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AMERICAN HELLENIC INSTITUTE, INC.

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President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I am reaching out to you in anticipation of your June 14 meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan recently stated that your upcoming discussion with President Erdogan would be an opportunity to discuss “significant differences.” As such, we want to share our viewpoint on how we believe President Erdogan should be perceived on the world stage, and the topics that we contend are important to raise with President Erdogan.

Turkey’s provocative and unrestrained actions, especially in recent years, are indicative of President Erdogan’s transformation of Turkey, from a secular ally of the West to an Islamist state with neo-ottoman ambitions. President Erdogan is a particularly dangerous leader insofar that he is motivated by the religio-nationalism ideology of the Muslim brotherhood, which is more clearly represented by his “Blue Homeland” doctrine. The doctrine holds that Turkey will assert its own version, lawful or not, of its sovereign rights in the sea and land of the area using any means at its disposal. The aim of this doctrine is to establish Turkey, with President Erdogan at its head, as the primary hegemon in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Balkans. This is inherently dangerous for U.S. interests in the very important geostrategic area of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Recently, you have repeatedly called out President Erdogan as an “autocrat.” This is a correct assessment and one that still holds true. The previous approaches of past U.S. Presidents to appease President Erdogan have failed. As such, it is imperative that President Erdogan and the Turkish government be held accountable for their provocative actions that violate United States laws and contradict the best interests of the United States.

President Erdogan is actively implementing his “Blue Homeland” doctrine on multiple regional fronts. Throughout 2020, in the Eastern Mediterranean, President Erdogan illegally sent warships and drillships to Greek and Cypriot waters. Turkish jets constantly violate Greek airspace, in contravention of U.S. laws, namely the Arms Export Control Act (AECA). In 2020 alone, Turkey engaged in over 7,000 violations of Greece’s territorial waters and airspace. There were over 4,605 airspace and 3,215 maritime incidents.

Provocations toward Cyprus

In October 2020, Turkey re-opened the beach in Varosha, the fenced-in area of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus which Turkey has occupied since it unlawfully invaded the Republic of Cyprus in 1974. This action violates United Nations resolutions and international treaties to which the U.S. and Turkey are signatories. Mr. President, as a public servant who advocated for upholding the rule of law on Cyprus throughout your long career, I am reminded of your January 27, 1989 letter to then-AHI Chairman Dean Lomis, where you stated: "...we must urge the new Administration [President George H.W. Bush] to make Cyprus a higher policy priority in American foreign policy...we cannot lose sight of the fact that the rights of Greek Cypriots have been trampled upon, and we must ensure that their claims to ancestral land and property seized during the 1974 invasion are not compromised. Finally, we must send a signal to Turkey that until it has removed every last soldier from Cyprus, it will never be recognized as a full member of the international community." Therefore, in the spirit of your long-standing position on the Cyprus problem, we urge you to press President Erdogan on the issue.

Regional Hostilities

In addition, President Erdogan exacerbated the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, openly backing Azerbaijan's aggression towards Armenia and sending Syrian jihadists into the area to fight on behalf of Azerbaijan. He is also meddling in Syria and Libya, further destabilizing those two war-torn countries. In addition, Turkey poses an increasingly dangerous threat to the State of Israel, one of America's closest allies in the region, by openly backing and supporting Hamas. On August 25, 2020, the U.S. Department of State condemned President Erdogan for openly meeting with Hamas' top leadership, including several globally designated terrorists. Last month, your Administration, in response to President Erdogan's inflammatory blood libel attack against Israel and the Jewish people, condemned those remarks as "anti-Semitic" and "incendiary." President Erdogan's blatant anti-Semitism and support of Hamas is particularly disturbing in the context of Hamas' recent attack against Israel.

Undermining NATO

Moreover, Turkey has undermined the integrity of NATO through its purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems. On October 16, 2020, Turkey tested these systems for the first time. In December 2020, the United States government rightfully sanctioned Turkey under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for its purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems.

Turkey's behavior and actions clearly demonstrate that Turkey is not an ally, and that President Erdogan is someone who operates outside of the rules-based international order. Secretary Blinken acknowledged this in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where he stated: "Turkey is an ally, that in many ways... is not acting as an ally should and this is a very, very significant challenge for us and we're very clear-eyed about it."

Given Turkey's provocative behavior which undermine regional stability, United States interests, the rule of law, including U.S. law, we request the following points be raised with President Erdogan:

- Call upon President Erdogan to improve human rights and religious freedom in Turkey. To that effect, demand that the Turkish government cease its persecution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the destruction or conversion of Holy Sites. Ask for President Erdogan to revert the Hagia Sophia back to a UNESCO-designated museum.
- Reiterate to President Erdogan the request to have the Turkish government immediately retire the Russian S-400 missile systems, as Turkey's purchase is in violation of U.S. law and threatens the integrity of NATO. Any conditions that President Erdogan places on retiring the missiles should be refused. Turkey needs to give up the missile system without expecting any special reward from the United States. Giving Turkey extraordinary concessions for it to simply honor its NATO obligations will embolden President Erdogan to extort the United States government.
- Call upon Turkey to cease and desist from its continuous violations of Greece's territorial waters and airspace, citing that the actions are in violation of both international and U.S. law, including the Arms Export Control Act (AECA).
- Call upon Turkey to end its illegal military occupation of 37.3 percent of Cyprus.
- Call upon Turkey to cease and desist from its illegal interference in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- Demand that President Erdogan cease his support and promotion of a two-state solution regarding Cyprus, which is in violation of international law and United Nations resolutions.
- Rebuke President Erdogan's efforts to change the status of Varosha.
- Call upon Turkey to cease its transfer of illegal settlers to the occupied area of Cyprus, which is in violation of the Geneva Convention.
- Demand that Turkey cease its support of Hamas, and more broadly, end its documented ties with radical Islamic terrorist organizations, which you have highlighted in the past. Point out that Turkey's support for international terrorism is also in violation of both international and U.S. law, including the Arms Export Control Act (AECA).
- Call upon Turkey to cease its destabilizing interventions in Libya, Syria (which included attacking Kurdish allies of the United States), and Nagorno-Karabakh.

While we understand that the U.S.-Turkey relationship is complicated and multifaceted, it is imperative to recognize the relationship cannot be artificially propped up by ignoring Turkey's malfeasance, to the detriment of regional stability, United States allies, and the long-term interests of the United States. The United States should expect more, not less, from an ostensible ally, which Turkey claims to be. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you pressure President Erdogan to take corrective actions regarding the aforementioned transgressions. If he does not listen, then the U.S. government should clearly delineate punitive consequences for his intransigence.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis

CC: Vice President Kamala Harris

Ron Klain, Chief of Staff

Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense

William Burns, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency

General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Jake Sullivan, National Security Adviser

Wendy Sherman, Deputy Secretary of State, Department of State

Victoria Nuland, Under Secretary For Political Affairs, Department of State

Amanda Sloat, Senior Director for Europe, National Security Adviser

Brett McGurk, Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, National Security Council

Philip Reeker, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European & Eurasian Affairs, Department of State

Judith Gail Garber, Ambassador of the United States to Cyprus

David Satterfield, Ambassador of the United States to Turkey

Matthew Palmer, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European & Eurasian Affairs, Department of State

Maria Olson, Director of Southern European Affairs, Department of State

Clare Orvis, Senior Turkey Desk Officer, Department of State

Isabelle Chan, Cyprus Desk Officer, Department of State

The Congress