# Hybrid Workshop on Turkish American Relations in the 21st Century

Inspired by the publication of the groundbreaking book titled “Turkish American Relations in the 21st Century,” which was edited by two distinguished academics, Prof. Dr. Ozan Örmeci and Prof. Dr. Herbert Reginbogin, a hybrid workshop that shares the same name as the book was held under the auspices of KENTUSAM on 21 May 2025. During the event, diplomats, academics, experts, and retired military commanders from around the world shared their opinions and insights on the relations between the two countries. The hybrid workshop, launched by Rector Necmettin Atsü's inauguration speech, consisted of three separate sessions, each focusing on distinct perspectives regarding bilateral relations.

*The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of Istanbul Kent University nor participants' affiliated positions and organizations.*

The participants in the event are as follows:

**Opening Speeches**

Emre Atsü (Presenter), Istanbul Kent University

Prof. Dr. Necmettin Atsü, Istanbul Kent University

Prof. Dr. Hasret Çomak, Istanbul Kent University

H.E. Uluç Özülker, (R) Turkish Ambassador

H.E. Matthew Bryza, Former American Ambassador to Azerbaijan

**Session I**

**Current Issues in Turkish-American Relations**

Prof. Dr. Ozan Örmeci (Moderator), Istanbul Kent University

Prof. Dr. Hall Gardner, Paris American University

Prof. Dr. Herbert R. Reginbogin, Catholic University of America

Prof. Dr. Füsun Türkmen, Galatasaray University

Dr. Yavuz Türkgenci, (R) Turkish General

Dr. Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, METU

Gülru Gezer, Former (R) Diplomat

**Session II**

**Different Layers of a Strategic Partnership: Political, Diplomatic, Economic, Military, Social, and Cultural Aspects of Turkish-American Relations**

Ege Furkan Toker (Moderator), Istanbul Kent University

Ahu Tuğba Karabulut, Istanbul Kent University

Prof. Dr. Ozan Örmeci, Istanbul Kent University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cenk Özgen, Giresun University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Doğan Şafak Polat, Istanbul Kent University

Asst. Prof. Dr. Sina Kısacık, Cyprus Aydın University

Matus Jevcak, Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Session III**

**Second Trump Era: Opportunities and Risks for Turkish-American Relations**

Dr. Hande Ramazanoğulları (Moderator), Istanbul Kent University

Prof. Dr. Serhat Güvenç, Istanbul Kadir Has University

Prof. Dr. Mark Meirowitz, State University of New York (SUNY) Maritime College

Prof. Dr. Yaşar Onay, Istanbul Kent University

Prof. Dr. Herbert R. Reginbogin, Catholic University of America

Asst. Prof. Dr. Murat Koray, Istanbul Kent University

## Commencement of the Event

The event started with a speech by Necmettin Atsü, the rector of Kent University. Mr. Atsü highlighted the importance of Türkiye’s geopolitical posture. He hoped that the event, attended by high-level participants including retired and former ambassadors, would yield productive and inspiring results.

Consequently, Hasret Çomak, Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, began his talk. Mr. Çomak mentioned that Türkiye and the United States share a deep and multifaceted relationship built on mutual respect and shared values, contributing significantly to Euro-Atlantic peace and stability. Moreover, he stated that the two countries’ cooperation spans critical issues like counterterrorism, energy security, and non-proliferation. Furthermore, he reminded us of our mutual goal to increase bilateral trade to $100 billion.

Following this, retired Ambassador from Türkiye, H.E. Uluç Özülker, connected online and briefly discussed the history of the two nations. Mr. Özülker gave key historical contextual information. He contended that the relationship between Türkiye and the United States has been historically complex, marked by periods of cooperation and tension. However, Mr. Özülker added that the ties strengthened significantly in the post-World War II period, with U.S. support during the Cold War.

Finally, Matthew Bryza, former U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan, expressed gratitude for the invitation and his pleasure at the opportunity to participate in this timely event in person. Mr. Bryza highlighted the historical and evolving relationship between Türkiye and the United States, emphasizing periods of strong strategic partnership driven by national interests. Mr. Bryza reminded us that the bilateral relationship, as recounted through firsthand experiences, could lead to advantageous outcomes, including cooperation in oil and gas pipelines. Mr. Bryza concluded by emphasizing the importance of Türkiye's role in NATO and the necessity of continued collaboration to address current and future challenges.

Following Mr. Bryza’s speech, the opening remarks were completed, and the event proceeded with the first session.

## Key Takeaways

### Session I: Current Issues in Turkish American Relations

Ozan Örmeci of Kent University moderated the session, which primarily focused on Donald J. Trump’s second term. Guests evaluated bilateral relations and discussed the opportunities and challenges associated with them.

The first speaker, Herbert Reginbogin, began by stating that the relationship between Türkiye and the United States faces challenges due to transactional foreign policies, geopolitical shifts, and internal political dynamics. Mr. Reginbogin added that while strategic interests have historically driven the alliance, current issues, such as democratic backsliding, regional stability, and climate change, require a deeper, value-based partnership. Moreover, he underlined that strengthening NATO and fostering mutual respect are essential for enduring cooperation.

Prof. Dr. Füsun Türkmen discussed two significant trends in Turkish-American relations: transnationalism and the influence of key individuals. Türkmen noted that while Cold War relations were driven by systemic analysis, the post-Cold War era has seen a return to leader-centric approaches, particularly under Trump and Erdoğan, and this has led to unpredictability and challenges. Türkmen noted that Trump's foreign policy is characterized by nationalism, transactional diplomacy, selective isolationism, and neo-imperialism. Furthermore, Trump’s unpredictable style was likened to Nixon's "madman theory," which aimed to create fear and uncertainty to achieve strategic gains.

Prof. Dr. Hall Gardner from the American University of Paris highlighted Türkiye's transformation into a pivotal actor in the multipolar international order, leveraging its geographical, political, economic, and cultural strengths. Mr. Gardner noted Türkiye's significant achievements, such as mediating the Russia-Ukraine War and improving relations with Syria and the West. He cited Azerbaijan's victory in Karabakh as an example of Ankara's success. Mr. Gardner emphasized that under Erdoğan's leadership, Türkiye's assertive steps towards becoming a regional power have led to some challenges in its relationship with the United States.

Yavuz Türkgenci briefly explained the security relations between Türkiye and the USA. Given the evolving security landscape, Mr. Türkgenci stated that it is crucial to reassess frequently visited issues, such as the PYD/YPG, FETÖ, and CAATSA sanctions, regularly. Additionally, Mr. Türkgenci noted that NATO remains a vital foundation for collective defense and security and concluded that recent encouraging developments have created positive momentum for strengthening these relationships.

Following this, Gülru Gezer discussed the underlying dynamics between the two nations. Ms. Gezer explained that maintaining positive momentum in Turkish-American relations is crucial to strengthening the institutional foundations and adapting mechanisms to current realities. Ms. Gezer reminded that while leveraging the good relations between President Erdoğan and President Trump, uncertainties remain, particularly regarding U.S. policy on Syria and its support for the Syrian Democratic Forces, which is sensitive for Türkiye. Consequently, it was once again emphasized that, despite challenges, there is significant potential for cooperation, particularly in trade and regional stability, if both countries focus on the positive aspects and resolve existing issues.

Finally, Dr. Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun touched upon some practical bureaucratic and diplomatic difficulties experienced in studies and contacts regarding Turkish-American relations in his speech. Mr. Tulun also discussed the importance of institutionalism and national interest in the context of the two countries’ relations.

### Session II: Different Layers of a Strategic Partnership: Political, Diplomatic, Economic, Military, Social, and Cultural Aspects of Turkish-American Relations

Ege Furkan Toker moderated the session. Speakers participated in this session and evaluated the relations between the two countries from various dimensions, presenting their analyses.

Cenk Özgen discussed Turkish-American relations in terms of defense industry cooperation and talked about projects that are being developed and completed. Mr. Özgen mentioned that during the Cold War period, most of the military material in the Turkish inventory was supplied from the United States.

Sina Kısacık discussed the Eastern Mediterranean and the geopolitical implications of the 1974 Turkish intervention in Cyprus. Mr. Kısacık highlighted the subsequent U.S. arms embargo on Türkiye and the ongoing tensions between Greece and Türkiye, emphasizing the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean as a significant factor in the Cyprus conflict.

Ahu Tuğba Karabulut's presentation focused on the objectives and potential impacts of tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on U.S.-Türkiye relations. Ms. Karabulut mentioned ways to boost bilateral trade, reduce trade deficits, and increase exports while also addressing the potential adverse outcomes experienced globally, such as higher inflation and economic instability. The presentation concluded with strategies for Türkiye to mitigate these impacts, including finding new markets, fostering innovation, and maintaining good international relations.

Doğan Şafak Polat explored the key challenges and strategic opportunities in Türkiye–US security relations. Mr. Polat highlighted issues such as diverging policies in Syria, the S-400 crisis, and regional conflicts, while also emphasizing opportunities for strengthening NATO cooperation, defense industry collaboration, and counterterrorism efforts. Mr. Polat stressed the importance of cooperation, mutual respect, and open communication in transforming challenges into opportunities and maintaining regional stability and NATO cohesion.

Ozan Örmeci emphasized the political nature of anti-Americanism in Türkiye. Mr. Örmeci noted that this is often used as a tool by politicians and influenced by historical leftist movements and reactions to U.S. foreign policy. Regarding current bilateral relations, Mr. Örmeci emphasized the importance of maintaining diplomatic channels despite challenges. To address the difficulty in sustaining ties, it was suggested that practical solutions and mutual respect between leaders could help improve the situation. As for outlook, it was discussed that there is a need for a long-term intellectual framework to sustain Turkish-American relations. Furthermore, despite anti-American sentiment, Mr. Örmeci underlined the admiration and respect for the U.S. as a global leader, and this duality is reflected in the Turkish public's perception of the United States.

Matus Jevcak discussed the evolving dynamics of the Türkiye-US-EU relationship from the perspective of complexity and urgency. Mr. Jevcak discussed the historical context from the post-Cold War era to the present, highlighting key events such as Türkiye's bid for EU membership, the impact of the Syrian civil war, and the 2016 failed coup attempt. Mr. Jevcak also examined the strategic implications of Türkiye's advancements in its defense industry and its balancing act between NATO commitments and regional autonomy.

### Third Session: Second Trump Era: Opportunities and Risks for Turkish American Relations

Hande Ramazanoğulları from Kent University moderated the last session. With Trump's second term, each speaker discussed and evaluated the opportunities and challenges that the relations between the two countries may bring.

Serhat Güvenç underlined that while Israel remains a strategic priority of the United States, its influence over U.S. policy is limited, and Trump's administration, though pro-Israel, did not fully align with the Israeli lobby's expectations. Moreover, Mr. Güvenç pointed out that having Trump on Türkiye’s side is an advantage in this context. It was stated that the US has strengthened its military presence in Greece and Greek Cyprus, and that both countries are pleased with this situation, adding that this situation has the potential to change regional dynamics. Lastly, Mr. Güvenç pointed out that a potential revival of Turkish-American relations could be signaled by renewed arms deals, especially the sale of F-35s, and this could indicate a return to strategic cooperation within NATO.

Mark Meirowitz discussed the unpredictable nature of US-Türkiye relations, particularly under President Trump's administration. Mr. Meirowitz emphasized the challenges posed by Trump's focus on domestic politics and his erratic foreign policy. Mr. Meirowitz emphasized the significant role of the US Congress in shaping foreign policy, particularly regarding military sales, sanctions, and the influence of various interest groups. Mr. Meirowitz also pointed out the low perception and misperception of Türkiye among Americans, which affects bilateral relations. Finally, Mr. Meirowitz stressed the importance of Türkiye in managing its strategic relationships carefully, particularly with Russia and China, to maintain a strong relationship with the US.

Yaşar Onay began the presentation by highlighting the shift from a strategic partnership to strategic autonomy in the relations between the two countries. Mr. Onay discussed the historical context of the alliance, particularly during the Cold War, and the complications that have arisen since the early 2010s, including the Syrian conflict and Türkiye's acquisition of the S-400 missile system. The impact of President Trump's foreign policy, characterized by unpredictability and a focus on domestic issues, was also examined in the talk. Moreover, Mr. Onay outlined Türkiye's more independent and ambitious foreign policy, including its increased defense production and regional engagements.

Herbert Reginbogin, like the previous participants’ statements, highlighted the unpredictability of President Trump's foreign policy and asserted that both countries should take responsibility for their own defense and economic development. Additionally, Mr. Reginbogin emphasized the importance of understanding the factual issues that affect their relationship. The significance of regionalism was also stressed, and the role of international trade in promoting peace and security was highlighted. Additionally, Mr. Reginbogin underscored the importance of trust, the rule of law, and strategic friendship in maintaining a strong bilateral relationship.

Murat Koray discussed the unpredictable and highly personalized nature of President Trump's foreign policy. Mr. Koray emphasized the second term of Trump’s impact on US-Türkiye relations and highlighted the shift from traditional institutional frameworks to a more transactional and loyalty-based approach.