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Turkey: A Criminal State, a NATO State

By Eric Draitser
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It is now openly discussed even in mainstream media the fact that Turkey has been intimately involved in fomenting and supporting the war on Syria, with its ultimate goal of the overthrow of the Syrian government and its replacement by a compliant proxy aligned with Turkish President Erdogan and the Muslim Brotherhood. That this is no longer a ‘conspiracy theory’ but a conspiracy fact not only vindicates my analysis over the last four years, but it also brings to the fore the nefarious role of a NATO member in stoking a brutal and bloody war for its own ends.

Beyond just the war itself, Turkey has been implicated in a wide variety of crimes (some constituting war crimes) which cast Ankara in a very bad light: a supporter of terrorism, a

criminal government engaging in acts of aggression against its neighbors and other world powers, the repression of journalists and others who have brought the truth to the light of day, among many others. Taken in total, it becomes clear that under President Erdogan Turkey has become a belligerent actor with delusions of hegemony and a complete disregard for human rights and sovereignty.

But how exactly has this transformation happened? What has been proven regarding Turkish government actions that make it so clear that the regime in Ankara is criminal in nature?

Cataloguing Turkish Crimes

The criminality of the Erdogan government can be roughly broken down into the following categories: aggression against sovereign states, material support for international terrorism, and systematic violation of human rights. Naturally, there are many other crimes that would also be included in a full and completing accounting of Ankara's illegal actions including, but not limited to, corruption, promoting and tacitly supporting fascist gangs, and many others. But it is the support for international terrorism that rises above all others to thrust Turkey into the spotlight as one of the single most important supporters of the global scourge of terrorism.

Turkey's central role in each and every aspect of terrorism in Syria must be the starting point of any analysis of Turkey's grave crimes. President Erdogan has not been shy about calling for regime change in Syria, but his position has been far more than merely rhetorical; Erdogan's government has played a very direct role in the sponsorship, arming, facilitation and military backing of everyone from the Free Syrian Army to Jabhat al-Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria) and the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL/Daesh).

In 2012, the New York Times confirmed that the CIA was sending weapons and other military materiel into the hands of anti-Assad forces from the Turkish side of the border, using their connections with the Muslim Brotherhood to do so. However, it has also come to light that Turkish intelligence has been front and center in the ongoing campaign to arm and resupply the terror groups such as the al-Nusra Front and others. This fact was exposed by Can Dündar, the editor-in-chief of the Cumhuriyet, who now faces a potential life sentence at the behest of President Erdogan, who himself called for Dündar to receive multiple life sentences.

What is the reason for the attack on Dündar and other opposition journalists? The Cumhuriyet, one of the most widely read Turkish dailies, published video footage confirming the widespread allegations that Turkish trucks, ostensibly loaded with humanitarian supplies, were actually filled with arms bound for terror groups fighting against Assad, and that those trucks were operated by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT). But it goes much further than that.

Turkey has been directly involved on the ground in Syria both in active military and support roles. In fact, transcripts of wiretaps obtained by Cumhuriyet, and presented in Turkish courts, along with shocking video footage, have confirmed what numerous eyewitnesses have stated: Turkish security forces have been directly involved in shelling and support operations for Nusra front and other jihadi groups in and around Kassab, Syria, among other sites. This is a crucial piece of information because it explains just why those terror groups were able to successfully

capture that region in 2014, and recapture it this year. Eyewitnesses in Kassab have confirmed what Syrian soldiers speaking on condition of anonymity had reported, namely that Turkish helicopters and heavy artillery were used in support of Nusra and the other terror groups during both the 2014 and the current campaign.

Of course this policy of alliance with anti-Assad terrorists has been part of Turkey's *modus operandi* since the beginning of the conflict. In 2012, Reuters revealed that Turkey, "*set up a secret base with allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar to direct vital military and communications aid to Syria's rebels from a city near the border... 'It's the Turks who are militarily controlling it. Turkey is the main coordinator/facilitator. Think of a triangle, with Turkey at the top and Saudi Arabia and Qatar at the bottom,' said a Doha-based source.*"

This information was confirmed by Vice President Joe Biden in his spectacular foot-in-mouth speech at Harvard University where he stated:

Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. The Turks were great friends... [and] the Saudis, the Emirates, etcetera. What were they doing?... They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad — except that the people who were being supplied, [they] were al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda, and the extremist elements of jihadis who were coming from other parts of the world.

But one must guard against the false notion that somehow Turkey's role has been merely as auxiliary in Syria, as a supporter, but not leader, of the terrorist factions wreaking havoc on the Syrian battlefield. Instead, it is now an inescapable fact, even acknowledged by some high-ranking military and intelligence officials, that Turkey has been the principal financier and supporter of the Islamic State and the other jihadist groups.

According to the UK Independent, President Erdogan's son Bilal Erdogan, along with a number of other close associates, have been directly benefitting from the illicit oil trade with the Islamic State. The paper noted that, "Bilal Erdogan...is one of three equal partners in the BMZ group, a major Turkish oil and marine shipping company, which both the Russian and Syrian governments have accused of purchasing oil from ISIS...Bilal Erdogan has been directly involved in the oil trade with ISIS... Turkey downed a Russian jet on 24 November specifically to protect his oil smuggling business."

In fact, Syria's Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi explained that "All of the oil was delivered to a company that belongs to the son of Recep [Tayyip] Erdogan. This is why Turkey became anxious when Russia began delivering airstrikes against the IS infrastructure and destroyed more than 500 trucks with oil already. They're importing not only oil, but wheat and historic artefacts [sic] as well."

So it seems that Erdogan and his clique are involved not simply in fomenting war and terrorism in Syria, but also in its plunder, with complex smuggling networks being directly tied to the Turkish President himself. Indeed, just such smuggling networks have been uncovered throughout Asia, tying Turkey into the broader international architecture of terrorism trafficking.

In late 2014 and early 2015, a human trafficking ring was exposed by Chinese authorities. It was revealed that at least ten Turks were responsible for organizing and facilitating the border crossings of a number of Uighurs (Chinese Muslims from Xinjiang), at least one of whom was a wanted Uighur terrorist with others being “radicalized potential terrorists.” These individuals were likely part of a previously documented trend of Uighur extremists traveling to the Middle East to train and fight with the Islamic State and/or other terror groups.

In fact, precisely this trend was exposed two months earlier in September 2014 when Reuters reported that Beijing formally accused militant Uighurs from Xinjiang of having traveled to Islamic State-controlled territory to receive training. Further corroborating these accusations, the Jakarta Post of Indonesia reported that four Chinese Uighur jihadists had been arrested in Indonesia after having travelled from Xinjiang through Malaysia. Other, similar reports have also surfaced in recent months, painting a picture of a concerted campaign to help Uighur extremists travel throughout Asia, communicating and collaborating with transnational terror groups such as IS.

Now, with these latest revelations regarding Turkish nationals being involved in the trafficking of extremists, it seems an invaluable piece of the terrorist transit infrastructure has been exposed. Indeed my assertions above (initially made here in early February 2015) have been substantiated by Syria’s ambassador to China, quoted at length by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh in his piece *Military to Military* which notes the following:

[Syria’s ambassador to China Imad Moustapha explained that] ‘China regards the Syrian crisis from three perspectives,’ he said: international law and legitimacy; global strategic positioning; and the activities of jihadist Uighurs, from Xinjiang province in China’s far west. Xinjiang borders eight nations...and, in China’s view, serves as a funnel for terrorism around the world and within China. Many Uighur fighters now in Syria are known to be members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement – an often violent separatist organisation that seeks to establish an Islamist Uighur state in Xinjiang. **‘The fact that they have been aided by Turkish intelligence to move from China into Syria through Turkey has caused a tremendous amount of tension between the Chinese and Turkish intelligence,’** Moustapha said. **‘China is concerned that the Turkish role of supporting the Uighur fighters in Syria may be extended in the future to support Turkey’s agenda in Xinjiang. We are already providing the Chinese intelligence service with information regarding these terrorists and the routes they crossed from on travelling into Syria’** [emphasis added].

Moustapha’s concerns were echoed by a Washington foreign affairs analyst who has closely followed the passage of jihadists through Turkey and into Syria. The analyst, whose views are routinely sought by senior government officials, told me that **‘Erdoğan has been bringing Uighurs into Syria by special transport while his government has been agitating in favour of their struggle in China. Uighur and Burmese Muslim terrorists who escape into Thailand somehow get Turkish passports and are then flown to Turkey for transit into Syria.’** He added that there was also what amounted to another ‘rat line’ that was funnelling Uighurs – estimates range from a few hundred to many thousands over the years – **from China into Kazakhstan for eventual relay to Turkey, and then to IS territory in Syria** [emphasis added]. ‘US intelligence,’ he said, ‘is not getting good information about these

activities because those insiders who are unhappy with the policy are not talking to them.’ He also said it was ‘not clear’ that the officials responsible for Syrian policy in the State Department and White House ‘get it’. IHS-Jane’s Defence Weekly estimated in October that as many as five thousand Uighur would-be fighters have arrived in Turkey since 2013, with perhaps two thousand moving on to Syria. Moustapha said he has information that ‘up to 860 Uighur fighters are currently in Syria.’

It has become clear that Turkey is now unmistakably a major supporter of international terrorism, with Syria being merely the proving ground for a stable of terror groups directly or indirectly working with Erdogan’s government. This is further evidenced by the now documented and verified fact that the Erdogan government was directly involved in the transfer of chemical weapons into the hands of ISIS.

As Turkish MP Eren Erdem explained before the Turkish parliament and to international media, “There is data in this indictment. Chemical weapon materials are being brought to Turkey and being put together in Syria in camps of ISIS which was known as Iraqi Al Qaeda during that time.” Erdem noted that according to an investigation launched (and abruptly closed) by the General Prosecutor’s Office in Adana, Turkish citizens with ties to the intelligence community took part in negotiations with ISIS-linked and Al-Qaeda-linked militants to sell sarin gas for use in Syria. The evidence of these allegations came in the form of wiretapped phone conversations similar to those published earlier this year by Cumhuriyet.

Taken in total, the case against Erdogan’s government is damning. At the same time, one must also note Erdogan’s grave crimes against his own people.

As noted already, Can Dündar and his colleagues at Cumhuriyet have been targeted by Erdogan’s state for their disclosure of Ankara’s dealings with the terrorists of Syria. Just a few weeks ago Dündar, along with Cumhuriyet’s Ankara bureau chief Erdem Gul, were charged in a Turkish court with “spying” and “divulging state secrets.” This should not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with Turkey’s track record when it comes to opposition journalism.

In fact, in December 2014, the Turkish police raided the offices of the Zaman newspaper, one of the most popular in the country, alleging that Zaman was responsible for “launching an armed terror organization.” The authorities detained the Zaman Editor-in-Chief Ekrem Dumanlı , as well as the head of the Samanyolu Media Group, Hidayet Karaca, along with a producer, scriptwriter and director.

The Turkish Journalists Association (TGC) and the Turkey Journalists’ Labor Union (TGS) released a joint statement in condemnation of the raids and the ongoing repression of journalists by the Erdogan government, noting that “Almost 200 journalists were previously held in prison on charges of being a member of a terror organization, violating their right to a fair trial. Journalists are now being detained once again. These developments mean that freedom of the press and opinion is punished in Turkey, which takes its place in the class of countries where the press is not free.”

International organizations too expressed their outrage at this blatant violation of freedom of the press. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), and its regional group the European Federation of Journalists (EFL), stated that, “We are appalled by this brazen assault on press freedom and Turkish democracy...One year after the exposure of corruption at the heart of government, the authorities appear to be exacting their revenge by targeting those who express opposing views...This latest act demonstrates that the authorities’ contempt for journalism has not diminished.”

Of course, Ankara’s war on freedom of speech, and the media generally, is not relegated to established media outlets such as Zaman and Cumhuriyet, but also to citizen media and social media as well. In response to the leaking of recordings on Twitter documenting corruption among Erdogan cronies and political elites within his Justice and Development Party (AKP), Erdogan attacked the social media platform, and his government immediately moved to restrict access to Twitter.

Erdogan even went so far as to suggest a total ban on all social media sites, including Facebook and YouTube, saying that “The international community can say this, can say that. I don’t care at all. Everyone will see how powerful the Republic of Turkey is.” This sort of megalomaniacal rhetoric has become the norm for Erdogan, who sees himself as less a president and more a sultan or absolute monarch.

The famous words of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremburg succinctly and matter-of-factly state that the waging of aggressive war is “*essentially an evil thing...to initiate a war of aggression...is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.*” This is undeniably true. But what happens when one is engaged in an international campaign to destroy a neighboring country through war? What happens when one country enables and participates in the destruction of another? What happens when one country will stop at nothing to come out victorious in a war it is not officially involved in, but covertly manages, and from which it directly benefits? Are these not simply different forms of the same crime, the supreme crime, as it were?

Let’s face it, Turkey is now a mafia state ruled by a criminal regime. It is also a NATO member state. Perhaps now the pernicious illusion of NATO as military alliance defending justice, human rights, and the rule of law can finally be put to rest. While the propagandists will continue the charade, Turkey has permanently exposed the US-NATO-GCC-Israel for the warmongers they are in Syria and around the world. Let’s just hope the world notices.