



# The Key Takeaways for U.S. from Türkiye's Historic May 28 Elections

Nazlı Alantar



## The Key Takeaways for U.S. from Türkiye's Historic May 28 Elections

Türkiye held a historic presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14 on which President Erdogan took the first round lead ahead of his opponent. For the first time in Turkish history, the second round of presidential elections was held on May 28. The election resulted in President Erdoğan's exceptional victory and gave the President-elect Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan right to run Türkiye for the next five years. After Türkiye's most historic presidential election, which had repercussions in the world, it was very clear that the United States government and the American media followed a stance that defended Erdogan's opponent. Before Türkiye headed to the polls on May 14, the American government and the American media made many negative comments



about President Erdoğan's candidacy. While the American media showed a supportive attitude towards President Erdoğan's opponent, (Kılıçdaroğlu's Nation Alliance formed of six opposition parties, including the Republican People's Party (CHP)), Türkiye was reminded of Joe Biden's statement which he clearly said "he would seek regime change in Türkiye and declared to work with opposition leadership in the country to topple President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Türkiye's 2023 elections." This had a big impact on the behavior of the Turkish nationalist electorate and led to increase in the percentage of the votes given to President Erdoğan. During his campaign, Erdoğan accused Kılıçdaroğlu of being a puppet of some powers. This was mainly due to some particular reasons. For example, Kılıçdaroğlu had claimed that Russia interfered in Turkish elections through deep fake content and later on he could not prove it. The visit



paid by the American ambassador Jeffrey L. Flake to Kılıçdaroğlu on the 29th March was also commented by many in Türkiye as Kılıçdaroğlu's tilting towards the United States. Most important of all, the tacit alliance that Kılıçdaroğlu made with the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), a Kurdish party which mainstream Turkish nationalists regard as a bastion of thinly veiled support for the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), strengthened the idea that Kılıçdaroğlu was Biden's beloved and would support the PKK affiliated YPG/PYD in case of coming to power.

Looking retrospectively, the bilateral relations with United States changed in a negative way after the failed July 15 coup attempt by FETO in 2016 when Joe Biden was the Vice President of the United States. Another issue worth to mention in particular is the U.S support of the separatist PKK/YPG terrorist organization in northern Syria harbouring PKK camps over the border. Before the elections, The HDP announced its support for the opposition (The Nation Alliance, specifically the CHP) candidate. American media had been supportive of the opponent of President Erdoğan for so long and clearly expressed their high hopes for victory of the opposition giving out misleading information about the elections to the Western World. However, Washington's overt support to Erdoğan's main rival Kılıçdaroğlu led to Erdoğan's electoral victory and therefore, Biden's order to topple Erdoğan and his support to Kılıçdaroğlu was commented by the Western media as a kiss of Biden which was turned to a kiss of death by Turkish voters.



## The Future of Wide Range of Cooperation Between Two Countries

Ankara and Washington have always been in close proximity trying to work on regional and global issues, peace and stability, defence cooperation and economic relations. Before the Turkish elections, regarding defence and security cooperation, the Biden Administration asked Congress to pass the approval of Lockheed Martin Corp. F16 to Turkish government.<sup>1</sup> However unfortunate opposition to the sale of fighter jets in the Congress steered Türkiye's direction to different alternatives and solutions. Meanwhile, Türkiye has moved to supply its defence technology aiming to be a major defence industry power in the world. For both countries, as NATO allies, defence cooperation has been extremely important. At the outset, Türkiye had originally ordered fifth-gen stealth fighter jets from the US. Even though The Biden administration proposed the F-16 sale as reimbursement for undelivered F-35s, there is still a wait from the U.S. Congress



<sup>1</sup> US working with Congress towards Turkey F-16 sale, Al Monitor, 13.01.2023,  
<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/01/us-working-congress-towards-turkey-f-16-sale#ixzz83pwErvUH>

to make its decision. It is an important question to ask what will be the attitude towards the expected sale and defence cooperation for the future and whether the U.S. Congress will be changing its course while the key takeaway from Turkish elections is that Türkiye will be making moves in defence industry in the future. Another issue is that, Türkiye has very clearly expressed its stance on Sweden's candidacy for NATO membership. Finland had taken steps to fulfill the commitments in terms of Türkiye's security concerns and had Türkiye's approval for NATO membership. However Sweden has not yet taken similar approach towards the subject and is backed by the U.S. government. President Erdoğan stated "It is not possible for us to take a positive stance toward Sweden if terrorists are not handed over to us.", making it clear that Türkiye won't ratify Sweden's NATO candidacy unless obligations are fulfilled. At this stage, the stance of the U.S. on the side of Sweden has been an issue that posed a threat to bilateral relations with Türkiye.



## President Erdoğan's Victory and What It Means for the U.S

The Turkish elections, which aroused curiosity all over the world, had many reflections in the U.S. May 28 showed relations between US and Türkiye should be solid as NATO allies while the election results made sure that there is stability in Türkiye. Regarding foreign policy, the Biden Administration can not afford to alienate Erdoğan's victory regarding broad range of issues and cooperation. Türkiye has played a tremendously remarkable role on the global stage as a key NATO member and a regional power in the Black Sea. It is very vital that the U.S. has a moderate approach to this stance after the Turkish elections. Due to Ukraine-Russia War, Türkiye's Black Sea Grain initiative





against rapid increase in food prices, poverty and global inflation displayed Türkiye's successful diplomacy efforts and value of Türkiye's mediation performance. As a NATO ally, with Türkiye's contributions to the world peace and foreign policy efforts, the U.S. should also show the expected performance towards Türkiye and manage relations with a softer approach. Considering the fact that Biden-Harris will face a neck and neck race at 2024 U.S elections against strong Republican candidates such as Donald Trump or Mike Pence, presuming Biden will be the Democrat candidate for the race, cooperating with a strong regional power like Türkiye in every field emerges as a factor that the Biden government can also benefit from.<sup>2</sup> In short, the US government should be in dire need of stabile relations with Türkiye now and in the future.



<sup>2</sup> Mike Pence tears into Donald Trump at 2024 campaign launch, BBC News, 08.06.2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-65839793>



# The Key Takeaways for U.S. from Türkiye's Historic May 28 Elections

Nazlı Alantar