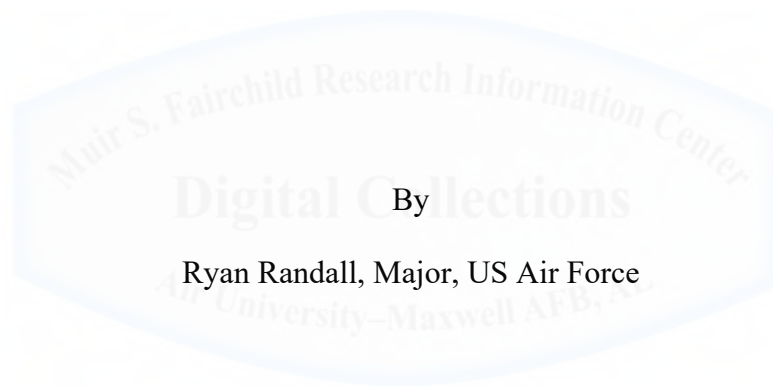


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**TURKEY AND NATO – (UN)HAPPY TOGETHER**



By

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### **Turkey And NATO – (Un)Happy Together**

*“Any attack on democracy, in any of our countries, is an attack on the very foundation of our Alliance. A strong and democratic Turkey is essential for the stability and security of Europe and the region. I am confident that Turkey will keep its commitment to the rule of law and the democratic values at the heart of our Alliance.”*

– NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 6 September 2016

In 1952 both Turkey and Greece joined NATO, decided largely out of Cold War strategies against the Soviet Union. While some question why Turkey, a country nearly 2,000 miles from the north Atlantic, was offered membership into the Alliance, the reason was two-fold: its strategic location within Europe and the underlying principle of the Truman Doctrine – “extending military and economic aid to states vulnerable to Soviet threat / expansion.”<sup>1</sup> Membership in NATO guaranteed that Turkey would not become a Soviet ally and expanded NATO’s reach eastward toward, what was then, the Soviet Union. With firmly anti-Communist governments, “Greece and Turkey were viewed by the West as bulwarks against Moscow and the spread of communism in Europe.”<sup>2</sup> With the Korean War on the horizon, “fears of China and Russia expanding their influence into other parts of the world were realized. (Both Greece and Turkey contributed troops to fight in Korea).”<sup>3</sup> While Turkey can be viewed as an important member of the Alliance and a reliable ally for nearly six decades, Turkey’s relationship with NATO and the West has been both complicated and tumultuous. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s continual defiance of the democratic principles that form the bedrock of the United Nations Charter has pinned the Alliance against one of its own members. Last year’s failed coup attempt to overthrow President Erdogan was a watershed moment that has further strained Turkey-NATO relations, jeopardizing Turkey’s close ties with the Alliance, while pushing it toward warming relations with Russia. NATO must not stand by and watch the erosion of democracy take place from within Turkey. The Alliance must come together and develop new

protocols for dealing with a member that continually defies the fundamental principles shared by all Allies: freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The Organization must reaffirm their clear commitment to the democratic values that form the cornerstone of the Alliance and oppose any and all actions that deter from their mission to establish peace and stability around the world.

This paper will briefly describe and examine the origins of Turkey's membership in NATO, the way in which the Greek-Turkish conflict underpins its commitment to NATO, along with an assessment of its contentious relationship with the Euro-Atlantic community and the West.<sup>4</sup> It will discuss the reasons why Turkey demonstrates lower levels of coherence to the alliance than any other NATO member, and the reasons why Turkey's most recent coup attempt has become such a defining moment for Turkey-NATO relations. Finally, it will discuss the concerns from both sides and explain why, despite calls for expelling Turkey or terminating its membership, Turkey will not seek to leave the alliance, nor will NATO pursue terminating measures.

Since joining NATO in 1952, the alliance considers Turkey's position at the nexus of the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Balkans a key strategic location as NATO's southeastern frontier.<sup>5</sup> But Turkey's acceptance into NATO stemmed more from the strategy of the alliance to stop the spread of communism in the face of Soviet advances, rather than Turkey's embodiment of NATO's democratic values and founding principles.<sup>6</sup> Leading up to Turkey joining NATO, and partly the reason for it, Turkey sought to set aside its centuries-long conflict with Greece and take up the fight against the spread of communism. Cooperation between the two countries developed in the 1930s "because both countries wanted to avoid entanglements with the great powers that had hindered their national ambitions in the past."<sup>7</sup>

Although WWII temporarily derailed this cooperation, the fear of communism brought them back together when Greece ‘fought a civil war against domestic Communists and Turkey endured enormous pressure from its Soviet neighbor for both maritime and territorial concessions.’<sup>8</sup> With the promise of funds and arms, the Truman Doctrine would prove to be the linchpin in their successful resistance. Both countries feared Communist aggression would persist “without the embrace of NATO.”<sup>9</sup> Turkey’s military commitment to the Korean War eventually persuaded the Alliance to reconsider Turkish membership. In February 1952, at the Lisbon meeting of the North Atlantic Council, against opposition from the northern allies, the US led the way to bring Greece and Turkey into the alliance based on “the perceived need for NATO to secure its southeastern flank against a potential Soviet attack and the prospect of acquiring troops, particularly from Turkish divisions.”<sup>10</sup>

While the US advocated for Turkey’s membership in NATO, the next several decades tested Turkey’s relationship with the alliance and the West, starting with the small island nation of Cyprus. With a population 80 percent Greek and about 20 percent Turkish, Cyprus had been the epicenter of turmoil in the Aegean Sea.<sup>11</sup> Britain’s sovereignty over the island, “Greek Cypriot pressure for enosis with their mother country,” and Turkish Cypriot “agitation for protection from Turkey ... created more problems than the Cypriots could handle.”<sup>12</sup> Former NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay attempted to mitigate the conflict in the late 1950s. Similarly, “his successor, Paul-Henri Spaak, proposed a federal arrangement with separate Greek and Turkish legislatures advising a British governor.”<sup>13</sup> This attempt also failed and Cyprus became independent in 1960. The terms of independence would give Greece, Turkey, and Britain special rights in Cyprus, and allow the Greek Cypriots, who had the majority population, “to control the government under President Archbishop Makarios, but with special protections for

the Turkish minority intended to promote internal harmony and eliminate obstacles to NATO objectives.”<sup>14</sup> Makarios instead worked to curb the minority’s role in the Cypriot government, resulting in violence between the two groups.<sup>15</sup>

Up to this point, the United States kept out of the conflict between Greece, Turkey and the new nation of Cyprus. However, it remained “conscious of the dangers a Greek-Turkish conflict could inflict on NATO’s defense structure in the eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>16</sup> Makarios’ anti-American rhetoric and belief in the unitary state would have a lasting impression in the region for the next 15 years. The 1960s and 1970s saw Turkey’s close relationship with the US unwind. As part of the Soviet-American resolution of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the United States removed its medium-range missiles from Turkey without warning, leaving Turkey with a sense of betrayal and vulnerable to Soviet incursion.<sup>17</sup> Two years later, Turkey’s contentious relationship with Greece over the island of Cyprus rose again. US President Lyndon B. Johnson vehemently opposed any Turkish intervention in Cyprus with US supplied military weapons that would bring about a Soviet attack. He warned that if this were to happen, “NATO would reconsider its military obligation to respond to an attack against Turkey under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.”<sup>18</sup> These words raised doubts as to the “reliability of the American commitment and made the Turks as susceptible as Greeks to Soviet efforts to weaken their ties to NATO.”<sup>19</sup>

This led to the 1974 overthrow of the anti-American Makarios by “supporters of the Greek junta in Athens and replaced by an unscrupulous agent of the new ruling colonels’ intent on securing Cyprus’s enosis with the mother country.”<sup>20</sup> Turkey invaded Cyprus, and within three days deposed the Greek junta and replaced it with a powerless civilian government. Greece blamed the US for the betrayal of its Greek ally, attempting to sway public opinion. After all, it

was Turkey's "military potential and strategic location straddling the Dardanelles that made the Turkish partnership more valuable than its Greek rival."<sup>21</sup> Although Turkey's purpose for intervening in Cyprus was to protect the Turkish minority from persecution, in February 1975, under Congressional pressure the United States placed an embargo on sending military equipment to Turkey. In retaliation, Turkey suspended US operations at Turkish military bases.<sup>22</sup> This resulted in Greece reducing its commitment to the alliance and both Greece and Turkey improved their relations with Russia. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 would reaffirm Greece's commitment to the alliance, and they would "reintegrate into NATO's military structure in 1980."<sup>23</sup>

While this may seem like a regional conflict between two nations, with the yet unknown totality of effects resulting from the July 2016 attempted coup, how NATO and the West handle Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's concerns will either breathe life into Turkey's commitment to the Alliance or warm its relations with Russia. So far, Erdogan's actions of recalling senior military officials, calling for NATO countries to turn over "plotters and mutineers,"<sup>24</sup> and the arrest of thousands of senior Turkish military officials have received international criticism. Erdogan has been extremely vocal toward the US demanding the extradition of the Muslim teacher Fethullah Gulen, the man he blames for orchestrating the coup, who lives in exile in Pennsylvania, where he runs "an organization that purports to promote moderate Islamic values."<sup>25</sup>

Even closer to Turkey, Erdogan has targeted Greece for refusing to extradite eight Turkish military personnel that fled to Northern Greece and sought political asylum following the 2016 coup. The already fragile relationship has become increasingly volatile, resurrecting years of animosity between two members of the Alliance.

Some observers blamed the failed coup on Kemalists (those who uphold the ideals of Kemal Ataturk, the First World War hero who modernized Turkey by turning it into a secular, Westward-oriented state) rising against the erosion of secularism under Erdogan's "vision of Turkey as a regional superpower with conservative Islam at its core"<sup>26</sup> Mehmet Yalinap, accused Turkish Air Force General, stated earlier this year that he sees a common denominator in those being rounded up in Erdogan's post-coup purge, that being "a firm belief in Ataturk's founding principles of our state, democracy, freedom of speech, openness, integration with the West in values."<sup>27</sup> Erdogan's anger over Turkey's NATO allies refusing to "extradite military personnel seeking asylum in countries across the alliance, from the United States to Belgium,"<sup>28</sup> has added fuel to the already contentious relationship with NATO, raising security concerns across member states of the Alliance.

During a meeting last September in Hangzhou, China, US President Barack Obama thanked President Erdogan, his Government and the people of Turkey for "exceptional humanitarian support of refugees" and reaffirmed their position as a "key partner in providing aid and assistance to vulnerable citizens that have poured out of Syria as well as Iraq."<sup>29</sup> However, Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) are under fire for numerous waves of repression within his own country. Critics accuse the party of:

"unwillingness to complete the peace and disarmament process with the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), suppression of individual liberties, freedom of the press and freedom of speech, its contempt for parliamentary democracy and its embrace of authoritarian rule, to its determination to polarize society, disregard for the law, dismissal of every criticism as treason, its reckless support of extremists in Syria,"<sup>30</sup>

The numerous human rights violations under Erdogan's presidency has earned scrutiny and skepticism. Because he blames the West for the failed coup, and criticizes western values and ideology for fueling the uprising, he has placed his de facto, one-man rule, authoritarian

presidency more in line with the likes of China and Russia than with the hallowed values of other NATO member states.

President Vladimir Putin, for instance,

“has presided over a weakening Russian economy plagued by massive crony corruption. Fearing popular discontent, he has introduced draconian restrictions on assembly and expression, imposed unprecedented sanctions for online dissent, and crippled civil society groups while embarking on various military adventures to distract from dwindling economic prospects at home.”<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, Chinese President Xi Jinping “has embarked on a similar path of repression. China enjoyed remarkable economic growth as earlier leaders freed citizens economically from the whims of Communist Party rule that had brought the disastrous Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.”<sup>32</sup> But political reform did not follow economic liberalization, which was “left stillborn in the crushing of the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement.”<sup>33</sup> Economic decisions were made “mostly by the party’s desire to sustain growth at any cost in order to keep popular discontent under wraps.” The result was soaring social inequality, a deteriorating environment, and flourishing corruption.<sup>34</sup> “Worried as well that popular discontent would rise as economic growth slowed, Xi, too, has embarked on the most intense crackdown since the Tiananmen era, leaving his government even less accountable.”<sup>35</sup> While the Chinese people’s demands for “cleaner air, safer food, a just judicial system, and an accountable government”<sup>36</sup> go unanswered, Xi is looking increasingly fearful for what comes next – a feeling Erdogan may know all too well.

While autocrats ruling in such countries as Venezuela, Ethiopia and Rwanda can also be added to the list of those plagued by corruption, political entanglements and blatant disregard for human rights, only Turkey has a commitment to NATO, and the values and European norms associated with the alliance. Erdogan’s authoritarian style of governing causes worry for several

NATO members, especially in light of his most recent push for constitutional changes that would eliminate the position of Prime Minister, a position he held from 2003-2014 before becoming President, and transfer all executive and administrative powers to the Presidency. As Prime Minister, “he presided over years of robust economic growth, but became entangled in regional and internal conflicts that brought a wave of terrorist attacks and economic decline to the country.”<sup>37</sup> However, the ongoing populist surge has given him the confidence and justification to push for one-man rule.

While most Turks felt relief that Erdogan had not been overthrown, the Kurds, which make up about 19% of Turkey’s population, disagreed.<sup>38</sup> They have suffered ethnic persecution since Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923. President Erdogan has openly expressed his disdain for the Kurds, all of whom he associates with the PKK, a Kurdish rebel group considered an armed terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union (EU) and United States. For years, he has blasted the PKK for attempting to create their own state within Turkey, and along with Fethullah Gülen, blamed them for inciting the attempted coup to overthrow his Presidency. Since the failed attempt, Erdogan has further targeted the PKK along the Iraqi-Turkish border, and in a region of Syria that the Kurds call ‘Rojava’, “a relative oasis of security and opportunity in a desert of anarchy and oppression,” comprised of the “three Kurdish-majority cantons of northern Syria”<sup>39</sup> and governed by the “principles of democratic confederalism as established by the Democratic Union Party (PYD).”<sup>40</sup> While Rojava has been a Kurdish and PKK stronghold for years, in their fight for freedom against religious persecution, it has also provided shelter and protection for Syrian refugees and those fleeing Mosul.

Si Sheppard notes that “The start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 gave the historically marginalized Kurds their first real chance to assert their autonomy, and embark on a radical experiment in direct democracy.”<sup>41</sup> The Kurds created their success in Rojava out of the West’s failed democracy-building efforts and the “disappointment of the Arab Spring” and “holds the potential to become a viable, America-friendly society—one that can serve as an exemplar of indigenous Middle Eastern, secular, democratic, feminist values, at a time when even those states in the region founded on similar principles are moving in the opposite direction.”<sup>42</sup> And while the United States has supported the PKK’s Syrian sister organization, known as the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), in their fight against the Islamic State (IS), President Erdogan has targeted the PKK in a broader Turkish security crackdown following the July 2016 coup attempt. “The YPG has proved vital in the international military campaign against the Islamic State, but the Turkish government has long been reluctant to aid the Syrian Kurds for fear that their gains could revive the PKK’s own desire for greater autonomy and threaten Turkey’s territorial integrity.”<sup>43</sup>

Turkey claims to stand side-by-side with the United States in the fight against the Islamic State, but has “concentrated more on PKK targets in a two-pronged ‘anti-terror’ war that many see as paradoxical and counterproductive.”<sup>44</sup> In a 2015 statement, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, “there is no difference between PKK and Daesh [IS],” underscoring the AKP’s determination to rid any threat of opposition, and showing the difference in perspective between the two nations regarding the Islamic State problem. While the United States has backed Syrian Kurds and focused on fighting the Islamic State militants, “Turkey’s main priority is curtailing growing Kurdish power along its southern border with Syria.”<sup>45</sup> Turkey shows concern that “Kurdish gains in Iraq and in Syria will encourage a revival of a Kurdish armed insurgency

in Turkey in pursuit of an independent state.”<sup>46</sup> Over the last several years, these differing views have further strained Turkey’s relationship with the West and now put United States and NATO security interests at risk.

While mostly out of political concerns—the desire to avoid giving the Muslim world the perception that Turkey was aiding the “West”—Turkey gave the United States limited access to key airspace and bases during the war in Iraq after 9-11, and for use in the fight against IS in Syria. American forces, aircraft and equipment have transited Incirlik Air Base, a critical logistics center in the Southern city of Adana, for the past 15 years in route to locations in the Middle East.<sup>47</sup> For years, Turkey had limited US activity on the base, allowing only support aircraft and personnel to use the base for non-combat operations and restricting the staging of strike aircraft and weapons for offensive operations against other Muslim countries in the region. In mid-2015, Turkey lifted that restriction and US forces flew their first combat mission from Incirlik against the Islamic State in Syria in August 2015. But during the coup attempt last summer, the government of Turkey shut down the electrical power supply to the base, limiting US operations to generator power. The Turkish base commander was arrested under accusations that he had a part in the attempted coup, raising questions whether or not US officials had known of the impending coup. President Erdogan has not further restricted the US use of the base, but expresses concern over its continued use by the US-led coalition, which has yet to join operations with the Turkish military in its fight against the Syrian rebels it backs. Moreover, Turkey expressed anger for US support for “Kurdish militia fighters it sees as an extension of PKK militants fighting within Turkey.”<sup>48</sup>

After nearly three decades of fighting, numerous calls for peace, and a two-year cease-fire between Turkey and the PKK in 2013, peace talks collapsed in the summer of 2015 as the

AKP backpedaled on a peace deal. As a result, the PKK resumed its attacks on Turkish security forces. During the 2015 negotiation talks, Erdogan and the AKP hoped to gain Kurdish voters in an attempt to increase its power, essentially looking to gain support from the AKP's opposition - the People's Democratic Party (HDP). Erdogan sought a deal "where the Kurdish party would support his plan for enhanced presidential powers in return for other constitutional changes that would give the Kurds, and by extension the HDP, more local power."<sup>49</sup> The HDP was initially receptive to this proposal and alienated "many liberal Turkish voters in the summer of 2013 when it refused to support the widely-publicized Gezi Park protests."<sup>50</sup> But the HDP quickly realized that "empowering Erdogan in pursuit of its own goals was a dangerous bargain" and "in the spring of 2015, the HDP publicly proclaimed that it would never support Erdogan's presidential plans."<sup>51</sup> Erdogan failed to bring the HDP into the fold for his own political gain, but instead caused a deeper rift within the political establishment. Erdogan responded by distancing himself from negotiations and doubling down on his nationalist rhetoric, which helped set the stage for renewed violence.<sup>52</sup>

The AKP had "once sought to use its political power to secure peace on the terms it wanted" but abandoned this stance for a new-found hope in using its "military force to compel an acceptable (peace) solution."<sup>53</sup> However, the attempted coup in the summer of 2016 has sidetracked any hopes of negotiations with either the PKK or the HDP, and left the legitimacy of the AKP in question. Zia Weise argues that the government has cracked down against "anything that appears to challenge government policy toward the 'Kurdish issue'" which "is quickly labeled 'terror propaganda' — a phrase derived from Turkey's broad anti-terror law, which criminalizes 'making propaganda in connection with [terror] organizations.'"<sup>54</sup> Following clashes with PKK militants in March 2016, President Erdogan stated, "it's not only the person

who pulls the trigger, but those who made that possible who should also be defined as terrorists,” there is no difference between “a terrorist holding a gun or a bomb and those who use their position and pen to serve the aims.”<sup>55</sup> The result ... a crackdown against dissenting voices – “journalists, lawyers, academics, and opposition politicians – have been arrested for disseminating propaganda on behalf of a terrorist organization.”<sup>56</sup>

This type of anti-democratic rhetoric by the Turkish government overshadows the Kurdish struggle for religious autonomy and incites continued religious persecution. President Erdogan’s crackdown on “terror propaganda” and efforts to arrest any dissenting voices is part of his larger quest to dismantle the Kurdish uprising and prevent armed Kurdish groups from joining forces along its borders, bolstering the PKK cause. Michael J. Totten claims that President Erdogan, “like most of his ethnic Turkish countrymen, is terrified that an independent Syrian Kurdistan will help Turkish Kurdistan wage a revolutionary war against Ankara. Fairly or not, Erdogan sees Rojava much the way the Israelis see Hezbollah-occupied southern Lebanon.”<sup>57</sup>

Of the 28 member countries in NATO, Turkey is the most volatile. The numerous human rights violations, ethnic persecution of the Turkish Kurds, hostile Greek-Turkish relations, and vociferous nature in which Erdogan and the AKP have shut down any opposition to the party, and prevented HDP participation in Turkish governance, have created this watershed moment in world events. Turkey’s response to the attempted coup last summer received international rebuke for widespread rounding up and arrest of military officers and protesters, suppression of individual liberties and freedoms (particularly freedom of press and freedom of speech), shutting down of television stations, dismissal of any criticism of his authoritarian rule as treason, and its post-coup purge of public workers, teachers, lawmakers, and soldiers – all moves that contradict

the democratic values and principles of the Alliance, and undermine the security of the North Atlantic area. And while Turkey has been struggling in its attempts to gain EU membership since accession talks began in 2005, its response to the attempted coup and subsequent call to reinstate the death penalty caused the European Parliament to immediately suspend membership talks condemning what it called “disproportionate repressive measures” taken by the Turkish government, almost definitely sealing its fate on renewed talks anytime soon.<sup>58</sup>

The scale of international criticism, and Erdogan’s recent talks with Russian president Vladimir Putin regarding joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), necessitate consideration of what will happen next. Turkey’s outright violation of NATO member states’ commitment to collective defense and “the principles of democracy, individual liberty, human rights and the rule of law,” puts into question the future of Turkey-NATO relations and its membership in the alliance.<sup>59</sup> While Turkey’s behavior violates NATO’s founding principles, Turkey is not prepared to leave the alliance just yet, and NATO has somewhat turned a blind eye. Although Russia would accept them into the SCO with open arms this would not serve Turkey’s, or NATO’s, best interest. This would jeopardize Turkey’s position on the world stage because NATO member states in the region would ostracize Turkey. While the SCO might seem like a fitting alternative to the NATO and EU alliances, given the recent criticism Turkey has received in response to last year’s failed coup and the numerous calls for their expulsion from NATO, Erdogan would forfeit great benefits within the Alliance for relatively meager gains in allying with Russia.

### **Why NATO wants them to stay**

First, Turkey has been present in virtually every NATO operation since joining the Alliance. From “training Afghan Security Forces and leading coalition efforts in the central

district, including Kabul; sending ships and aircraft to Libya; participating in counterpiracy operations; maintaining a steady presence in the security and peacekeeping force in the Balkans.”<sup>60</sup> In the wake of the coup attempt, NATO has reaffirmed its commitment to Turkey and will make concessions before it allows Turkey to leave the Alliance. While the failed attempt to overthrow Erdogan has strengthened his power within Turkey, it weakened Turkey’s image on the international stage, and member states questioned its NATO commitment. Even after the purge of those responsible for the attempted coup, the Turkish army remains the second largest military in NATO.

Second, Turkey is a strategic ally and plays a significant role in securing US and NATO interests around the globe. The country is central to several global hotspots that “makes the continuing availability of its territory for the stationing and transport of arms, cargo, and personnel valuable for the US and NATO.”<sup>61</sup> “Turkey also controls access to and from the Black Sea through its straits pursuant to the Montreux Convention of 1936.”<sup>62</sup> Turkey allows US and NATO personnel to use various Turkish bases, such as Incirlik Air Base, as transient locations for operations. Though not a NATO facility, it “serves as a base for airstrikes on positions of the 'Islamic State' group in Syria and Iraq” and has “played an important role in the wars in the Persian Gulf and NATO's Afghanistan mission.”<sup>63</sup> And while primarily the United States uses Incirlik, the “western Turkish port city of Izmir hosts one of the five NATO headquarters, which is responsible for coordinating major operations of land-based forces.”<sup>64</sup> With the US military airport in Izmir, the US and NATO have a lot to lose should Turkey withdraw from the alliance.

Third, should Turkey leave NATO for closer ties with Russia, the United States would have to relocate one of NATO’s missile defense radar systems, as well as a handful of US nuclear weapons. In the light of recent events, critics find the presence of these weapons

troubling. They express fears that, should Turkey be expelled or cut ties with the Alliance, it may take possession of these weapons or worse, turn them over to Russia.

Lastly, Jamie Chandler, a political scientist at Hunter College in New York City, argues that “Turkey’s secular-Islamic government provides NATO [with] a cultural and political bridge into the Arab world, and NATO installations in the country give the organization an efficient means to deal with instability in the region.”<sup>65</sup> The cultural bridge has helped the United States to gaining access to areas of instability in which NATO has conducted missions for decades. Because of the extraordinarily strategic geopolitical position, NATO would sooner give Turkey concessions than expel it from the alliance.

### **Why Turkey wants to stay**

Similarly, Turkey has numerous reasons why it needs NATO. First, the United States, France and the UK provide Turkey with military arms, equipment, and weapon systems. Replacing these systems and equipment would be extremely costly, but they would not work with Russian or Chinese built systems (should Turkey choose to go that route.) It would take Turkey many years to integrate new (weapon) systems and train personnel on them, a great strain for Turkey’s existing capabilities.

Second, Erdogan’s rubbing elbows with Russia and expressing interest in joining the SCO may prove fruitful in the short-term, but eventually Russia or China will turn on him and exploit the relationship, using both Erdogan and Turkey pawns in their power game. However, the threat of a shift to the East may be just the strategy Erdogan needs in getting NATO to come to the bargaining table, to support his agenda and acknowledge Turkey’s great power status on the world stage. For now, it seems to be an idle threat on Erdogan’s part and a shrewd tactic to get NATO and the EU to overlook his human rights abuses. Even if this approach fails, the

international backlash that would ensue from Turkey's pivot toward Russia and China would have drastic effects for Turkey, both politically and economically, and create an internal opposition windfall – more than Erdogan would be able to control.

Third, while NATO has remained relatively neutral in responding to the attempted coup and backing Turkey in their fight against the PKK, if Turkey was to go to war with one of NATO's enemies, they would have the full-weight of the alliance behind them – something Erdogan has been hoping for since he became President. However, because Greece is also a member of NATO, Turkey will not be able to assume NATO support in gaining any ground on its quarrels over Cyprus, or extradition of suspected coup conspirators.

Lastly, with much of the senior Turkish military officials either imprisoned or awaiting trial, it brings Turkey's military prowess and loyalty in question. The tighter civilian control over the military since the failed coup will have major effects on readiness and performance. The struggle to maintain civilian authority will put Turkish national security at risk. With dissention in the ranks, Erdogan has nowhere else to look for support except NATO.

### **Where does this leave Turkey-NATO relations?**

While the post-coup response is ongoing, there are growing concerns over Turkey's future role in NATO, the possible loss of benefits as a member of the alliance, and its path to correct its injustices. A few of the major concerns are:

- US/NATO basing and operations in Turkey and the ability to maintain security and stability within the region and conflict areas influenced by Turkey's geopolitical location
- Joint exercises and expeditionary missions may be affected along with “NATO assistance to address (to include air defense batteries and AWACS aircraft) to address Turkey's external threats”<sup>66</sup>
- Bilateral military cooperation agreements and arms sales may be jeopardized. Currently, the US provides Foreign Military Sales of arms and weapon systems to Turkey as well as approximately \$3-\$5 million annual security-related aid<sup>67</sup>

- Ongoing issues in Syria and Iraq and anti-ISIS coalition. As previously mentioned, there are increased tensions over the US backing Kurdish rebels in their fight against the Islamic State, while Turkey sees these Kurds as terrorists against Turkish society. There is also Turkey's suppression of the Kurds both within and outside Turkey, "other state and non-state actors, and contested territory in northern Syria"<sup>68</sup>
- Domestic instability and numerous human rights violations that plague the country. "Including the government's approach to rule of law, civil liberties, terrorist threats, Kurds and other minorities, and nearly 3 million refugees and migrants from Syria and elsewhere"<sup>69</sup>
- Border concerns over "Turkey's ability and willingness, in concert with other international actors, to control cross-border flows of refugees, migrants, and possible foreign fighters and terrorists."<sup>70</sup> While this is a growing concern across Europe, Turkey's proximity to conflict zones makes it more vulnerable to incursions than other NATO allies.

Among speculation as to NATO's stance regarding the failed coup in Turkey and Turkey's membership in the alliance, a NATO spokesperson stressed their position stating:

In view of speculative press reports regarding NATO's stance regarding the failed coup in Turkey and Turkey's NATO membership, let me stress NATO's very clear position. Turkey is a valued Ally, making substantial contributions to NATO's joint efforts. Turkey takes full part in the Alliance's consensus-based decisions as we confront the biggest security challenges in a generation. Turkey's NATO membership is not in question. Our Alliance is committed to collective defence and founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, human rights and the rule of law. NATO counts on the continued contributions of Turkey and Turkey can count on the solidarity and support of NATO.<sup>71</sup>

And yet, the relationship between Turkey and other Alliance members is clearly strained. In an article for *Deutsche Welle*, titled "NATO and Turkey: Allies, not friends," Bernd Riegert states that while NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemned the attempted military coup, he stated, "Turkey had to respect its own democratic order, rule of law and human rights."<sup>72</sup> And while President Erdogan had hoped for the full-support of NATO behind his response to the coup, "the Turkish government was displeased with what it regarded as this very restrained expression of solidarity."<sup>73</sup> Riegert advises that while Turkey is a NATO member, "the North Atlantic Treaty makes no mention of leaving or being expelled from the alliance, nor of any penalties for misbehavior. The treaty can only be terminated by the member state itself."<sup>74</sup>

This would suggest that Erdogan's authoritarian autocratic rule and numerous violations of the principles of democracy, individual liberty, human rights and the rule of law will go unanswered. In other words, "NATO can only admonish the government in Ankara, not punish it."<sup>75</sup>

On the one hand, if Erdogan's actions go without reprisal, it will suggest that the founding principles of the Alliance have become merely procedural and administrative, easily overlooked for the sake of NATO's best interest. On the other hand, any punishment by NATO may push Erdogan to terminate its membership as it moves closer to Russia. Erdogan's presidency is a true test of the Alliance's might, both in principle and in practice. The lack of NATO support in the aftermath of the attempted coup and the outright criticism over Turkey's response by other member states, leaves Erdogan and the Turkish government to question the purpose of the Alliance. As Riegert suggests, the "Alliance has had little impact on Turkey after the country's failed coup."<sup>76</sup> This is just one of several incidents in Erdogan's presidency in which NATO states have not come to Turkey's aid.

Another incident occurred late in 2015 when a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian SU-24 fighter jet in the Turkey-Syrian border area, saying it violated Turkish airspace. Russia vowed retaliation and tensions grew between NATO and Russia. NATO ministers discussed the decisive article of the Alliance, Article 5, which guarantees that an "armed attack against one or more of (the alliance members) in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all."<sup>77</sup> Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Asselborn dismissed the argument that NATO had a duty to respond noting that "the guarantee is only valid when a member state is clearly attacked."<sup>78</sup> While NATO seeks to avoid conflict and find ways to avoid escalation with countries like Russia, several NATO members are not willing to "pay the price for a war started by the Turks."<sup>79</sup> This antagonistic attitude may be in part due to the widespread Islamophobia

that has spread across Europe in the wake of increased terrorist attacks and the globalization and resettlement of Syrian refugees. But for reasons that remain unclear, Russia made amends with Turkey less than a year later. Even the December 2016 assassination of Andrey Karlov, Russia's ambassador to Turkey, by a Turkish police officer in Ankara did not drive a wedge between Turkey-Russia relations.

Since this rekindled relationship, Turkey has expressed interest in joining the SCO as an alternative to the European Union. As Turkey flounders in the wake of the European Parliament's decision to suspend EU membership talks, Erdogan would rather join the SCO than face criticism and scrutiny from other Euro-Atlantic nations. His shift in foreign policy also impacts other NATO partners that rely on Turkey's assistance in the refugee crisis. German Chancellor Angela Merkel increasingly fears that Erdogan could end up pulling out of their refugee deal, which would promote a further wave of migration to Germany – “a threat he has repeatedly issued.”<sup>80</sup> And while Germany pays him handsomely for providing “humanitarian assistance,” one can only assume that his “kindness” also requires payment “with ignoble silence about his trampling of democracy and human rights.”<sup>81</sup>

### **What does this all mean?**

Turkey's shift to the east in foreign policy, including Ankara's closer cooperation with the Russia-China dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the similarities between Xi and Putin's rule to that of Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian and autocratic governance have raised significant concern. President Erdogan clearly rejects the Western conception of human rights and civil liberties that provide the underlying principles of the NATO alliance. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated, “any attack on democracy, in any of our countries, is an attack on the very foundation of our Alliance.”<sup>82</sup> But so far, Turkey has received no reprisals

for its blatant violations of human rights and liberties. Erdogan's Islamic chauvinism and his attack on the secular ideals of the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, have put the country at odds, leaving the world to question what's next.

### **Conclusion**

Although Stoltenberg emphasized NATO's solidarity with Turkey after last year's attempted coup and terrorist attacks in Istanbul, other government officials reject his confidence in Turkey's ability to "keep its commitment to the rule of law and the democratic values at the heart of our Alliance."<sup>83</sup> While he correctly believes that the stability and security of Europe and the region rely on a strong and democratic Turkey, this can all collapse should Turkey turn rogue and side with the East. While Erdogan is quick to place blame elsewhere and continues to rule with an iron fist, NATO must keep him in check if they want to keep a strategic ally, not necessarily a "friend."

Turkey plays a critical role in the security and stability of US and NATO interests around the globe, but now NATO should stand in solidarity against the authoritarian rule that President Erdogan has been so quick to embody. While this requires diplomacy in dealing with Erdogan, NATO must stop pandering to his every whim. As Erdogan spews rhetoric regarding his interest in joining the SCO and makes idle threats to leave the NATO alliance, seemingly warming relations with Russia, he is not going anywhere anytime soon. Though he has expressed strong complaints about the lack of support from NATO in his regional grievances and internal strife within Turkey, he appears committed to the Alliance in the wake of Turkey's post-coup crackdown, after replacing nearly half of the senior military officials at several key NATO installations. While he has clearly shown his discontent with the Alliance, just how far he would go in his protests remains unknown.

The mercurial Erdogan has unwittingly ushered in a new era for NATO. In spite of his many digressions from democratic principles of the North Atlantic Treaty, to preserve stability in the North Atlantic region, NATO needs Turkey as much as Turkey needs NATO. The Alliance must accept that dealing with such a capricious member will always be difficult and therefore must create official processes for engaging with him. NATO must develop a new protocol for dealing with a member of the Alliance that falls out of sync with the rest of the Organization – or at worst may drag the Alliance into a conflict with Russia, China or others. This new protocol must become part of the Organization’s official charter.

The diplomacy at the heart of this new protocol, must seek to keep open lines of communication with Erdogan. In communicating with him, it must be explicitly clear that NATO will never force him out of the Alliance, but Turkey must suffer strong consequences for violating NATO rules. If Turkey provokes a hostile action or attack, it cannot expect NATO to bail it out, thereby dragging the rest of the Alliance into an unwanted military action. The new protocol must show Erdogan unequivocally that the Alliance will only provide military backing in the event of an unprovoked attack by a hostile actor. NATO must not push him too far – and into the welcoming embrace of Russia. Turkey-NATO relations will continue to be complicated and tumultuous, but NATO and the international community must ensure Turkey remains committed to the founding principles of the Alliance and makes the necessary changes to remain a valued member within NATO – the security and stability of the world depends on it

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Palash Ghosh, “Why Is Turkey In NATO?,” *IBTimes.com*, last modified June 06, 2012, <http://www.ibtimes.com/why-turkey-nato-704333>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 74.

<sup>5</sup> Eric S. Thompson, “Turkish Influence in the South Caucasus and Levant: The Consequences for NATO and the EU” (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2013), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United*, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Brabant, "Greece-Turkey Relations Under Pressure Amid Erdogan's Extradition Calls," *PBS.com*, last modified January 3, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/greece-turkey-relations-pressure-amid-erdogans-extradition-calls/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> President Barack H. Obama's Remarks Following a Meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey in Hangzhou, China, September 4, 2016, accessed March 04, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Firat Demir, "Erdogan's War," *Foreign Policy*, last modified March 18, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/18/erdogans-war-turkey-terrorism-kurds-pkk-isis/>.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Roth, "We Are on the Verge of Darkness," *Foreign Policy*, last modified January 12, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/12/we-are-on-the-verge-of-darkness-populism-human-rights-democracy/>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Kenyon, "Turkey's President Erdogan Pushes for Broader Powers" *NPR*, last modified February 9, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/02/09/turkeys-president-erdogan-pushes-for-broader-powers>.

<sup>38</sup> The World Factbook, "Middle East: Turkey," *Central Intelligence Agency*, last updated January 12, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Si Sheppard, "What the Syrian Kurds Have Wrought," *The Atlantic*, Last modified October 25, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/kurds-rojava-syria-isis-iraq-assad/505037/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Lauren Bohn, "All Our Young People Have Gone to the Mountains," *The Atlantic*, Last modified August 18, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/08/turkey-kurds-pkk-syria/401624/>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Burns, "Pentagon Officials Say US F-16 Fighters Fly First Missions from Turkey against IS Militants," *Associated Press*, Last modified August 12, 2015, 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2015/08/12/us-f-16-fighters-fly-first-missions-from-turkey>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas, "Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief," *Congressional Research Service*, August 26, 2016, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44000.pdf>, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Murad Sezer, "Turkey Questions U.S.-Led Coalition Presence at Incirlik Air Base.," *Reuters.com*, Last modified January 5, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-usa-idUSKBN14P0XR>.

- <sup>49</sup> Nick Danforth, "When Peace is Bad Politics," *Foreign Policy*, February 18, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/18/when-peace-is-bad-politics-turkey-kurds-akp-pkk/>.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Zia Weise, "In Erdogan's Turkey Everyone is a Terrorist," *Foreign Policy*, March 24, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/24/in-erdogans-turkey-everyone-is-a-terrorist-kurds-pkk-terrorism/>.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Michael J. Totten, "The Trouble with Turkey: Erdogan, ISIS, and the Kurds," *World Affairs Journal*, Fall 2015, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/trouble-turkey-erdogan-isis-and-kurds>.
- <sup>58</sup> James Kanter, "European Parliament Votes to Suspend Talks with Turkey on E.U. Membership," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/24/world/europe/european-parliament-turkey-eu-membership.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/24/world/europe/european-parliament-turkey-eu-membership.html?_r=0).
- <sup>59</sup> the principles of democracy, individual liberty, human rights and the rule of law," (NATO)
- <sup>60</sup> James Stavridis, "Now's the Time for NATO to Rally Around Turkey," *Foreign Policy*, November 25, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/25/nows-the-time-for-nato-to-rally-around-turkey/>.
- <sup>61</sup> Zanotti and Thomas, "Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief," 10.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Bernard Riegert, "NATO and Turkey: Allies, Not Friends," *Deutsche Welle*, August 02, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/nato-and-turkey-allies-not-friends/>.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Ghosh, "Why Is Turkey In NATO?," *IBTimes.com*, 2012.
- <sup>66</sup> Zanotti and Thomas, "Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief," 7.
- <sup>67</sup> "State Department FY2017 Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations," Appendix 3, pp. 114-116, Accessed March 4, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252734.pdf>.
- <sup>68</sup> Zanotti and Thomas, "Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief," 8.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> NATO Spokesperson's Statement on Turkey, August 10, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_134408.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_134408.htm).
- <sup>72</sup> Riegert, "NATO and Turkey: Allies, Not Friends," 2016.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>77</sup> Markus Becker, Matthias Gebauer, Konstantin von Hammerstein, and Christiane Hoffmann, "NATO Concerned Over Possible Russia-Turkey Hostilities," *Spiegel.de*, February 19, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-worried-about-possible-turkey-russia-hostilities>.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>80</sup> Markus Feldenkirchen, "Refugee Crisis Prevents Honest Dealings with Turkey," *Spiegel.de*, March 06, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/editorial-refugee-crisis-prevents-honest-dealings-with-turkey>.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>82</sup> Statement by NATO Secretary General, "Turkey is a Strong and Valued Member of our Alliance," *NATO.int*, September 09, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_135061.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_135061.htm).
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid.

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