

The Politics of Betrayal: Obama Backstabs Kurds to Appease Turkey

By [Mike Whitney](#)

Global Research, July 31, 2015

[Counter Punch](#) 29 July 2015

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The Kurdish militias (YPG, PKK) have been Washington's most effective weapon in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. But the Obama administration has sold out the Kurds in order to strengthen ties with Turkey and gain access to Turkey's Incirlik Air Base. The agreement to switch sides was made in phone call between President Obama and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan less than 48 hours after a terrorist incident in the Turkish town of Suruc killed 32 people and wounded more than 100 others.

The bombing provided Obama with the cover he needed to throw the Kurds under the bus, cave in to Turkey's demands, and look the other way while Turkish bombers and tanks pounded Kurdish positions in Syria and Iraq. The media has characterized this shocking reversal of US policy as a "game-changer" that will improve US prospects for victory over ISIS. But what the about-face really shows is Washington's inability to conduct a principled foreign policy as well as Obama's eagerness to betray a trusted friend and ally if he sees some advantage in doing so.

Turkish President Erdogan has launched a war against the Kurds; that is what's really happening in Syria at present. The media's view of events—that Turkey has joined the fight against ISIS—is mostly spin and propaganda. The fact that the Kurds had been gaining ground against ISIS in areas along the Turkish border, worried political leaders in Ankara that an independent Kurdish state could be emerging. Determined to stop that possibility, they decided to use the bombing in Suruc as an excuse to round up more than 1,000 of Erdogan's political enemies (only a small percentage of who are connected to ISIS) while bombing the holy hell out of Kurdish positions in Syria and Iraq. All the while, the media has been portraying this ruthless assault on a de facto US ally, as a war on ISIS. It is not a war on ISIS. It is the manipulation of a terrorist attack to advance the belligerent geopolitical agenda of Turkish and US elites. Just take a look at these two tweets from CNN Turkey on Saturday and you'll see what's going on under the radar:

@CNNTURK_ENG:

#BREAKING Sources tell CNN Türk last night Turkish jets made 159 sorties against #PKK camps in N.Iraq&hit 400 targetspic.twitter.com/oGVJmKsGbs

@CNNTURK_ENG:

#BREAKING Sources tell CNN Türk last night there was no air strike against #ISIS, targets were hit by tank fire near #Kilis.
(The tweets first appeared at [Moon of Alabama](#))

Repeat: 159 air attacks on Kurdish positions and ZERO on ISIS targets. And the media wants

us to believe that Turkey has joined Obama's war on ISIS?

The Turks know who they're bombing. They are bombing their 30-year long enemy, the Kurds. Here's more on the topic from Telesur:

A decades-old conflict between Turkey and the Kurdish PKK has been reignited. Turkey vowed Saturday to continue attacks against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), along with strikes against the Islamic State group.

The operations will continue for as long as threats against Turkey continue," Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said, according to Turkey's Anadolu Agency.

Ankara also confirmed it carried out airstrikes against PKK sites in Iraq. While Davutoglu said any organizations that "threaten" Turkey would be targeted in a crackdown on militants, on Friday President Tayyip Erdogan said the PKK would be the main focus of attacks." ("[Turkey Says More Anti-PKK Strikes to Come](#)", Telesur)

Repeat: "Erdogan said the PKK would be the main focus of attacks.

For Washington, it's all a question of priorities. While the Kurds have been good friends and steadfast allies, they don't have a spanking-new air base for launching attacks on Syria. Turkey, on the other hand, has a great base (Incirlik) that's much closer to the frontlines and just perfect for launching multiple sorties, drone attacks or routine surveillance fly-overs. The only glitch, of course, is that Washington will have to bite its tongue while a former ally is beaten to a pulp. That's a price that Obama is more than willing to pay provided he can use the airfield to prosecute his war.

It's worth noting, that Turkey's relationship with jihadi groups in Syria is a matter of great concern, mainly because Turkey appears to be the terrorists biggest benefactor. Check this out from Turkey's *Hurriyet Daily News*:

Naturally, one has to ask who fathered, breastfed and nourished these Islamist terrorists in hopes and aspirations of creating a Sunni Muslim Brotherhood Khalifat state? Even when Kobane and many Turkish cities were on fire, did not the Turkish prime minister talk in his interview with CNN about his readiness to order land troops into the Syrian quagmire if Washington agreed to also target al-Assad?

This is a dirty game...." (Editorial, "[Kobane and Turkey are Burning](#)", Hurriyet Daily News)

And here's more from author Nafeez Ahmed:

With their command and control centre based in Istanbul, Turkey, military supplies from Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular were transported by Turkish intelligence to the border for rebel acquisition. CIA operatives along with Israeli and Jordanian commandos were also training FSA rebels on the Jordanian-Syrian border with anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. In addition, other reports show that British and French military were also involved in these secret training programmes. It appears that the same FSA rebels receiving this elite training went straight into ISIS - last month one ISIS commander, Abu Yusaf, said, "Many of the FSA people who the west has trained are actually joining us." ("[How the West Created the Islamic State](#)", Nafeez Ahmed, CounterPunch)

Then there's this from *USA Today*:

Militants have funneled weapons and fighters through Turkey into Syria. The Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, have networks in Turkey....

Turkish security and intelligence services may have ties to Islamic State militants. The group released 46 Turkish diplomats it had abducted the day before the United States launched airstrikes against it. Turkey, a NATO member, may have known the airstrikes were about to begin and pressured its contacts in the Islamic State to release its diplomats.

This implies Turkey has more influence or stronger ties to ISIS than people would think," Tanir said. ("5 reasons Turkey isn't attacking Islamic State in Syria", *USA Today*)

The media would like people to believe that the bombing in Suruc changed everything; that Erdogan and his fellows suddenly saw the light and decided that, well, maybe we shouldn't be supporting these ISIS thugs after all. But that's just baloney. The only one who's changed his mind about anything is Obama who seems to have realized that his takfiri proxy-warriors aren't ruthless enough to remove Assad, so he's decided to team up with Sultan Erdogan instead. That means Erdogan gets a green light to butcher as many Kurds as he wants in exchange for boots on the ground to topple Assad. That's the deal, although, at present, the politicians are denying it. Now check out this blurb from Foreign Policy "Situation Report":

The nominee to be the next commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Robert Neller, didn't really get off to a great start in his relationship with Senate Armed Services Committee chief Sen. John McCain. The general drew the ire of the Arizona lawmaker by telling the panel on Thursday that the Islamic State is essentially fighting to a draw in Iraq and Syria. McCain took the opportunity and ran with it, telling the Iraq vet that "I'm very disappointed in a number of your answers," on the Islamic State, promising to send along more questions to push the general on his views. It was an unexpected ending to what had been a hum-drum confirmation hearing, and if McCain wants to press the issue, it could hold up a vote on Neller's confirmation until after the August congressional recess. ([Situation Report](#)", ForeignPolicy.com)

The point is, the Big Brass is telling US policymakers that ISIS is *not* going to win the war, which means that Assad is going to stay in power. That's why Obama has moved on to Plan B and thrown his lot with Erdogan, because the Pentagon bigshots finally realize they're going to need boots on the ground if they want regime change in Syria. But "whose boots", that's the question?

Not U.S. boots, that's for sure. Americans have had it up to here with war and are not likely to support another bloody fiasco in the Middle East. That's where Erdogan comes into the picture. Washington wants Turkey to do the heavy lifting while the US provides logistical support and air cover. That's the basic gameplan. Naturally, the media can't explain what's really going on or it would blow Obama's cover. But who doesn't know that this whole campaign is aimed at removing Assad? You'd have to be living in a cave for the last three years not to know that.

The bottom line is that Erdogan has three demands. He wants a buffer zone on the Syrian

side of the border to protect Turkey from ISIS and Kurdish attacks. He wants a no-fly zone over all or parts of Syria. And he wants Syrian President Bashar al-Assad removed from power. That's what he wants and that's what Obama has agreed to (as part of the Incirlik deal) although the media is refuting the claim. To help explain what's going on, take a look at this article in Reuters that was written back in October, 2014. Here's an excerpt:

Turkey will fight against Islamic State and other "terrorist" groups in the region but will stick to its aim of seeing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad removed from power, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday...

We will (also) continue to prioritise our aim to remove the Syrian regime, to help protect the territorial integrity of Syria and to encourage a constitutional, parliamentary government system which embraces all (of its) citizens. ...

But it (Turkey) fears that U.S.-led air strikes, if not accompanied by a broader political strategy, could strengthen Assad and bolster Kurdish militants allied to Kurds in Turkey who have fought for three decades for greater autonomy.

"Tons of air bombs will only delay the threat and danger," Erdogan said.....

We are open and ready for any cooperation in the fight against terrorism. However, it should be understood by everybody that Turkey is not a country in pursuit of temporary solutions nor will Turkey allow others to take advantage of it. ("[Turkey will fight Islamic State, wants Assad gone: President Erdogan](#)", Reuters)

That's pretty clear, isn't it? Either the US helps Turkey get rid of Assad or there's no deal. The Turkish president's right-hand man, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, said the same thing in an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour in February, 2015. Here's an excerpt from the article:

Turkey would be willing to put its troops on the ground in Syria "if others do their part," Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told CNN's Christiane Amanpour in an interview that aired Monday.

We are ready to do everything if there is a clear strategy that after ISIS, we can be sure that our border will be protected. We don't want the regime anymore on our border pushing people against — towards Turkey. We don't want other terrorist organizations to be active there."...

He said that American airstrikes in Syria were necessary but not enough for a victory.

"If ISIS goes, another radical organization may come in," he said. "So our approach should be comprehensive, inclusive, strategic and combined ... to eliminate all brutal crimes against humanity committed by the regime.

"We want to have a no-fly zone. We want to have a safe haven on our border. Otherwise, all these burdens will continue to go on the shoulder of Turkey and other neighboring countries."...

Turkey is trying to dispel the idea that the United States can become involved in Syria by going after ISIS but not al-Assad." ("[Turkey willing to put troops in Syria 'if others do their part,' Prime Minister says](#)", CNN)

Repeat: "Turkey would be willing to put its troops on the ground in Syria", but Assad's got to

go. That's the trade-off. Davutoglu has since backed off on this demand, but the basic deal hasn't changed. Leaders in the US and Turkey have just decided to be more discreet about what they tell the press. But the plan is moving forward. For example, officials from the Obama administration have denied that they will provide a no-fly zone over Syria. According to the New York Times, however, the US has agreed to create an "Islamic State-free zone" or "safe zone... controlled by relatively moderate Syrian insurgents." ("[Turkey and U.S. Plan to Create Syria 'Safe Zone' Free of ISIS](#)", *New York Times*)

So the question is: Will the US provide air cover over this "Islamic State-free zone"?

Yes, it will.

Will Assad send his warplanes into this zone?

No, he won't. He'd be crazy to do so.

Okay. Then what the US has created is a no-fly zone, right? And this actually applies to all of Syria as well, now that US warplanes and drones are less than 500 miles from Damascus. The Incirlik deal means that the US will control the skies over Syria. Period. Here's more from the *Times* trying to occlude the obvious details:

American officials say that this plan is not directed against Mr. Assad. They also say that while a de facto safe zone could indeed be a byproduct of the plan, a formal no-fly zone is not part of the deal. They said it was not included in the surprise agreement reached last week to let American warplanes take off from Turkish air bases to attack Islamic State fighters in Syria, even though Turkey had long said it would give that permission only in exchange for a no-fly zone.....("Turkey and U.S. Plan to Create Syria 'Safe Zone' Free of ISIS", *New York Times*)

What does this gibberish mean in English? It means that, yes, the US has created a no-fly zone over Syria, but, no, the administration's public relations doesn't want to talk about it because then they'd have to admit that Obama caved in to Turkish demands. Got that?

And just to show that the *NYT* hasn't lost its sense of humor, here's more in the same vein:

American officials in recent months have argued to Turkish counterparts that a formal no-fly zone is not necessary, noting that during hundreds of American-led strike missions against Islamic State in Syria, forces loyal to Mr. Assad have steered clear of areas under concerted allied attack....(NYT)

In other words, "American officials" are telling Erdogan that 'We don't need to call this a no-fly zone, because once the F-16s start circling the skies over Damascus, Assad will get the message pretty quick.'

Can you believe that they would publish such circular palaver in the nation's top newspaper?

And the same is true with the massive expropriation of Syrian sovereign territory, which the US and Turkey breezily refer to as an "Islamic State-free zone". This just proves that Obama caved in to another one of Erdogan's three demands, the demand for a buffer zone

on the Syrian side of the border. Not surprisingly, this blatant violation of Syrian sovereignty hasn't even raised an eyebrow at the United Nations where delegates have gotten so used to Washington's erratic behavior that they don't even pay attention anymore.

By the way, this issue of setting up buffer zones, shouldn't be taken lightly. As State Department spokesman Mark Toner opined just weeks ago, "We'd essentially be opening the door to the dissolution of the Syrian nation-state."

Indeed, isn't that the point? Aside from the fact, that these "protected areas" will be used as launching grounds for attacks on the central government, they'll also become autonomous regions consistent with the US strategy to redraw the map of the Middle East by breaking Iraq and Syria into smaller, tribal-governed cantons incapable of challenging regional hegemon, Israel, or global superpower, the US. Author Thomas Gaist provides a little background on this phenom in a post at the World Socialist Web Site:

In a brief published Tuesday, "Deconstructing Syria: A new strategy for America's most hopeless war," the Brookings Institution detailed the application of this neocolonial strategy in Syria....The Brookings report argued that a "comprehensive, national-level solution" is no longer possible, and called for the carving out of "autonomous zones."

The only realistic path forward may be a plan that in effect deconstructs Syria," the report argued. The US and its allies should seek "to create pockets with more viable security and governance within Syria."

This "confederal Syria" would be composed of "highly autonomous zones," the report said, and would be supported militarily by the deployment of US-NATO forces into the newly carved-out occupation areas, including deployment of "multilateral support teams, grounded in special forces detachments and air-defense capabilities."

Past collaboration with extremist elements of the insurgency would not itself be viewed as a scarlet letter," the Brookings report argued, making clear the extremist militant groups which have served as US proxy forces against the Assad government will not be excluded from the new partition of Syria. ("[Turkey, Jordan discuss moves to seize territory in Syria](#)", Thomas Gaist, World Socialist Web Site)

Isn't this precisely the strategy that is unfolding in Syria and Iraq today?

Of course, it is. Everything you've been reading about "Islamic State-free zones", "safety zones", or "no-fly zones" is lies. I won't even dignify it by calling it propaganda. It's not. Just like the idea that this new buffer zone (carved out of Syrian territory) is going to be administered by "relatively moderate Syrian insurgents". (which is the NYT's new innocuous-sounding sobriquet for al-Qaida terrorists.) That's another lie that's intended to divert attention from the real plan, which is the Turkish occupation of Syrian territory consistent with Erdogan's and Davutoglu's commitment to put boots on the ground if the US agrees to their demands. Which Obama has, although the media denies it.

The US is not going to entrust this captured territory to "relatively moderate Syrian insurgents", because as Gen. Robert Neller already admitted to McCain, the jihadis aren't winning. In other words, the jihadi plan is a flop. That's what this whole Turkey-US alliance-thing is all about. It is a major shift in the fundamental policy. There's going to be a ground

invasion, and the Turks are going to supply the troops. It's only a matter of time. Here's how analyst Gaist sums it up:

Having failed to remove Assad using proxy militia forces alone, Washington is now contemplating the direct invasion of Syria by outside military forces for the purpose of carving out a large area of the country to be subsequently occupied by US and NATO troops. Plans for a new imperialist division of Syria and the broader Middle East have been brewing within the US ruling elite for decades. ("[Turkey, Jordan discuss moves to seize territory in Syria](#)", Thomas Gaist, World Socialist Web Site)

Naturally, Obama's not going to tell the media what he's up to. But that's the plan.

Mike Whitney lives in Washington state. He is a contributor to [Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion](#) (AK Press). Hopeless is also available in a [Kindle edition](#). He can be reached at fergiwhitney@msn.com.

The original source of this article is [Counter Punch](#)

Copyright © [Mike Whitney](#), [Counter Punch](#), 2015

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Mike Whitney](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca