

Time for the U.S. to dump Turkey: A deeply flawed relationship

by Dr. Thoreau Redcrow - 19/02/2018 08:55



Turkey's often-belligerent autocrat Tayyip Erdogan recently threatened the U.S. military in Syria with an "Ottoman slap", indicating just how fractured this so-called alliance has become. In fact, foreign relations between the American and Turkish Governments have sunk to their lowest point since Turkey joined NATO in 1952, leading many to wonder if it is time for a breakup.

As an indication of just how unpopular the United States is amongst the Turkish population of their supposed "ally", a November 2017 National Survey by the Center for American Progress found that 83% of Turks viewed the U.S. unfavourably, with only 10% viewing the U.S. in a favourable light. Moreover, the poll found that 46% of Turks think their nation should do more to confront the U.S., while only 37% believed the alliance should be maintained. Indicatively, The New York Times noted how, "Public expressions of anti-American sentiment here [in Turkey] have become routine and intense since 2016", while an AKP-backed Turkish newspaper (*Yeni Akit*)

pronounced that, “There is no limit to the treachery of the supposed ally, the United States.” In another newspaper (*Yeni Safak*), columnist Ibrahim Karagul described the U.S. as the “greatest and most open threat for Turkey”, before denouncing it as “an enemy country.”

Amidst such hostile rhetoric, Gonul Tol, the founding director of the Center for Turkish Studies at the Middle East Institute, has diagnosed that, “There has always been a strain of anti-American sentiment in Turkey, but the anti-Americanism we’re seeing now is different... It is much more widespread.” In a similar vein, Nicholas Danforth, a senior analyst at the Bipartisan Policy Center, has described a new wave of “anti-Western hostility” and “rampant nationalism” in Turkey; while Ozgur Unluhisarcikli of the German Marshall Fund has opined how, “The U.S.-Turkey alliance can no longer be taken for granted”, before theorizing that, “this relationship has endured several stress tests in the past is no guarantee that it will survive this one.”

With regards to some of those ‘stress tests’, just in the last few years, Erdogan’s dictatorial regime has: armed and supported ISIS as a proxy army against the Kurds in Rojava, used now-indicted banker Reza Zarrab to evade U.S.-sponsored international sanctions on Iran, published maps of secret U.S. bases in Syria, refused to punish a Turkish mob who attacked U.S. Navy sailors of the USS Ross docked in Istanbul, ordered fifteen of his personal bodyguards to brazenly assault U.S. protesters outside his ambassador’s residence in Washington D.C., and had his security rough up several Americans who interrupted his speech at a New York City hotel.

Following that up, more recently Erdogan’s regime has arrested an American pastor (Andrew Brunson), a NASA scientist (Serkan Golge), and two Turkish employees of the U.S. State Department (Metin Topuz & Hamza Ulucay)—ostensibly holding them as de-facto hostages they would like to exchange for the U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen. The latter action caused the U.S. to suspend the issuance of non-immigrant visas in Turkey, at a fraught time when the U.S. does not even have an ambassador to the country. However, when you consider the recent history of how Russia’s Ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov was gunned down on live TV in December of 2016 by a Turkish riot police officer, that decision may be a wise one.

In lieu of all the aforementioned variables, the danger for U.S. citizens and military personnel within Turkey is becoming more pronounced; especially for the 2,700 U.S. soldiers stationed at Incirlik Air Base—which also houses dozens of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. With regards to this possible scenario, Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute, cautioned how if Erdogan, “Ordered a mob into Incirlik,

Turkish forces would stand down and the base would be overrun”; before adding that, “To be assigned to Turkey as an American diplomat or military officer is increasingly as dangerous as being asked to reside in Libya.”

Indeed, I imagine many U.S. families living on Incirlik—a base I myself resided on as a child—would be shocked to know that one of the most popular novels in Turkey in recent years was entitled *Metal Storm (Metal Firtina)*, and featured a U.S. invasion and attempted partition of Turkey, causing the Turkish heroes of the story to steal a U.S. nuclear bomb and destroy Washington D.C., killing millions of Americans. With allies like this, who needs enemies?

Allying with Ankara’s Jihad

A major source of Erdogan’s incompatibility with U.S. objectives and purported values (at least on paper) is his continued support for an array of self-proclaimed Salafi Islamist factions in the region. From ISIS in Rojava, Al-Nusra and Al-Qaeda in Syria, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt—Erdogan has continually attempted to fulfill his past ‘poetic’ declaration that, “the mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets, and the faithful our soldiers.” As part of this calling, secular schools throughout Turkey have been replaced by madrassas, as imams in state-supported mosques have been instructed to pray for Turkish military victories.

In seeking such victories, Hulusi Akar, the chief of staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, recently decreed that the Turkish Army be known as the “Furnace of the Prophet [Muhammad]”, while on the brink of invading Afrin, Ali Erbas, the head of the Department of Religious Affairs, ordered the recitation of the *Surat al-Fath (Triumph)* chapter 48 of the Quran in 90,000 Turkish mosques. Additionally, to seek out such ‘divine triumphs’, Erdogan has enlisted the assistance of Adnan Tanriverdi, a former brigadier general fired in 1997 for his links to Islamists, who now utilizes his private security company SADAT as a secret police force and death squad for the regime.

All of this places the United States and NATO in an uncomfortable position, where they are inexplicably aligned with the same Turkish Army who refused to fire their tanks pointing directly at advancing ISIS forces during the 2014 siege of Kobane. I should add that this isn’t behaviour I am recounting second-hand, but rather something I personally watched and witnessed while on the Turkey-Syria border in October of that year.

More broadly, it should be noted that in previous years, the mere fact of NATO membership—alongside their hunger for purchasing U.S. and German supplied weaponry—guaranteed that Turkey could murder, torture, and repress their 20+

million occupied Kurdish citizens with near impunity. For as long as Turkey burned down those 4,000 Kurdish villages of Northern Kurdistan within Turkey's southeastern borders, the West was not going to object too loudly. However, Erdogan's growing megalomania—where he delusionally sees himself as a new 'Sultan' of a revived Ottoman Empire—has led him to take his nation's domestic brutality 'on the road'; symbolically displayed recently when their allied-henchmen around Afrin cut the mutilated breasts off the dead YPJ Kurdish female fighter Barin Kobani (a sadistic practice the Turkish military has perfected for years on captured female PKK guerrillas).

Thankfully, many are starting to awake to the absurd proposition of Turkey's membership within NATO. As David L. Phillips, author of *An Uncertain Ally: Turkey Under Erdogan's Dictatorship* has observed, "Turkey is hostile to democracy and human rights, with little freedom of expression and more imprisoned journalists than any other country. If Turkey applied to join NATO today, it likely would not qualify for membership." Unfortunately, they are already in, and NATO has no formal mechanism to remove a member, which means that the European Court of Human Rights can condemn Turkey 2,812 times (as they have since 1959), and Erdogan can praise the executive powers once granted to Adolf Hitler (as he did at the end of 2015), but there is very little member states can do about it. Then again, as the French intellectual Bernard-Henri Levy recently wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* following Turkey's attack on the Kurdish civilians of Afrin, "Turkey cannot continue to exist simultaneously within NATO and outside it", before decrying how "This sad farce has gone on too long. Unless the West comes to its senses, 2018 will live in infamy as the year that Turkey dropped an iron curtain over the Kurdish people."

A Blood Soaked Olive Branch Pointing at Manbij

Following Turkey's laughably named "Operation Olive Branch" invasion of Western Kurdistan's Afrin Canton (in northwest Syria) last month, the once inconceivable prospect of a direct clash between Turkish and American soldiers has become an alarming possibility. Earlier this week, in a massive understatement, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declared, "The rhetoric is hot. The Turks are angry, and this is a difficult time to do business." The cause of such consternation is the refusal by the U.S. military to vacate the city of Manbij (i.e. Minbic) in Rojava, a city of 100,000 people about 60 miles east of Afrin (i.e. Efrin). Manbij was heroically captured by the YPG (People's Protection Units) & YPJ (Women's Protection Units) from ISIS in 2016, and the U.S. now has an undisclosed number of Special Forces stationed within the city at their request.

In response, Erdogan has angrily threatened U.S. forces by promising, "We will come

to Manbij to handover these territories to their rightful owners” (note: he did not specify whether he was referring to the former owners of ISIS, whose control of the city Turkey was fine with). Erdogan then warned the U.S. to not, “get in between us and terrorist organizations, or we will not be responsible for the unwanted consequences.” Of course, it should be pointed out how those forces he shamelessly labels “terrorists” are the predominately-Kurdish men and women of the YPG & YPJ, who (with U.S. air cover) have valiantly defeated the depraved ISIS mercenaries that Erdogan’s government has armed and funnelled into Syria for the past 3.5 years.

Interestingly, it was during one of these past battles against ISIS that a few photos were taken of U.S. Special Forces wearing shoulder patches of the YPG & YPJ—in solidarity with those actual allies fighting and dying alongside them. In response, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag recently threatened U.S. forces, telling CNN-Turk, “The United States has to understand Turkey’s sensitivities, if US soldiers wear the uniforms of terrorists or stand among them in the event of an attack against the army, there will be no chance of discrimination... If they stand against us with such uniforms, we will consider them terrorists.”

So what you essentially have is a NATO “ally” Turkey threatening to kill U.S. soldiers of a fellow NATO nation, because some of them may wear the patches of their fellow anti-ISIS fighters within Syria, who are only aided by the U.S. because Turkey gave so much previous assistance to ISIS in the first place. The absurdity of the situation should be evident and all Americans should demand that their government break off the useless and dangerous alliance with Turkey as a result. For their part, the YPG & YPJ (who are also under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces or SDF) have proven their value to all of humanity by liberating the ISIS capital of Raqqa and eliminating thousands of their demented butchers since 2014; the least the U.S. Government and American people could do is repay them with our continued support.