



Setting the Record Straight on Turkey

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Lt. General Michael Flynn's commentary "Our ally Turkey is in crisis and needs our support" is appalling and alarming, especially for someone with such established military credentials, and who is considered to be an influential voice in national security for the Trump Administration.

First, Lt. General Flynn's statement that Turkey "...provides badly needed cooperation with U.S. military operations" is flawed. Turkey is an unreliable ally, stemming back to the Cold War. However, one does not have to go back that far to find examples. Turkey's unreliability was proven during the George W. Bush Administration when Turkey refused to allow the United States to use bases in Turkey to open a northern front against the Saddam Hussein dictatorship. Turkey's reasoning was that it wanted \$6 billion more -- in addition to \$26 billion irresponsibly offered by the Bush administration through then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz -- for a total of \$32 billion. A former Bush administration official called Turkey's negotiating tactics "extortion in the name of alliance."¹ Additionally, the United States' successful prosecution of the war against Iraq without access from Turkey proved Turkey's limited value as a strategic military resource in the region.

Furthermore, Turkey is not our strongest ally against ISIS and is not a source of stability in the region as Lt. Gen. Flynn claims. For example, when asked during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Feb. 26, 2015, if he was optimistic that Turkey would become "more engaged" in the fight against the Islamic State (IS), U.S. Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper replied, "*No, I'm not. I think Turkey has other priorities and other interests.*"²

Post-coup attempt in Turkey, Steven A. Cook, senior fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, and Michael Koplow, a policy director at the Israel Policy Forum, penned an op-ed that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* titled, "Turkey Is No Longer a Reliable Ally."³ They cited how the Turks "forced the U.S. into a yearlong negotiation" to use Incirlik air base to strike the Islamic State. The authors added

how post-coup Turkish anger toward the U.S. “reinforces the bilateral crisis.” Cook and Koplou conclude, “All of this should be a clarifying moment for American policy makers, demonstrating that Turkey and the U.S. no longer share values or interests. Rather than overlook Turkish excesses while hoping Mr. Erdogan will come around, it is time to search for more reliable allies.”

Moreover, Robert Ellis, in a *Frontpage Magazine* June 3, 2015 article titled “Turkey, Our Ally” cited the Bipartisan Policy Center’s 2015 Annual Report on Turkey titled, “Turkey: An Increasingly Undependable Ally.”⁴ Ellis stated the BPC’s report concluded: “Turkey is an increasingly undependable ally, and that because of the fundamental strategic disparities between Ankara and Washington, the U.S. should look to other regional players...”⁵ Ellis’ article also cites a UN Security Council report⁶ that he states concludes: “Turkey has also provided the primary routes for arms smuggled to ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaida affiliate.”⁷

Moreover, many prominent think-tanks, such as Cato Institute, even question Turkey’s value in NATO. Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at Cato, wrote, “As Turkey descends more deeply into repression and conflict, its value to NATO decreases ever further.” He continues, “Turkey’s primary military benefit to Washington is access to Incirlik airbase, which is not in fact contingent on Ankara being part of NATO. Moreover, the Erdogan government’s cooperation is not guaranteed. It failed to back the U.S. in its invasion of Iraq and initially barred attacks on the Islamic State,” and adds, “...Ankara probably would not qualify for alliance membership today.”

Of course, Lt. General Flynn neglects Turkey’s cozy relationship with terrorists, helping to facilitate the financing of terrorism. According to a February 2014 report by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD): “Turkey has become a principal financial hub for terrorists under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose government has helped Iran skirt sanctions, supported jihadi groups in Syria, and provided financial backing to Hamas.”

Finally, Lt. General Flynn also needs to be reminded that Turkey contributes to instability in the region with its frequent violations of NATO ally Greece’s sovereignty in the Aegean Sea and its ongoing, 42-year illegal occupation with 40,000 Turkish troops of the Republic of Cyprus, an EU nation. With the former, the examples are egregious and numerous.

- In 2014, there were 3,045 total violations of Greek national airspace and Infringements of Air Traffic Regulations (ICAO) that resulted in eight engagements with Hellenic Air Force interception fighters, according to the Hellenic National Defense General Staff.

- On March 1, 2015, Turkey unilaterally issued a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), a move to reserve extensive airspace over the Aegean Sea for military maneuvers that Greece protested. On March 3, 2015, Turkey canceled the NOTAM thanks to pressure from the U.S. and NATO.
- On July 15, 2015, six Turkish fighters crossed into Greek airspace 20 times – in a single day.
- On February 15, 2016, six Turkish fighter jets and a CN-235 maritime patrol aircraft violated Greek airspace 22 times – again, in a single day.

Turkey's military occupation of the Republic of Cyprus, in violation of international law, is one of many key reasons why peace and stability in the eastern Mediterranean has yet to be achieved. Also, Turkey is threat to energy security in the region. Turkey's bellicose threats against Cyprus, and in recent years, against Israel, which is working in collaboration with Cyprus and a U.S. energy company to develop hydrocarbon reserves found within their exclusive economic zones (EEZs), also threaten U.S. interests. For a six-month period (fall 2014 to spring 2015), Turkey elevated tensions in the eastern Mediterranean by sending warships into Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and by issuing a NAVTEX that stated it would begin seismic surveys.

Lt. General Flynn asserts that "We need to adjust our foreign policy to recognize Turkey as a priority. We need to see the world from Turkey's perspective." Sounds like the high-level national security advisor President-elect Trump is acting like a foreign agent, placing the interests of a foreign government ahead of the best interests of the United States.

¹ *New York Times*, Feb. 20, 2003; A1; col. 6.

² <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/turkey-syria-islamic-state-foreign-fighters.html>.

³ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/turkey-is-no-longer-a-reliable-ally-1470869047>.

⁴ <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/BPC-Turkey-Alliance.pdf>.

⁵ Robert Ellis. "Turkey, Our Ally," *Frontpage Magazine*, June 3, 2015 (web site).

⁶ http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/815.

⁷ Ellis (web site).

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