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To Curb Turkey's Invasion Of Syria, Cut Off Us Arms And Support

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It's too late to undo the considerable damage already inflicted by President Trump's abrupt removal of US troops from northeastern Syria and the subsequent Turkish invasion, but if the US has any hope of preventing further bloodshed the best option is to cut off the US arms supplies and spare parts that sustain the Turkish military.

The limited economic sanctions imposed by President Trump, including increased tariffs on Turkish steel exports and postponing a new trade agreement, are too little, too late, as are proposed sanctions on current and former Turkish officials. It remains to be seen whether further sanctions will be imposed, but if so they will take a while to have an impact. It's also possible that direct pressure from President Trump and vice president Mike Pence could influence Turkish behavior, but that can't be counted on.

One area where US action could make a difference is an immediate cessation of US arms sales to Turkey, and, even more crucially, an end to US support for Turkey's existing arsenal. According to the most recent edition of the International Institute for Strategic Studies' "Military Balance," all of Turkey's 300-plus combat aircraft are of US-origin, as are over two-thirds of its armored vehicles, the bulk of its medium-range transport aircraft, and most of its attack helicopters. Although Turkey has developed its own arms industry, it still depends on US spare parts and maintenance support to keep its military running, including such crucial items as engines and software. The Center for International Policy's Security Assistance Monitor has published useful fact sheets on the flow of US arms to Turkey, as well as the US role in training and equipping opposition forces in Syria ([here](#) and [here](#)). A cutoff of arms and sustainment would strike directly at the principal instruments of the Turkish invasion.

A bipartisan coalition in Congress has threatened to pass legislation imposing economic sanctions and cutting arms transfers to Turkey. It is critically important that these measures explicitly target the US role in sustaining Turkey's military, not just arms transfers in the pipeline.

The Turkish invasion of Syria is yet another cautionary tale regarding the risks involved in transferring US arms to potentially unreliable allies and regions of conflict. The most egregious current case is the role of US-supplied arms in the brutal Saudi/UAE-led war in Yemen, which has sparked the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe. These cases underscore the need for

strengthening Congressional oversight of arms sales, perhaps including a requirement that major deals receive Congressional approval before moving forward.

The Center for Civilians in Conflict has published a detailed report with a series of recommendations on how to improve the US government's approach to arms exports that would substantially decrease the risk of US weapons being used to harm civilians. And the Cato Institute has developed a risk index that evaluates potential recipients of US arms based on factors such as corruption, stability, and human rights performance. These analyses can be used as a guide to improving Congressional and Executive Branch vetting of potential weapons transfers.

As the Saudi and Turkish examples demonstrate, the current US arms sales decisionmaking process is not working to advance US security interests or prevent the use of US weaponry in sparking humanitarian crises of the highest order. Something has to change.