

TURKEY: NATO'S ISLAMIC STATE MEMBER

Sheri Laizer, 16 February 2019

Not only have a very considerable number of Turks joined ISIS from the mainland, their numbers boosted by their extremist brothers, including Uzbeks, Chechens and Turkmen funnelled through Turkey into Syria – President Recep Tayyib Erdogan's government has directly helped ISIS flourish.¹

Turkey is, of course, not a functioning democracy: the country has never plunged further from democratic principles since the foundation of the secular Republic as envisioned by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk).

The AKP government has steadily undermined the secular basis of the state since coming to power fifteen years ago, systematically supplanting secular codes with Islamic conventions.



ISIS fighter redeployed in Turkish Army (Source: Twitter²)

Since the Syrian conflict increasingly impacted upon Turkey, President Recep Tayyib Erdogan has pursued an overt Islamicisation policy that has come to determine the character of Turkey's diplomatic and military relations with domestic and external forces. Erdogan has publicly and covertly aided Sunni militant groups, including Palestinian Hamas, ISIS, the Al-Qaeda linked Jabhat al-Nusra – later known as the al-Nusra Front, succeeded in 2017 by Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS), and others. He has ignored Syria's territorial integrity staking our spheres of influence through the so-called Free Syrian Army and extremist elements within it – the very players the Global Coalition has been seeking to disempower, and most importantly, the Islamic State organization (IS/ISIS/ISIL).

¹ <https://rojavareport.wordpress.com/2014/07/25/ihd-isis-using-turkey-as-logistical-base/>

² Photo Credit: https://twitter.com/Dr_HawzhinAzeez/status/1077335270104559616/photo/1

Looking back over the past five years of terror inflicted by the Islamic State group, at the time when ISIS hordes first raced across Syria and Iraq, former AKP Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, had decried claims that they were a terrorist group arguing that they were just angry young Muslim kids.³

Fallout from Kobane

In 2014-2015, the AKP government under Erdoğan's control had been prepared to sit on the sidelines and allow ISIS to slaughter the Kurds in the neighbouring Syrian Kurdish town of Kobane. Erdoğan's deliberate inactivity provoked an outcry of pain and rage amongst the Kurds at home and those across the artificial border in Syria – a porous border line drawn at the time of the Sykes-Picot agreement a century ago. As some 130,000 Kurds fled the imminent conquest of Kobane by ISIS in September 2014, by October, the black flag with its white scrawl was flying above the town, visible from Turkey. US air strikes supported the Kurdish defenses until after months of heavy fighting ISIS lost the destroyed town on 26 January 2015,⁴ but Erdoğan's policy had cemented deep revulsion and distrust amongst the wider Kurdish population. Ankara had refused to allow Kurdish forces to cross into Syria and reach the town, instead deploying the police to attack protestors at the border including with tear gas and water cannons.⁵ Some 1600 people were killed there including over one thousand jihadists. An unnamed US official observed at the time: "There's growing angst about Turkey dragging its feet to act to prevent a massacre less than a mile from its border. After all the fulminating about a humanitarian catastrophe, they're inventing reasons not to act to avoid another catastrophe ... This isn't how a Nato ally acts while hell is unfolding a stone's throw from their border."⁶ IS attacked Kobane afresh in June. Turkey's actions over Kobane were the primary cause for the PKK to abandon its 18-month ceasefire. The PKK issued a statement stating that because of the AKP's "war against [Kurdish] people, the organisation would "step up its struggle in every area and by all possible means".⁷

However, from the outset of the Islamic State's swift rise, President Recep Tayyib Erdoğan, his immediate family, his party and their far right wing partners had been actively responsible for sustaining the terror group and aiding its expansion, firstly in Iraq and then in Syria. Erdoğan and family were lining their pockets through the transit and sale of ISIS oil mixed with Kurdish oil in the KRG⁸ but pursued anyone that sought to expose it.⁹

The AKP government was funnelling jihadists into Syria through special Turkish military units, such as SADAT, AFAD, and an NGO called the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH).¹⁰ The private mercenary army, SADAT, went into Syria as part of Operation Euphrates Shield in August 2016.

³

http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/651414/Davutoglu_ISiD_icin_ofkeli_cocuklar_de_di_mi_Cumhuriyet.com.tr_sordu_iste_anket_sonunu....html

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29688108>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/08/kobani-isis-turkey-kurds-ypg-syria-erdogan>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/08/kobani-isis-turkey-kurds-ypg-syria-erdogan>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/08/kobani-isis-turkey-kurds-ypg-syria-erdogan>

⁸ <https://ekurd.net/islambul-2017-09-01>

⁹ <https://www.icij.org/investigations/paradise-papers/turkish-journalist-sentenced-to-prison-over-paradise-papers-investigation/>

¹⁰ <https://medium.com/insurge-intelligence/former-turkish-counter-terror-chief-exposes-governments-support-for-isis-d12238698f52>

Erdogan continued to pursue his sweeping Islamicisation policy in alliance with extremists in Qatar (including Global Muslim Brotherhood leader, cleric Youssef Qaradawi¹¹), with the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Turkey has armed the jihadists, funnelled in thousands of fighters¹², hospitalised the injured – including al-Baghdadi’s Number 2 man; clothed them in IS and Turkish military uniform and recycled identified fighters in fresh disguise as members of the Turkish army to be redeployed back into Syria. IS uniforms have been manufactured in their tens of thousands in Turkish sweat shops where little-paid Syrian refugees eke out a miserable existence exploiting child labour.¹³

Turkey directly aided the misnamed Free Syrian Army (FSA), an umbrella group that from the outset of the conflict fielded Sunni jihadist extremists supported by Turkey in its aim to oust Bashar al-Assad from power and replace him with a Sunni Islamist regime.

David L. Phillips, Director of the Program on Peace Building and Rights, from Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights published useful research on ISIS-Turkey Links charting the evidence obtained from various sources covering Turkey’s actions in the 2014 period of ISIS’s territorial expansion. Allegations include, with several sourced examples for each section heading:

Turkey provides military equipment to ISIS

Turkey Provided Transport and Logistical Assistance to ISIS Fighters

Turkey Provided Training to ISIS Fighters

According to Jordanian intelligence, Turkey trained ISIS militants for special operations.

Turkey Offers Medical Care to ISIS Fighters

Turkey Supports ISIS Financially Through Purchase of Oil

Turkey Assists ISIS Recruitment

Turkish Forces Are Fighting Alongside ISIS

Seymour Hersh maintains in the London Review of Books that ISIS conducted sarin attacks in Syria, and that Turkey was informed.

Turkey Helped ISIS in Battle for Kobani:

“Based on the intelligence we got two days before the breakout of the current war, trains full of forces and ammunition, which were passing by north of Kobane, had an-hour-and-ten-to-twenty-minute-long stops in these villages: Salib Qaran, Gire Sor, Moshrefat Ezzo. There are evidences, witnesses, and videos about this. Why is ISIS strong only in Kobane’s east? Why is it not strong either in its south or west? Since these trains stopped in villages located in the east of Kobane, we guess they had brought ammunition and additional force for the ISIS.” In the second article on September 30, 2014, a CHP delegation visited Kobani, where locals claimed that everything from the clothes ISIS militants wear to their guns comes from Turkey. (See HERE and HERE.)”

Among other claims the report detailed in the final section:

A Kurdish commander in Kobani claims that ISIS militants have Turkish entry stamps on their passports.

Kurds trying to join the battle in Kobani are turned away by Turkish police at the Turkey-Syrian border.

¹¹ <https://www.globalmbwatch.com/2013/06/19/qaradawi-supports-praises-turkish-prime-minister-Erdoğan-meets-hamas-leaders-gaza-trip/>

¹² <https://twitter.com/vvanwilgenburg/status/1079392068139696128>

¹³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3597143/Child-slaves-making-uniforms-Isis-Inside-Turkish-sweatshop-children-young-nine-work-12-hours-day-stitching-combat-gear-used-battle-Islamic-State.html>

OdaTV released a photograph of a Turkish soldier befriending ISIS militants.

Turkey and ISIS Share a Worldview

Cengiz Candar, a well-respected Turkish journalist, maintained that MIT helped “midwife” the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria, as well as other Jihadi groups.

An AKP council member posted on his Facebook page: “Thankfully ISIS exists... May you never run out of ammunition...”

A Turkish Social Security Institution supervisor uses the ISIS logo in internal correspondences.

Bilal Erdogan and Turkish officials meet alleged ISIS fighters.¹⁴

By September 2016, Dorian Jones for the Voice of America had observed of the Free Syrian Army and Turkish-organized groups, “These are eight to 10 groups equipped, armed and trained by Qatari and Saudi money organized by Turkey and also helped by the CIA. I do not subscribe to this moderate presentation; they are jihadists, all of them are jihadists and jihadists do cannibalize each other. And we can see former ISIS militants turn to moderate Islamists overnight... Ankara has been reluctant to give detailed information on the makeup of the FSA elements it is supporting in Syria. Critics point out that understanding the rebel forces is complicated by the tendency of fighters to rename their organizations or simply join another group...¹⁵

That same month, journalist Nafeez Ahmed published further confirmation in details obtained from a senior Turkish police official named Ahmet Yayla. Mr Yayla went public as a whistleblower in professional and personal dismay over the Turkish government and his colleagues’ support for ISIS.

Yayla stated that allegations over support to militant groups in Syria through a Turkish charitable NGO, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), were “accurate reflections of a murky relationship between the Turkish government and jihadist groups... and have nothing to do with a Gülenist conspiracy” as pro-state sources have sought to claim. Yayla fled to the United States where in June 2016 he published a book: *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*, co-authored with Professor Anne Speckhard, a NATO and Pentagon consultant specialising in the psychology of radicalisation.¹⁶ Thirty-two ISIS defectors were interviewed about their time inside ISIS forming the basis of the book.

A current US Congressional Research Service report, Armed Conflict in Syria Overview and US Response, updated at the beginning of January 2019, observed that “Turkey has played a significant role in Idlib, maintaining 12 military observation posts in and around Idlib province along the “separation line” between pro-Syrian government and opposition forces. Turkey maintains ties with a range of Syrian opposition groups in the province – reportedly including Free Syrian Army elements as well as HTS, a U.S.-designated FTO.¹⁷

¹⁴ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke_b_6128950.html

¹⁵ <https://www.voanews.com/a/jihadists-free-syrian-army/3515339.html>

¹⁶ <https://medium.com/insurge-intelligence/ive-been-threatened-for-exposing-turkish-state-terror-ties-c802e67ca8be>

<https://medium.com/insurge-intelligence/former-turkish-counter-terror-chief-exposes-governments-support-for-isis-d12238698f52>

¹⁷ “Select Armed Coalition Groups Operating in Idlib, Hay’at Tahrir al Sham (HTS). Established in 2017 as a successor to the Al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front. U.S. officials have stated that “The core of

The report cited importantly noted towards the end section that in light of Trumps' December 2018 announcement for the withdrawal of US forces, "If Kurdish armed groups reconcile and align with the Asad (sic)-led government in the wake of U.S. withdrawal, it could increase the likelihood of more pronounced confrontation between Turkey, the Syrian government, and its allies. An abrupt severance of all U.S. support for Kurdish groups also could sour U.S. relations not just with Syrian Kurds, but with Kurdish populations and leaders in other regional countries."¹⁸

Nowhere did the report openly acknowledge Turkey's direct backing of, arming, training and ideological support for the Islamic State.

Polarisation of Turkey - the Suruç massacre

Erdogan 's populist grip on his pro-Islamist support base at home has been further underpinned by his far-right allies in the MHP, the Grey Wolves, the youth extremists in the Ottoman Hearths etc. Together they have focused on enflaming deep-rooted racial hatreds towards the historic ethnic minorities of the former Ottoman Empire, and most conspicuously, the Kurds.

The AKP's policy for staying in control has been to embrace the far right and promote domestic paramilitary groups as well as Islamic extremists in coordination against the pro-Kurdish movement, such as "building violent organizations by the name of Ottoman Hearths on the remnants of their base organizations (Ülkü Ocakları and Alperen Ocakları). Especially since June 2015, these base organizations have burnt down Kurdish party buildings and attacked Kurdish protesters... Another expression can be seen in prominent mafia leaders joining forces with the party. One of these figures, Sedat Peker, recently threatened academics who signed an anti-war petition by declaring he would "bathe in their blood...."¹⁹ (Peker recently urged the population to arm themselves before the forthcoming local elections at the end of March 2019. A probe has been launched).²⁰

HTS is Nusra,"²⁴ and amended the FTO designation of the Nusra Front in May 2018 to include HTS as an alias. However, some analysts argue that statements by Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri and actions by Nusra and HTS members point to the emergence of a genuine rift within the two groups. This rift can be seen, they argue, in the defection of former Nusra Front members from HTS, and the arrests by HTS of senior Al Qaeda figures.²⁵ In addition to its military operations, HTS also runs a civilian-led "Salvation Government," based in Idlib, which provides services such as education, health care, electricity, and water.

National Liberation Front (NLF). In May 2018, 11 Syrian armed groups established the NLF coalition. A NLF spokesperson described the coalition as unifying a number of "Free Syrian Army factions."²⁶

The group has been described as one of the largest coalitions fighting the Asad (sic) government, reportedly reaching nearly 30,000 fighters.²⁷

In August, the Syrian Liberation Front (SLF), composed of fighters from armed Islamist groups Ahrar al Sham (Free Men of the Levant) and the Nour al Din al Zinki Movement, merged into the NLF. Hilf Nusra al Islam. In April 2018, Horas al Din (Guardians of Religion) and Ansar al Tawhid (Supporters of Monotheism, merged to form Hilf Nusra al Islam (Alliance for the Support of Islam).²⁸ The group is viewed as sympathetic to Al Qaeda. See more at:

<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33487.pdf>

¹⁸ Op. Cit, p.57/59

¹⁹ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/cihan-tugal/turkey-hard-totalitarianism-Erdogan-authoritarian>

²⁰ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/probe-launched-into-notorious-turkish-crime-boss-for-calling-on-civilians-to-take-up-arms-141048>

No more talk of 'peace' - peace becomes a dirty word in mid 2015

The 'peace process' effectively came to an end between Erdogan and Kurdish groups in 2015 after Erdogan lost his parliamentary majority in the parliamentary elections held in June and AKP supporters blamed the pro-Kurdish HDP. This led to a second round in November intended to bolster the AKP's losses by seeking to marginalize the HDP. This was also achieved after the public furor over the bomb blast in Ankara on 10 October by an ISIS activist named in recent indictments as a Saudi born Turk, Ilhami Bali: According to indictments filed by Turkish prosecutors, "Bali is accused of being the mastermind behind three deadly 2015 terrorist attacks in Turkey's capital city, Ankara, that claimed the lives of 142 people. A year later, a criminal court issued another warrant for Bali's arrest for his alleged role in a suicide bomb attack – the deadliest in Turkey's history – on October 10, 2015 in Ankara. The explosion killed 105 civilians, including the two suicide bombers, as ISIS militants targeted NGOs and the supporters of left-wing and pro-Kurdish parties, who were holding a peace rally outside the city's main train station weeks ahead of the November 1, 2015 snap elections," Bozkurt revealed. Although the Turkish authorities knew Bali's exact location and Turkish courts issued several arrest warrants against him, the Erdogan government had let him roam freely between Turkey and Syria..."²¹

Another major factor in the collapse of the peace dialogue was undoubtedly the suicide attack attributed to an ISIS supporter who massacred 32 pro-Kurds and injured more than 100 others in the Kurdish town of Suruç, Urfa, near the border with Syria on July 20. "A senior Turkish official told *Reuters* that he believed the bomber", (who he did not name), "had travelled to Syria last year with the help of a group linked to IS militants.²² The bomber was later identified from his DNA as Seyh Abdurrahman Alagöz of Kurdish ethnic origin who had gone to fight in Syria with his brother. The bomb was detonated in the Amara Cultural Centre where student activists from the Socialist Youth Associations Federation were in the process of holding a news conference over the destruction of Kobane wrought by ISIS. The students had intended to travel on to Kobane to help with the rebuilding. Protests joined by thousands of people ensued across the country. The PKK's HPG armed wing also retaliated two days later, killing two Turkish police officers in their shared home in Ceylanpinar accused of having links with ISIS.²³ The government blocked Twitter to try to curb protests over the massacre and Turkey's alleged relations with ISIS.

As reported soon after by the BBC, "Some pro-government papers recently came out with headlines suggesting that the Kurdish militias in Syria were more dangerous than IS... Critics of the government are also concerned by a recent report that alleged Turkish intelligence agency trucks were carrying weapons to Syrian Islamist rebels across the border... President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called the report "fabricated" and sued the journalist and the paper for publishing the story.²⁴

An HDP rally had been bombed the previous month in Diyarbakir.

Further violence ensued later in the year when on Sept. 8, "ultranationalists stormed HDP offices around the country and set the buildings on fire. In Ankara, an HDP employee tweeted: "Our headquarters are being attacked. The police are not doing their job." In Istanbul, anti-Kurdish youths marched through the streets with torches and yelled: "We don't want a military operation, we want a massacre!" In hundreds of locations the next day, honking cars with waving Turkish flags drove through the streets

²¹ <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2019/02/13/Turkey-support-terrorists/2071962>

²² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33619043>

²³ <https://horizonweekly.ca/en/70442-2/>

²⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33617199>

and celebrated the violence.²⁵ Kurdish towns like Cizre were placed under siege. The peace process collapsed and has not been revived.

On the contrary, an increasingly violent political polarisation process was set in motion between the traditional secular opposition and the fundamentalist Islamist sector of the country. That socio-political divide has been further intensified by Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict alongside jihadist elements and by the failed 'coup' of July 2016 that resulted in commentators speculating the coup had been a political ploy stage-managed by Erdogan and his inner circle to reinforce his power.

Since the 'coup' almost three years ago, more than 100,000 people have been imprisoned and "tens of thousands are waiting for their lives to be upended by a knock on the door, or the publication of a new emergency decree. Tens of billions of assets have been seized and 150,000 people have been purged, losing not only their jobs but their passports (and those of their spouses); they are branded national security threats and become unemployable... Turks today confront the capriciousness of arbitrary power with no recourse to anything that resembles the rule of law...All judges are aware that any decision deemed adverse to the government may end their careers. The scale of the social transformation being wrought by these measures exceeds even the founding convulsions of the republic...²⁶

Elections with unequal arms

The chaos unleashed was partially shored up by the highly controversial Presidential referendum that took place in April 2017.

Parliamentary and Presidential elections were then held prematurely on 24 June 2018 instead of as scheduled for November this year, 2019 - further strengthening President Erdogan's grip on power, abolishing the office of Prime Minister for a Presidential appointee as Vice President and widely extending Presidential powers. Al Jazeera observed, *inter alia*: "Vice Presidency will be introduced and the president will be able to appoint and remove vice presidents, ministers and high level officials, whereas now, the president has the power to appoint and remove the prime minister and ministers only upon the prime minister's proposal..."²⁷

The provincial elections due to be held at the end of March and could likely result in bloodshed – there are no longer 'equal arms' in any Turkish electoral process. Right-wing ultranationalist extremists may also have been roused by Peker's call to arm themselves.

The pro-Kurdish opposition flailing under the banner of the HDP has been prevented from campaigning on an equal basis and its candidates and supporters are intimidated, detained and often jailed on spurious charges aimed at eliminating them from the political process and limiting the Kurdish vote. Owing to legislation even if they won a high equal number of seats they could not change the status quo. HDP MPs protests over Turkey's support for ISIS in Iraq and Syria have resulted solely in their being charged with "aiding andabetting terrorism", or with "treason", imprisoned, convicted as with former chair, Selahattin Demirtas in December 2018 for "disseminating terror propaganda"²⁸, and silenced.

"Low number of convictions in ISIS cases"

²⁵ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/turkish-kurdish-violence-edges-turkey-closer-to-civil-war-a-1053044.html>

²⁶ <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n10/ella-george/purges-and-paranoia>

²⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2018/06/turkey-elections-june-24-polls-180611104841735.html>

²⁸ <https://www.euractiv.com/topics/selahattin-demirtas/>

Erdogan's aggressive military expansion into Syrian Kurdish territory continues apace to ensure Turkish domination of ethnic Kurdish lands. Any Kurds that criticize this policy at home are labelled as 'terrorists'.

The private army, SADAT, has also played a role in Turkey's Islamist expansion. According to Jonathan Spyer writing for the *Jerusalem Post* "the company's mission is to "establish a defensive collaboration and defensive industrial cooperation among Islamic countries to help [the] Islamic world take the place where it merits among superpowers by providing consultancy and training services." ...Western states are described as "imperialist," "crusader" countries."

Spyer continued, "Tanriverdi is an artillery officer who later specialized in asymmetric warfare. A former head of the Home Front Command in Northern Cyprus, he was expelled from the army because of his Islamist convictions in 1997. His ties to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the circles of the ruling AKP are of long standing...Michael Rubin ...noted eyewitness reports of armed SADAT personnel involved in the suppression of the coup attempt of July 2016. The failed 'coup' heralded the beginning of a comprehensive attempt by the Turkish president to remake the Turkish Armed Forces along lines more amenable to himself. As part of this process, hundreds of officers dismissed for Islamist leanings are being reinstated, and Tanriverdi was himself appointed chief military adviser to the president in late 2016.

SADAT has been heavily involved in Turkey's training of Syrian Sunni Arab rebels for the fight against Assad...The Syrian rebellion in northern Syria is today able to survive only because of Turkey's support.²⁹

The US and Europe also misguidedly backed Islamist extremist opposition groups in Syria, as I observed from the outset of the Syrian conflict when watching early news footage coming from the region.³⁰ This included support for Jabhat al-Nusra despite the group being known to be linked with Al Qaeda in Syria.

Further revelations have emerged from wiretaps disclosed in evidence to the Investigative Journal of the Stockholm Center for Freedom by Turkish journalist, Abdullah Bozkurt. The full report demands close attention owing to the allegations made including that the secret documents "indicate that an implicit agreement existed between ISIS and Turkish security officials that allowed traffickers to operate freely on both sides of the porous 511-mile (822-kilometer) Turkish Syrian border without repercussions from the Erdogan government..."

"At the helm of this sinister ISIS smuggling operation is a 36-year-old Saudi-born Turk, Ilhami Bali, with the code name Abu Bakr. He facilitated and orchestrated "the movement of large numbers of foreign and local militants back and forth along the Turkish-Syrian border. ... Bali [also] moved goods across the border for ISIS, ranging from shoes and clothing to handcuffs, drone parts, binoculars, tents, a spotlight projector and even a boat. Additionally, the wiretaps show the Turkish government knew the names and locations of 33 Turkish nationals who pledged to work as drivers in ISIS's smuggling network," Bozkurt reported..."

"In a recorded conversation between Bali and a Turkish soldier, Bali was told that he would get whatever he needed. The two agreed to ensure that there was no confrontation between ISIS and Turkish security guards.

²⁹ [https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Erdogan s-shadow-army-The-influence-of-Turkeys-private-defense-group-549698](https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Erdogan-s-shadow-army-The-influence-of-Turkeys-private-defense-group-549698)

³⁰ <https://ekurd.net/syrian-problem-turkey-ii-2018-02-07>

Surprisingly, then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced on television that the government could not arrest suicide bombers until they acted, even though Turkey had advance warning and the list of names of potential suicide bombers. These suicide bombings in fact boosted Erdogan's ruling party's ratings in advance of the November 2015 Turkish parliamentary elections.

Bozkurt went on to state that there are serious questions regarding "cases involving ISIS, al-Qaeda and other armed jihadist groups [who] are being investigated, prosecuted, and tried in Turkey. The astonishingly low number of convictions in ISIS cases illustrates how the government is unwilling to successfully prosecute ISIS cases."

Bozkurt correctly pointed out that Erdogan's government uses draconian measures to arrest innocent journalists, human rights activists, academics and political opponents, but is very lenient on real terrorists: "The fact that, in many cases, detained ISIS and al-Qaeda members have been let go with a mere slap on the wrist can only be explained by the political cover and protection provided by the government."

In my opinion, the European countries and the United States have to take strong measures to curtail Erdogan's support of terrorists in Syria. It is strange that Turkey as a NATO member is aiding and arming terrorists who have been committing murders in several other NATO countries. This cannot be allowed to continue..."³¹

Turkey's Islamic State

President Erdogan's wider anti-Kurdish drive has been reflected all along in his Syrian policy and continues to be so. He rebuffed US National Security Advisor, John Bolton, during Bolton's recent visit to Turkey at the beginning of this year (2019). At the same time, Turkish jets have been strafing border areas inside Iraqi Kurdistan ostensibly targeting the PKK but resulting in casualties to Iraqi Kurdish civilians, including women and children. Kurds in northern Iraq attacked a Turkish base near Dohuk in retaliation and the Baghdad government expressed condemnation of ongoing Turkish incursions.³² Erdogan's policy at home and abroad is one and the same – to destroy Kurdish resistance.

The US administration has been seeking the unlikely assurance that Turkish forces will not attack their allies in the mopping up of ISIS fighters in Syria. Former Special Presidential Envoy of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, Brett McGurk expressed disbelief in various interviews after Trump's announcement of an intended US withdrawal and submitted his own resignation in response. He claimed there was no plan in place for "what's next" in Syria and that the ideology of ISIS was not defeated. He expressed concern for the US's Kurdish allies.³³

In response to Bolton's concerns Erdogan had rebutted in characteristic fashion: "Claims that Turkey targets Kurds in Syria is dishonorable, ugly, vulgar and defaming..."³⁴

Also rebuffing Bolton's remarks, Turkish presidential spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, dubbed Bolton's claims as "irrational," as the country is fighting Daesh and PKK/PYD/YPG terrorists..."For Turkey, there is no difference between PKK, YPG, PYD or Daesh," the president said..."Very soon we will act to neutralize terrorist groups in Syria. And we

³¹ <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2019/02/13/Turkey-support-terrorists/2071962>

³² <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/iraq-summons-turkish-ambassador-over-deadly-clashes-in-the-north-1.818666>

³³ <https://theregion.org/article/13352-quot-there-039-s-no-plan-quot-syria-says-former-syria-special-envoy-mcgurk>

³⁴ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/01/09/cannot-abandon-kurds-syria-vital-defeat-isil/>

will take out other terror groups that might try to prevent us from doing this," Erdoğan added..."³⁵

Ece Temelkuran's Turkey: The Insane and the Melancholy (2016) "chronicles Erdoğan's paranoid style of politics and his lurch into authoritarian populism...The socio-economic and cultural transformations that Turkey has undergone under the AKP – and in the aftermath of the 1980 coup more generally – are of little concern to Erdoğan, though. Power is what counts, and if playing up an old divide in order to paper over new ones works, then so be it...the more everything crumbles around him, the firmer he holds to the belief that he – the reis or chief – is the manifestation of the popular will and the strongman the country needs.

The outbreak of the Arab Spring, and its turn to winter in the Syrian civil war; the electoral successes of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) in 2015, which undermined (for a time) the constitutional reforms necessary to create a presidential system; the (my note: 'renewed') outbreak of the conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the southeast; the attempted 2016 coup...; the fallout with the US and Europe over their reactions to Ankara's post-coup purge; repeated terrorist attacks. All of this has contributed to reinforcing Erdoğan's paranoid style of politics and his lurch into authoritarian populism. It seems unlikely things will improve in the near future...³⁶

Only missing from this valid diatribe is reference to the Turkish President's direct backing for the Islamic State and other jihadist groups in Syria that are equally barbaric.

Erdoğan may consider that his recycling of IS fighters to combat the Kurds in Syria is a clever strategy – using them like "toilet tissues" as one former IS fighter named Faraj commented by phone to the *Independent* a year ago, from which the following observations derive: "An estimated 6,000 Turkish troops and 10,000 Free Syrian Army (FSA) militia crossed into Syria on 20 January, pledging to drive the YPG out of Afrin...The attack was led by the FSA, which is a largely defunct umbrella grouping of non-Jihadi Syrian rebels once backed by the West. Now, most of its fighters taking part in Turkey's "Operation Olive Branch" were, until recently, members of Isis...Some of the FSA troops advancing into Afrin are surprisingly open about their allegiance to al-Qaeda and its offshoots.... he cites Turkish officers ...quoting one as telling an FSA group in training that "we leave the suicide attacks for the YPG and the PKK ...so that the world will be convinced that they are terrorists"³⁷

Human Rights Watch observed in a report dated 23 February 2018, headed 'Civilian Deaths in Turkish Attacks May Be Unlawful – Survivors Describe Attacks on Tents, Home, Farm: "Human Rights Watch investigated three attacks in Afrin – on January 21, 27, and 28 – that killed at least 26 civilians, including 17 children. Among the victims were two displaced families..." Full details of civilians targeted, killed and injured are recorded in the report.³⁸

With hindsight, Western calculations in 'incubating' ISIS (and other of the Syrian armed opposition jihadist groups) have been acknowledged with - or without - embarrassment³⁹ but with a distinct lack of insight as to where this policy would lead.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/william-eichler/making-of-demagogue-how-erd>

³⁷ <https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/02/12/is-turkey-recruiting-ex-isis-fighters/> and <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/turkey-isis-afrin-syria-kurds-free-syrian-army-jihadi-video-fighters-recruits-a8199166.html>

³⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/23/syria-civilian-deaths-turkish-attacks-may-be-unlawful>

³⁹ <http://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pg.-291-Pgs.-287-293-JW-v-DOD-and-State-14-812-DOD-Release-2015-04-10-final-version11.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/03/us-isis-syria-iraq>

IS killers may yet be laughing up the sleeves of their Turkish military uniforms, ready to behead their master and his subjects, should Erdogan abandon them now that the last kilometres of their formal stronghold in Syria has collapsed.

All eyes should be focused on how the IS captives are to be processed, and what is to be done about Idlib, the 'dumping ground' for terrorists. As Robert Fisk asked back in November 2018, before Trump's about face, "But where will all the fighters, who have sworn never to surrender, go to next? This is the question. When they surrendered their bastions in the big Syrian cities, they were all bussed to the Islamist dustbin of Idlib. There is a land corridor between Idlib and the Turkish frontier... ⁴¹

Jihadist butchers seek a cosy return to the West

The monstrosities committed by IS jihadists of both sexes, cannot go unpunished. Burning people alive; casting them to their deaths from the rooftops of buildings; beheadings; rape; torture; summary executions; deploying human shields and child soldiers; the destruction of the treasures of antiquity, including Nimrud in Iraq and Palmyra⁴² in Syria; - the vast catalogue of their crimes must always before our eyes in determining the response to what to do with them.

European countries abolished the death penalty – if they are repatriated as the US is urging, they have nothing to fear from a cosy return to the West and continuing the radicalization drive inside prison. In Iraq and Iran, where the death penalty is retained hundreds of Islamic State actors have been executed with or without due legal process. Those IS war criminals begging to be allowed to return to the countries they scorned and from where they eagerly departed, whose citizens they are still trained to murder in the name of Jihad, cannot complain over difficulties in being processed. It is manifestly absurd, not less abhorrent. ⁴³These inhumane individuals have destroyed civilized society in their quest to turn the clock back to the 7th century. They merit neither sympathy nor compassion - not least vast revenues being expended on their unlikely 'rehabilitation'.

In Iraq, IS attacks, IED roadside bombs, suicide bombings, clashes with the the Kurdish peshmerga and Iraqi security forces including the Shi'a militia occur on a daily basis destroying lives and families. Tunnels are constantly being found, weapons caches exposed and suspects arrested. The same pattern is likely to be seen in Syria.

Turkey has aided this process and seeks to further slaughter Kurds in Syria and elsewhere. It is long past time for NATO to call Erdogan to account and to prevent the further destabilisation of Idlib, and of Kurdish- administered areas of their traditional lands in Syrian Kurdistan, Rojava. These lands do not belong to Turkey or to Assad.

⁴¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/syria-idlib-battle-bashar-assad-vladimir-putin-syrian-war-robert-fisk-a8525076.html>

⁴² <http://ekurd.net/weep-for-palmyra-2015-09-05>

⁴³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/shamima-begum-isis-syria-uk-citizenship-revoked-sajid-javid-home-office-a8787846.html>