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United States lifts sanctions on Turkey following Turko-Russian agreement

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Following statements from U.S. President Trump that led to the withdrawal of U.S. support from former Kurdish allies in northern Syria, Turkish troops crossed the Syrian border and attacked Kurdish positions. The backlash from the U.S. Congress, retired officials and armed forces against the “abandonment” of U.S. allies led Trump to issue Executive Order 13894^[1] on Oct. 14. The order designated the Turkish Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, as well as Defence Minister Hulusi Akar and Energy Minister Fatih Dönmez.

The U.S. also stopped negotiations on a USD 100 billion trade deal and increased steel tariffs to 50%. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted a Turkish bank^[2] for alleged violation of the U.S. sanctions regime against Iran.

Assistant Attorney General of the National Security Division John C. Demers said, "Halkbank, a Turkish state-owned bank, allegedly conspired to undermine the United States Iran sanctions regime by illegally giving Iran access to billions of dollars' worth of funds, all while deceiving U.S. regulators about the scheme. This is one of the most serious Iran sanctions violations we have seen, and no business should profit from evading our laws or risking our national security."

A U.S.-brokered deal for a ceasefire, involving limited pullbacks by Kurdish troops from the Turkish-Syrian border and the removal of economic sanctions, ended on Oct. 22. That ceasefire was replaced with a more "permanent" agreement between Russia and Turkey that requires Kurdish troops withdraw completely from the border or face "the Turkish steamroller."

¹ 84 Fed. Reg. 201 (2019) <http://bit.ly/2N5BLiH>

² U.S. Department of Justice, “Turkish Bank Charged In Manhattan Federal Court For Its Participation In A Multibillion-Dollar Iranian Sanctions Evasion Scheme,” DOJ press release, October 15, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2P02cZG> (accessed October 22, 2019).

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