



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on July 27, 2026

Ankara, Air Force One, and Alliance on Edge

U.S. President Donald Trump arrived at the NATO summit in Ankara, Turkey, earlier this month on the Qatari-gifted Air Force One — the newly retrofitted Boeing 747-8 that has become one of the more symbolically loaded objects in American foreign policy. During his journey, he switched between that and an older Air Force One. When asked if the switch was due to an Iranian security threat, Trump [told reporters](#): “I’m No.1 on the kill list for Iran.”

Within 48 hours, federal agents appeared at the homes of four *New York Times* journalists who had reported on security concerns surrounding the plane swap, delivering grand jury [subpoenas](#) demanding testimony before a Manhattan federal court. The subpoenas cited “an alleged violation of federal criminal law.”

The Air Force One drama consumed the news cycle entirely. The summit, and the far-more significant strategic questions it raised, went almost entirely unexamined.

The Summit

Holding NATO’s annual summit in Ankara is itself a story. As geopolitical strategist George Friedman [wrote](#), “The next 100 years will see political powers rise and fall, but the basic matrix remains the same. Russia and China will weaken, as Japan, Turkey, and Poland fix their internal issues and rise.”

Trump has been cultivating Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan carefully throughout the Iran conflict, signaling to Ankara to [stay out of the war](#) while simultaneously dangling the prospect of F-35 deliveries as an inducement. Reports have circulated, which Trump himself has discussed publicly, about whether F-35s might be offered to Turkey conditional on Erdoğan using his influence with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa to deploy Syrian forces in Lebanon — a suggestion that retired Colonel Douglas MacGregor describes as “ridiculously stupid.”

MacGregor is a former advisor to the secretary of defense, a decorated combat veteran, and one of the most consistently contrarian voices in American strategic commentary. Regarding the Ankara summit ([here](#) and [here](#)), he recounted a presentation he made in Israel in 2013 when he stunned his audience by saying, “There is one true potential existential threat to Israel that exists in the region, and that is the Turkish state.”

His reasoning: “The Iranians can lob missiles and bombs, but the Iranians can’t invade Israel. The Turks can invade Israel. And you are living on territory that the Ottomans governed for hundreds of years.”



AP Images

Air Force One arriving in Ankara, Turkey



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Playing Both Sides?

Both former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and current PM Benjamin Netanyahu have publicly [acknowledged](#) that they see Turkey as a regional rival.

If Israel regards Turkey as its primary regional adversary, and if Israel exercises the degree of influence over American decision-making that MacGregor [and others](#) argue it does, then the United States is simultaneously a NATO treaty partner with Turkey and the primary military and financial backer of a state that views Turkey as an existential threat.

An alliance that includes Turkey cannot simultaneously be an instrument of pressure against Turkey. The situation pushes Turkey further toward the posture MacGregor describes: technically inside NATO, but in the crosshairs of one of its putative NATO allies.

Critics argue that the Iran War continues not because it serves American interests, but because it advances a Greater Israel Project that is already lining up Turkey as its next target. According to [Joe Kent](#), the former director of the National Counterterrorism Center, “Unfortunately leaving NATO won’t be to avoid foreign entanglements; we’ll be leaving NATO so we can side with Israel when Turkey & Israel eventually clash in Syria.”

The NATO summit in Ankara — hosted by a member state Israel privately considers a future adversary, attended by a president whose plane movements triggered a leak investigation and four journalist subpoenas — may be one of the more revealing diplomatic intrigues of this time period.

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