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September 29, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute, I write to raise the issue of the inflammatory statements which are being articulated by President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and members of his government, toward the United States and Greece. President Erdogan has regularly made aggressive and unfounded statements. However, the comments he has made over the past months are unprecedented in terms of their hostility. Given their nature and scope, it is essential for the Administration to issue a strong and unequivocal condemnation of President Erdogan for his comments.

In a recent series of incendiary threats against Greece, President Erdogan essentially advocated for an invasion of the Greek islands when he spoke at an aerial festival on September 3, 2022. He stated, "Your occupation of the [Greek] islands does not bind us. When the time comes, we will do what is necessary. As we say, one night we can suddenly come down on you." In addition, he said, "We have one sentence to Greece: Don't forget Izmir," in reference to the Smyrna Catastrophe caused by the Turkish military in 1922.¹

Parroting his president, Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, said in a speech posted to *CNN Türk's* YouTube channel on September 3, 2022, that the United States government supported terrorism:

"When will the [PKK and PYD] terror organizations be finished off? It will soon be finished off in Turkey, do not worry. With Allah's permission and blessing. But just that is not enough for us. We should rip it out of the region around us. Also, know that while we are ripping out the terror organization, we want to rip America out. I am speaking openly. There are no two ways about it. That's why they have been mixing this region up with coups for years. Alawites [against] Sunnis, Turks [against] Kurds... That's why they set us upon one another. That's why they have tried to make us foreign to one another. They do not want the world to see the facts about our religion and the realities of our civilization."

President Erdogan's rogue behavior was seen on the world stage during his September 20 speech to the United Nations General Assembly. While President Erdogan made several outrageous remarks during his speech, I want to highlight his most egregious comments in which he accused Greece of committing crimes against humanity.

¹ <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1192501/turkish-leader-erdogan-ups-rhetoric-on-greece-amid-tensions/>

More specifically, President Erdogan stated, “Greece is turning the Aegean into a graveyard for refugees.” During this part of the speech, President Erdogan displayed photos of deceased children who perished in refugee boats and insinuated that Greece caused their deaths. These incendiary attacks are completely ridiculous and have no basis. Within the very same speech, President Erdogan stated Turkey, “wants good neighborly relations and compliance with international law,” in reference to Greece. The fact that President Erdogan claims Greece commits crimes against humanity and murders children, and yet says Turkey wants to have good relations with Greece, within the same speech, demonstrates the either disingenuous or completely schizophrenic posture of the Turkish government and its leadership.

All the outrageous threats from the Turkish government must be condemned by the highest levels of the United States government. If the U.S. government fails to respond, the Turkish government will be further emboldened. The fact that Turkey, an ostensible member of NATO, would accuse the United States of supporting terrorism and ethnic conflict, and then threaten to “rip” the United States from the region, demonstrates that Turkey is a failed ally of the United States and NATO. Some members of the press attempt to downplay President Erdogan’s statements by asserting that he is just posturing for his upcoming re-election campaign in 2023. This is a mistaken point of view. Rather, these statements by President Erdogan and members of his government demonstrate a long-established policy of designs against Greek sovereignty in the Aegean Sea and are a clear and present threat to Greece. More broadly, their assertions reflect an increasingly deranged obsession with reconstructing a religio-nationalist neo-Ottoman sphere of influence. As such, Turkey views U.S. regional presence as well as Greece and Cyprus as a threat to its hegemonic aspirations. At a time when the conflict in Ukraine is ongoing, we cannot afford to have the destabilization of NATO’s southeastern flank, either through action against Greece or efforts by Turkey to undermine the influence of the United States in the area.

Most recently, on September 27, the Turkish government issued demarches to the U.S. and Greek governments to protest the deployment of U.S.-made armored military vehicles to Greece, specifically two Aegean islands. President Erdogan threatened to use “all means at our disposal” against Greece and insinuated that Greece is being used as a “puppet” by the United States. As such, Turkey is threatening Greece and the United States, making it clear that it wants to either reduce U.S. influence or dictate the terms of U.S. regional engagement. This is absurd and unbecoming of a NATO member. President Erdogan issues provocative remarks daily, and by the time you receive this letter, he likely will have made additional incendiary statements.

To that effect, the Administration must condemn Turkey as the aggressor. The United States, the European Union, and NATO must demand that Turkey cease and desist from its inflammatory assertions against the United States and Greece. Should Turkey fail to desist, it should face coordinated multilateral sanctions from the United States and European Union. It is not enough for the State Department to issue oblique critiques of Turkey or try to call on “all sides” to reduce tensions, which creates a false parity between Greece and Turkey. There is only one side, Turkey, which is acting provocatively. Furthermore, Mr. President, please raise these concerns at the Presidential level. It has been widely reported in the press that you may meet with President Erdogan sometime in the near future. If so, we request that President Erdogan be confronted about his statements and for Administration officials to state that they will reconsider their support for the sale of F-16 jets to Turkey.

The conflict in Ukraine demonstrates the dangers of dictatorships that operate outside international rules-based order. Russia is one such example, but so is Turkey. We must recognize Turkey as it is under President Erdogan's reign, and not what we wish it would be. Enough with the platitudes promoted by foreign policy elites of Turkey being a "NATO ally," a "model for the Islamic world," or a "bridge between East and West." At this point, Turkey is a dangerous Islamic fundamentalist dictatorship similar in principle to Iran and aligned with Putin's Russia. If the United States does not pursue a policy of containing Turkey and President Erdogan, there is a risk Turkey, which already occupies a member of the European Union, Cyprus, will create a "second Ukraine" by undertaking military action against Greece.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis
President

CC: Vice President Kamala Harris
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Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin
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Karen Donfried, Assistant Secretary of State, European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State
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Josh Huck, Director of Southern European Affairs, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State
David Mendez, Greece Desk Officer, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State
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The Congress