

Genocide, Sanctions and Incirlik: Erdoğan Will Not Kick Out NATO from Its Bases Despite Threats

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has dropped a bombshell by announcing that he could shut down the NATO-controlled Incirlik airbase that hosts U.S. nuclear bombs and the U.S. missile warning radar at Kurecik military base, in response to Washington's threats of sanctions against Turkey. These nuclear bombs are of course placed purposefully close to Russia. The Incirlik air base in the southern Turkish province of Adana is used by the U.S. Air Force while the U.S. military also maintains a missile warning radar in the Kurecik district in Turkey's southeastern Malatya province, which is part of NATO's missile defense system in Europe.

"If it is necessary for us to take such a step, of course, we have the authority... We will close down Incirlik if necessary," Erdoğan said on A Haber TV on Sunday.

[Last week](#), the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Senate of the United States Congress approved the "Promoting American National Security and Preventing the Resurgence of ISIS Act" bill that directly targets Turkey's military and economic apparatus. [According to the draft bill](#), the Turkish acquisition of the powerful Russian S-400 missile defense system gives grounds to impose sanctions against this country, under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), including against the Minister of National Defense of Turkey, the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, the Commander of the 2nd Army of the Turkish Armed Forces, the Minister of Treasury and Finance of Turkey, the Halkbank and a whole host of other senior officials.

This action could further isolate Turkey from NATO, especially after the latest blow against the Eurasian country came [last Thursday](#) when the U.S. Senate finally passed [S.Res.150](#) that recognizes the Turkish perpetrated genocide(1915-1923) against Turkey's Christian minority that saw millions of Greeks, Armenians, and Assyrians exterminated. There is no doubt the long-awaited U.S. recognition of the genocide [is politically motivated](#), and Erdoğan understands this, threatening to [recognize the U.S. genocide](#) against Native Americans.

However, there are key differences between a potential Turkish recognition of the U.S. genocide against the Native Americans and the Turkish genocide against the Christians of Anatolia. There are hundreds of thousands, if not over a million, Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians living in the U.S. who have direct ancestry to genocide survivors who lost their entire lives including houses, farms, shops and other associated wealth. These descendants could pressure Washington to seek compensation from Ankara and could intensify sanctions

against Turkey if they refuse too. Although the likelihood of compensation is extremely low, it could be used as a justification to strengthen sanctions against Turkey, which in turn will only push Turkey further away from the U.S./NATO and potentially closer to Russia.

On the other side, although Turkey may acknowledge the genocide against Native Americans, I would imagine there are no Native Americans, or maybe just a few, living in Turkey. Ankara could reciprocate sanctions against the U.S., but they would be virtually ineffectual as the world's monetary system is still overwhelmingly dominated by the U.S. Dollar, despite efforts by Russia and China to de-Dollarize the international economy.

Turkey's potential closure of the Incirlik and Kurecik bases from the U.S. military would effectively mean freezing relations with NATO. Even a Turkish reclamation of its military bases poses problems however – the obvious being political, but also the military and budgetary costs. However, discussions of Turkey closing the bases are not new. Ankara believes the Incirlik base was a staging point for the 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan and has already contemplated kicking NATO out of there.

Despite the threat from Erdoğan, Washington will likely not be phased by the threat for a number of reasons:

- 1) Washington has already turned Greece into its [Plan B](#) option in case Turkey leaves NATO.
- 2) Turkey leaving NATO could mean the U.S. backing a number of issues that have been frozen because of Washington's policy of appeasing Turkey for geostrategic reasons, such as the unresolved status of Cyprus.
- 3) The Incirlik base is also used by other NATO states at times such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy, and a Turkish reclamation of the base could see Turkey further souring its relations with the European Union.

Although removing the U.S. military from the Incirlik Airbase would be a huge blow to NATO, Erdoğan is unlikely to do this despite Ankara's strengthening relations with Moscow. Even if this were the case, the most important question still remains, would U.S. President Donald Trump accept this? It is highly unlikely that Trump will want to surrender the base that is critical for U.S. interests and aggression in the Middle East. Although Greece is a Plan B, it is a Plan B for a reason – it is not as strategically placed as Turkey towards the Middle East, and therefore the U.S. will not surrender such a great advantage it has so easily.

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