

May 21, 2017 Sunday 25 Iyyar 5777

8:11 IST



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THE JERUSALEM POST



Supporters listen to the speech by Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan during a rally for the upcoming referendum in Istanbul, Turkey. (Photo by: REUTERS)

Turkey's record on terrorism

By ZACH HUFF
05/21/2017

Since it is Turkey that the White House has just reiterated support for, it's time for a refresher on Turkey's record on terrorism, genocide and human rights.

In a joint statement with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the White House last week, US President Donald Trump declared, "We support Turkey in the first fight against terror and terror groups like ISIS [Islamic State] and the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party], and ensure they have no safe quarter."

By which measure of conduct, which relativism, are we judging these organizations, from ISIS to the PKK? Since it is Turkey that the White House has just reiterated support for, it's time for a refresher on Turkey's record on terrorism, genocide and human rights.

Let's start with Turkish support of jihadist groups.

In Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are primary sponsors of al-Qaida affiliated jihadists, including Jaysh al-Fatah, the "Army of Conquest," Ahrar al-Sham and the Al-Nusra Front. Not quite freedom fighters, these groups compete with ISIS for the mantle of who gets to establish the Islamic caliphate. Many are designated terrorists by the US, Russia and Syria – they are Islamists that American taxpayers have already paid to bomb, but which our "allies" are funding, arming and providing intelligence to.

When Turkey says that America should support its "alternative options" to the Kurds to defeat ISIS, these jihadists are the forces it is actually referring to.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that Turkey is also a longtime ally of Hamas – the Muslim Brotherhood affiliate ruling the Gaza Strip and a designated terrorist organization in both the US and EU. In 2011, Hamas established a recruitment and planning base in Istanbul; Turkey harbors

countless Hamas terrorists exiled from Israel, and mulled whether to provide the jihadist group with \$300 million annually. For almost a decade, Turkish security forces even supported the Turkish Hezbollah. Just last week, President Erdogan called on the Muslim world to flock to Jerusalem to protect it “against attempts at Judaization.”

Vis-a-vis ISIS, Turkey has been widely accused of aiding the terrorist group, by allowing free passage of its fighters and export of oil to the global market.

How did ISIS, while actively besieged by 68 nations who fought on both sides of WWII, manage to import 30,000 foreign fighters and export 40,000 barrels of oil a day on more than 1,000 tanker trucks? When America and NATO were finally allowed to use their Incirlik airbase for anti-ISIS operations – nearly 1.5 years after ISIS began its conquest of terror – the West was shocked at how decisively the Turkish Air Force began to use this newfound involvement to strike 400 Kurdish targets – versus just three ISIS targets – in the just the first three days following the agreement. Hence why it's a common joke that Turkey is the air force of the Islamic State. Around the same brief period, Turkey rounded up more than six suspected PKK combatants for every detainment of an ISIS suspect.

But this is as old as the Turkish Republic.

More than 3.5 million Eastern Christians were brutally massacred by Turkish forces surrounding the founding of the “modern” Turkish state, from 1915 to 1923. The Turkish government has refused to recognize these crimes – which probably makes ISIS turn from black to green with envy. Just last year, the Turkish government seized every church in the million-person city of Diyarbakir, as persecution of Christians continues.

Soon after the Christian genocides, Turkish attention turned to the Kurdish question. Promised a Kurdish state in the aftermath of WWI, the nascent Turkish entity would resort to anything to keep that from happening. Roughly 30,000 Kurds were massacred during the 1930s, followed by decades of systematic ethnic cleansing, continuing to the present day.

The extreme methods of “Turkification” included the banning of the Kurdish language, music, dance, clothing – and even Kurdish baby names. When Leyla Zana became the first female Kurd elected to the Turkish Parliament, she was sentenced to 15 years in prison for self-identifying as a Kurd at her swearing-in ceremony.

Through ethnic cleansing of Kurdish areas, the Turkish government has eradicated as many as 4,000 Kurdish villages since 1984, and executed around 20,000 Kurdish civilians. Around three million Kurds have been summarily displaced, and well over 500,000 since just mid- 2015.

In 1978, the PKK was organized to resist this pattern of genocide and human rights abuses. Since then, the PKK's position has oscillated between demanding an independent Kurdish state to pushing for equal constitutional freedoms in Turkey. An independent study found that from 1989 to 1999, 1,205 civilians were killed by the PKK, a declining trend as strategies change. Killing civilians is wrong, yet the PKK's number is less than a rounding error compared to the number of civilians Turkey has killed.

One is left in awe at how much the largest armed force in NATO – and current prospective EU member – can get away with. This is the same Turkey that last month banned Wikipedia, in which gays are beaten by police and where the audience at a Radiohead party in Istanbul are assaulted by mobs for consuming alcohol. The thuggery is not contained to within Turkish borders. For the second consecutive time, American protesters were viciously attacked by Erdogan's security detail during his visit to Washington last week.

Turkey was praised by President Trump for having been a bulwark against the Soviet Union, and as an "ally" in the war on terrorism. It's difficult to see how Turkey was any better to the Christians, Kurds and non-Muslims. If Turkey were a "moderate" success story for a Muslim-majority state, then what would it have been like if it was "extreme"? Let's hope President Trump's praise of Turkey was just as disingenuous as the sycophantic adoration lavished on him by President Erdogan. President Trump cannot be both tough on terrorism and continue the Obama legacy of pampering Turkey.

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