTRACT

As Türkiye increases its defense exports, this paper delves into the reasons and consequences of Ankara's decisions and priorities. The reasons range from political to economic to historical. Erdogan holds tight to his chair, attempting to divert the public's attention from depleting social conditions to foreign defense collaborations.

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Contents

Behind the defense expenditures: What prompts Türkiye to advance its defense purchases and expenditures in contemporary times?	2
News Summary	7
References	13



Behind the defense expenditures: What prompts Türkiye to advance its defense purchases and expenditures in contemporary times?

Introduction

In this world of disruptions, the globe is witnessing another strange yet interesting phenomenon unfolding itself in stages: Türkiye's huge rise in its defense expenditures. At prima facie, it may seem common for a country to expand its defense base and spread arms for its security. Several countries spend a significant amount of their money on defense. But few points make it uncommon and a sign for other countries to mind sensitivities or take note of every development. Since 2002, the country has been ruled by a hero turned hegemon - President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. After he assumed power, he pushed for a variety of policies. His efforts for EU membership and controlling the interference of military in civilian matters are known to all. But amid all this, fear still looms.

Scholars have called Erdogan's policy as 'neo-ottomanism,' when talking about foreign policy and managing global affairs. The term owes its existence to the erstwhile Ottoman Empire which once controlled parts of West Asia, Southeast Europe, and North Africa in its prime. The empire was under Caliphate – the religious of Sunni Muslims of the world. This analogy is visible s to President Erdogan in the contemporary times. In such circumstances, eyeing on the defense expenditures of the country becomes essential.

A look at the defense industry

Türkiye has the NATO's (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) second largest standing army. Though an organization named **Defense Industry Development and Support Administration Office (SAGEB)** came into force in 1985, keeping in mind the defense needs of the country. In 2010s, the country shifted to domestic production.

Experts have claimed that the rise in the defense indigenization of the country can be traced back to various historical factors. It includes incidents when the US put an embargo over Türkiye over its intervention in Cyprus in 1970s over the recent sanctions by the US when it purchased Russian made S-400 missiles. Germany imposed similar sanctions in the 1990s.

As of now, there are about 3,000 weapons companies in the nation. Prominent among them are **Aselsan, Havelsan, Roketsan, Baykar Technologies, and Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI)**. The arms and ammunitions produced by these companies such as the KAAN fighter jet, the Altay tank, Turkish UAVs, and UCAVs, the TCG Anadolu, Kızılelma, MILGEM projects, ANKA, and the National Infantry Rifle are of global repute.

The defense products have exceptional capabilities. For instance, the unmanned stealth fighter jet **Kızılelma**, while locking on an F-16 can directly hit the target using locally produced advanced **MURAD AESA radar** and firing a local air-to-air missile. Türkiye has also unveiled its first hypersonic missile, Tayfun Block-4. This ballistic missile is the hypersonic version of the Tayfun missile, the country's longest-



range nationally produced ballistic missile. The country is also working on its **Steel Dome (Celik Kubbe)**, a Turkish drone which described as a system that, augmented by AI, can identify and intercept any airborne threat.

ACCORDING TO STATISTICS, THE COUNTRY’S ARSENAL CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING

Army	Navy	Air Force
2,378 Battle tanks	12 Submarines	294 Combat aircraft
6,403 Armoured personnel carrier	16 Frigates	58 Drones
645 Infantry fighting vehicles	50 Patrol and combat boats	32+ Surface to air missiles
91 Attack helicopters	-	-
2,762 Artillery	-	-
1,404 Anti air craft guns	-	-

Türkiye’s 2026 budget sets aside 2.15 trillion liras for defense and internal security, which is a 33.9% increase from 2025. Out of this, 1.202 trillion liras of this is for national defense and 953 billion lira is for homeland security. The total amount set aside in the 2025 central government budget was 1.608 trillion liras, with 913.9 billion going to defense and 694.5 billion going to security.

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Türkiye holds a share of 1.7 percent in the global arms exports. In 2015-19, the share was 0.8 percent. According to this, the SIPRI report says there has been a rise of 103 percent in the country’s share. Its main customers are the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Pakistan, Qatar, Ukraine, Kenya, Iraq, and Bangladesh. Turkish defense products are also in high demand in various countries.

FOLLOWING COUNTRIES TURKISH DEFENSE PRODUCTS ARE IN HIGH DEMAND

List of countries							
Africa	South and South-East Asia	Latin America	Central Asia	West Asia	North America	Eastern Europe	Balkans
Sudan	Bangladesh	Ecuador	Kazakhstan	United Arab Emirates	United States of America	Poland	Albania
Somalia	Malaysia	Peru	Azerbaijan	Kuwait	-	-	North Macedonia
Libya	Indonesia	Columbia	Uzbekistan	Saudi Arabia	-	-	Kosovo

Niger	Philippines	-	Kyrgyzstan	Qatar	-	-	Romania
Egypt	Pakistan	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mali	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Algeria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Why are countries interested in Türkiye’s Defense industry?

NATO and the EU’s SAFE initiative

Since 1952, Türkiye has been the member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Much of its security commitments and policies are either directly or indirectly related to the cold war borne organization. At present, two factors may contribute to the reason of high spending by Türkiye – NATO’s commitment for defense spending up to 5 percent of GDP and the **Security Action for Europe (SAFE)** initiative.

At the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague, the member states made a commitment to investing 5% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually on core defense requirements and defense and security-related spending by 2035. According to the plan, they will allocate at least 3.5% of GDP annually based on the agreed definition of NATO defense expenditure by 2035 to resource core defense requirements and to meet the NATO Capability Targets. 1.5% of GDP annually would be allocated for inter alia protecting critical infrastructure, defend networks, ensure civil preparedness and resilience, innovate, and strengthen the defense industrial base. This surge is due to the long-term threat posed by Russia and the need to strengthen civil and military resilience.

Türkiye has supported NATO's decision to more than double its defense spending target to 5% of GDP by 2035. As of now it is already exceeding the previous 2% benchmark.

Also, **Security Action for Europe (SAFE)** initiative, worth up to €150 billion in EU-backed loans, is the first such initiative where the EU is using its collective financial power to underwrite military spending. It aims to help member states procure defense equipment jointly, strengthen Europe’s defense industrial base, and reduce fragmentation. The loans, raised on capital markets and repayable over 45 years, are part of the broader Readiness 2030 initiative. Türkiye sees it as a huge market.

But there is one problem. This initiative is only accessible to the EU member states or to those countries who are parties to **European Free Trade Association (EFTA)**. Ukraine or the countries which have special security and defense partnership with the union can also join initiative. Türkiye is neither an EU member nor it has any free trade or security partnership with Brussels, but a member of NATO. Also, with Greece (an EU member state which opposes Türkiye’s policies and its accession to this initiative), present on the table, things get more complex. Türkiye is trying for this initiative. But there is a light for hope.

Türkiye has the largest standing army in NATO after the United States. Its security interests align with that of the EU. Türkiye considers itself a European state. In a situation when Brussels wants to reduce dependence on the United States for defense products, Türkiye presents itself as the best alternative. A recent signal of this came in November 2025, when the EU appointed a military advisor to its delegation in Ankara for the first time. It's a win-win game for Türkiye.

Israel-Palestine conflict

From past so long, statements such as “Turkey is the new Iran” have become increasingly common in Israeli public discourse.

The main tension between Israel and Türkiye is due to the result of Ankara's position that Hamas remains a significant factor in postwar Gaza, even if only behind the scenes. Ankara has also played a significant role in brokering a ceasefire and has deployed forces in the region which has evoked strong reactions from Israeli politicians including Israel's Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**.

Throughout the war, Israel opposed giving Turkey a significant role in the talks aimed at reaching a ceasefire, based on Israel's recognition that Turkey, alongside Qatar, is one of Hamas's supporters and that there was no indication of any reassessment in Ankara regarding its support for the organization following the October 7 massacre. On the contrary, President Erdoğan has declared repeatedly that Hamas is a “resistance” movement and not a terrorist organization.

Owing to such bilateral deterioration, Israel is stepping up defense cooperation with Türkiye's rivals, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. Ankara has ongoing territorial disputes with both -over maritime and airspace rights in the Aegean Sea, and the division of Cyprus following Türkiye's 1974 invasion of the island. Türkiye only recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the north of the island.

This month, Israeli and Greek warships held joint military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean. The drill followed similar exercises by the country's air forces.

Cyprus could become an increasingly focal point for Türkiye-Israel rivalries, given its strategic location. The United Kingdom has two military bases on the island, with the United States having a presence on these. Türkiye, meanwhile, has an air base in the soi-disant Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Türkiye's recent purchases of Eurofighter jets, along with a missile development program encompassing hypersonic and ballistic capabilities, are also fueling Israeli concerns.

Rising Israeli threats in the Eastern Mediterranean and Gaza are pushing Egypt and Türkiye toward closer strategic cooperation, creating the conditions for what analysts now see as a potential new regional axis.

This growing urgency has sparked the possibility of a new strategic axis. Türkiye, Iran, Egypt, as well as Syria and Lebanon, have all felt the security risk that is Israel and its expansionist policies, notably in the past two years.



Activities have also prompted Ankara to be ready for any conflict. However, there are no chances of any direct military confrontation, but tensions can increase as evident from the above lines when both countries are pushing for new alliances to counter each other.

Türkiye has been pushing for the rights of Palestine for so long. This is the regional influence as envisioned in the Century of Türkiye goals (An action plan for Türkiye as it entered the second century of its establishment. Adopted in 2023) and to the expansionist policy.

Which one holds ground?

The two factors are equally important as reasons for the surge in Ankara's defense and security expenditure. The call of the EU is more market-oriented and is important as it gives an edge over defense products and paves a way by which **Türkiye can repair its fractured economy. It also gives way to be closer to the European Union and opens doors to the European market.**

The issue of Israel (for Ankara) has an ideological appeal. It is important for Türkiye to stand by Palestine no matter what comes. The argument becomes more important when President Erdogan - a conservative head has been pressing for Muslim Brotherhood. In this case, sticking to the cause of Palestine becomes inseparable for him. It is also important to mention here that whoever solves this issue will be a leader in the region. This also fuels the inner autocratic of Erdogan. Recently, when Türkiye had played a decisive role in breaking the war, Erdogan was hailed for his influence and diplomacy in the region.

What is in it for India?

For India, the issue is of grave concern. New Delhi needs to closely watch these developments as Ankara has been regularly voicing anti-India narratives fueling concerns in New Delhi. With Turkish involvement in Operation Sindoor (Türkiye supplied drones to Pakistan) and alleged connections in the recent Delhi blast, Türkiye has it all. The growing influence of Türkiye in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan should be also of utmost concern. With Türkiye increasing its defense capabilities and increasing global influence, it will be difficult for India to manage the situations, making things complicated. New Delhi should keep track of the details of it.

News Summary

S.No.	Sector	Date	News Headline	Source
1.	Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy	22/09/25	Turkey ends some tariffs on US imports ahead of Erdogan-Trump meeting	Reuters
2.		23/09/25	Erdoğan Urges UN Membership For Palestine	IHA News
3.		23/09/25	Türkiye is in talks with Trump, his team on regional crises: President Erdogan	Anadolu Agency
4.		24/09/25	CM, Turkish CG, Bangladesh Deputy HC, stress trade, investment cooperation	The Nation
5.		25/09/25	Türkiye, US sign deal to deepen partnership in nuclear energy	TRT World
6.		26/09/25	Trump links Erdoğan to ‘rigged elections,’ reviving scrutiny of Turkey’s vote security	Turkish Minute
7.		28/09/25	Israel-linked armament of Greek Cypriots worries TRNC	Daily Sabah
8.		29/09/25	Over 500,000 Syrians returned from Türkiye: Minister	Daily Sabah
9.		30/09/25	Türkiye joins mediation talks over Trump-led peace deal	Hurriyat
10.		02/10/25	Türkiye opens probe into detention of its citizens on Gaza-bound flotilla attacked by Israel	TRT World
11.		03/10/25	64 FETÖ suspects arrested in operations across 30 provinces	Daily Sabah
12.		04/10/25	Türkiye brings 137 Gaza flotilla activists detained by Israel	Daily sabah

13.		04/10/25	Türkiye-UAE swap deal to enhance digital banking, attract Gulf investments	Hurriyat
14.		20/10/25	Portugal's doors 'wide open' as Türkiye eyes \$75B infrastructure boom	Daily Sabah
15.		20/10/25	Türkiye border could open soon amid positive dialogue: Armenia	TRT World
16.		23/10/25	Relations with Oman are deepening! After energy, another agreement has been reached in mining.	Hurriyat
17.		24/10/25	Relations with Oman are deepening! After energy, another agreement has been reached in mining.	Posta
18.		28/10/25	Türkiye, Jordan ink pact to strengthen economic ties	TRT World
19.		29/10/25	Türkiye, Egypt could build a new regional axis: expert	Daily Sabah
20.		30/10/25	Türkiye kicks off training of Syrian troops: Ministry	Hurriyat
21.		30/10/25	As Merz visits, Turkey eyes German help to access EU defense funds	Turkish Minute
22.		30/10/25	Turkey's Erdogan to Merz: does Germany not see Israeli 'genocide' in Gaza?	Reuters
23.		31/10/25	Israel seeks excuses to resume massacres in Gaza despite ceasefire deal: Turkish president	Anadolu Agency
24.	Economy	23/09/25	World Bank provides \$600 million in funding to Türkiye	Sozcu
25.		25/09/25	Gold price falling: Gram gold falls below record level	Posta

26.		26/09/25	Turkey annual inflation seen at 32.5% in September, monthly rate 2.6%	Reuters
27.		26/09/25	Turkish Airlines to expand fleet with up to 225 new Boeing planes	Daily Sabah
28.		21/10/25	Türkiye sees \$207.3M in budget for space, aviation projects in 2026	Daily Sabah
29.		23/10/25	Central Bank cuts policy rate by 100 bps to 39.5 percent	Hurriyat
30.		30/09/25	Türkiye mulls \$250M plan by China's DEC to build wind turbine plant	Daily Sabah
31.		30/09/25	TÜİK: Unemployment rate was 8.5 percent in August, idle labor force was 29.7 percent	Anka News Agency
32.		01/10/25	Food inflation continues to rise: at 6-month high	Bir Gun
33.		02/10/25	Debts are on the rise: Debt per capita has increased by hundreds of millions of TL	Bir Gun
34.		03/10/25	Türkiye's annual inflation at 33.29% in September	Anadolu Agency
35.		28/10/25	Over 47.6K vessels docked at Turkish ports in January–September, highest in last 7 years	Anadolu Agency
36.		29/10/25	Türkiye fast-tracks oil, gas exploration, rare earths development	Daily Sabah
37.		30/10/25	Household inflation expectations deteriorate: Survey	Hurriyat
38.		31/10/25	Turkey predicts 30% drop in produce yields for 2025	Fresh Plaza

39.	Politics	21/09/25	Turkey's main opposition party reelects leader in a bid to avoid government crackdown	Associated Press
40.		22/09/25	8 AKP provincial chairmen resign amid party turmoil	Turkish Minute
41.		22/09/25	CHP's ousted Istanbul head, 25 members appear in court	Hurriyat
42.		23/09/25	Corruption probes against opposition municipalities expand to Ankara as 13 detained	Bianet
43.		23/09/25	Actor who challenged Özgür Özel faces expulsion from Türkiye's CHP by Daily Sabah ISTANBUL Sep 23, 2025 - 3:34 pm GMT+3	Daily Sabah
44.		26/09/25	Court rejects CHP appeal, confirms trustee leadership in Istanbul	Daily Sabah
45.		26/09/25	Speaker urges PKK to take steps to advance anti-terror bid	Hurriyat
46.		30/10/25	Amedspor fined over Kurdish-language chest sponsor tagline	Bianet
47.		01/10/25	The new legislative year opened with protests in Parliament	Evrensel
48.		21/10/25	Top CHP official draws ire, faces lawsuit for insulting Erdoğan, voters	Daily Sabah
49.		24/10/25	İmamoğlu faces espionage probe, journalist detained	Bianet
50.		24/10/25	İmamoğlu reacts to 'espionage' investigation: "Even the devil wouldn't think of it!"	Evrensel
51.		24/10/25	Turkish court throws out case seeking to oust opposition leader	Reuters

52.		24/10/25	Turkey's new judicial package would criminalize LGBTI+ journalism, press freedom groups warn	Bianet
53.		29/10/25	Erdoğan marks republic's 102nd year, renews 'Century of Türkiye' vision	Hurriyat
54.		30/10/25	Erdoğan meets DEM Party delegation to discuss terror-free Türkiye	Daily Sabah
55.		30/10/25	Former Kemer mayor arrested on fraud, influence peddling	Daily Sabah
56.		31/10/25	Jailed Kurdish politician criticizes peace efforts for ignoring reconciliation between Kurds and Turks	Turkish Minute
57.		31/10/25	TELE1 journalists resign en masse after gov't-appointed trustee takes control	Turkish Minute
58.	Defence	25/09/25	Türkiye, Egypt hold first joint naval exercise in the Mediterranean in 13 years	TRT World
59.		26/09/25	NATO to deploy Turkish-made surveillance system after Russian incursions	Daily Sabah
60.		28/09/25	Türkiye joins NATO Tiger Meet 2025 with F-16s and air force personnel	TRT World
61.		20/10/25	Turkey pressing for Western fighter jets to claw back regional edge	Reuters
62.		24/10/25	Turkey in talks with Qatar and Oman to buy used Eurofighter jets, Erdogan says	Associated Press
63.		27/10/25	Turkey signs deal to buy 20 Eurofighters from Britain for 8 bln pounds	Reuters

64.		29/10/25	Turkish main battle tank Altay to be powered by domestic firm	Anadolu Agency
65.		31/10/25	Türkiye will not make compromises with its defense industry: Vice president	Anadolu Agency
66.	Security	26/09/25	Istanbul faces water crisis as dam levels drop to critical 30%	Daily Sabah
67.		02/10/25	Earthquake with preliminary 5 magnitude shakes Istanbul, causing panic	Associated Press
68.		03/10/25	MIT arrests man suspected of working for Mossad	Daily Sabah
69.		04/10/25	4.1 magnitude earthquake in Kütahya	Sozcu
70.		26/10/25	PKK terror group announces complete withdrawal from Türkiye	TRT World
71.		28/10/25	Magnitude 6.1 earthquake hits western Turkey, causing buildings to collapse	Associated Press
72.		30/10/25	PKK leader Mustafa Karasu explained the reasoning behind the latest decision	Bir Gun
		31/10/25	1,526 terror-linked suspects arrested in Istanbul in 2025	Daily Sabah
73.	Education	23/09/25	Türkiye's 'human capital' is rapidly eroding: Young people are hopeless, 7 million children are hungry, 14 million children don't know anything about cinema or theater	Anka News Agency
74.		21/10/25	Turkey sees rise in school dropouts, union warns	Bianet
75.		22/10/25	5% of children in Türkiye face speech difficulties, expert says	Daily Sabah

76.	Energy	21/10/25	Solar power Türkiye's cheapest source of electricity: UK think tank	Anadolu Agency
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