



Turkish Aggression: U.S. Interests, and the Need for Stability in the Eastern Mediterranean

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Over half a million Americans died and were wounded during two world wars to preserve the peace and establish the present European border system. Recent statements and actions by Turkish President Erdogan have threatened what so many of our brave men and women in uniform sacrificed for and have defended before and since the end of the Cold War.

Tensions within Turkey were made evident this past summer by the attempted military coup and the suspension of all democratic rights and institutions. Soon afterwards, President Erdogan began a campaign of threats and intimidation against Greece based on an expansionist agenda by questioning the legitimacy of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which established the borders between Greece and Turkey after World War I. Threats to reconsider his government's acceptance of this internationally recognized treaty is a flagrant violation of legal norms and threatens to destabilize NATO while it calls into question legitimately established borders long recognized by the European Union and the United Nations. The Turkish occupation of Cyprus' northern part constitutes a prime example of threatening the European order by violating the border of Cyprus, a European Union member. This is also being done at a time when the refugee crisis in the Aegean has placed extraordinary economic and humanitarian burdens primarily on Greece, but also the rest of Europe. Recently, Turkish violations of Greek territorial air space have blatantly increased with multiple armed squadrons invading dozen of times daily over the Eastern Aegean islands whereas Turkish armed submarines and surface combatant ships have entered Greek territorial waters in violation of NATO sanctioned norms. Similar escalations almost resulted in the two countries going to war

in 1996 over the Greek sovereignty of the islet of Imia, as part of a wider Aegean territorial dispute fomented by Turkey.

The Southeast European and Eastern Mediterranean region is of vital strategic importance to the United States. This is especially true now that we are fighting a war to eradicate radical Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and restore stability and peace to countries such as Syria and Afghanistan, and even Iraq. The rule of law is a core principle of American diplomacy and the surest instrument for advancing American interests in the world. All too often U.S. policies have failed to apply the rule of law in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean against persistent violations by Turkey. Despite these violations, the U.S. has given assistance and supplied arms to Turkey far beyond its legitimate defense needs. Turkey's continuing aggression and unfounded claims toward Greece represents a destabilizing threat to the region which is contrary to U.S. interests. Turkey's, Greece's and the European Community's role in support of the international war against the ISIS and its terrorist state would be severely compromised should Erdogan be allowed to pursue illegitimate irredentist claims in Cyprus and the Aegean at this critical time. Additionally, the delicate negotiations between Turkey and Europe concerning the influx of thousands of refugees steadily endeavoring from Turkey to the Eastern Aegean islands of Greece, would be undermined, and their efforts to discover and thwart terrorist plots against the West would be severely compromised in the event of any escalation of tensions. In fact, Turkey has recently threatened to enable thousands more undocumented refugees to reach Greece and to ignore its agreements with the European Community concerning them. Such actions would bring chaos to NATO's southern flank and present Russia with opportunities to pursue its own agendas against our regional security interests.

The new President should make it clear to Turkey that the Administration recognizes accepted international law as described and delimited by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and successor treaties (the Italy-Turkish Convention of January 4, 1932, the Italy-Turkish Protocol of December 28, 1932, and the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, under which the Dodecanese Islands and adjacent islets and rocks were ceded by Italy to Greece, and the Law of the Sea Convention) recognizing the islands and islets of the Aegean being questioned by Turkey as sovereign Greek territory. Specifically, the President should state that the U.S. supports these treaties and the adherence to internationally recognized law, treaties and agreements regarding the territorial integrity and sovereign rights of a state, including the United Nations Charter and the NATO Treaty. The U.S. State Department should be instructed to make this clear to the Turkish government and the new Administration should support a bi-partisan Congressional Resolution declaring that these well-established and recognized international Treaties are a fundamental component of the inviolate European border system.

There is ample precedent for this United States action since on July 21st, 1999, the House of Representatives passed a unanimous voice vote Amendment 19 to H.R. 2415 (the State Department authorization bill), expressing the “Sense of Congress that: (1) the water boundaries established in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and the 1932 Convention between Italy and Turkey, including the Protocol annexed to such Convention, are the borders between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean; and (2) any party, including Turkey, objecting to these established boundaries should seek redress in the International Court of Justice at the Hague.”

Using this precedent and subsequent Congressional actions, our government should make it clear to Turkey and the international community that the United States supports the rule of law and the *status-quo* in the Eastern Mediterranean. Such action will help preserve the regional stability needed for the United States and its allies to continue to effectively pursue the war against Islamic terrorism and also deal with the security issues posed by the unprecedented refugee crisis. Remaining silent while Turkey aggressively questions well established international treaties and the hard-won European border system, will encourage others in the region to pursue their own territorial agendas. This will result in instability that will threaten vital American interests that could lead to armed conflicts with dire consequences.

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