

Trump Enthrones Erdogan - Destroys Trust In U.S. Diplomacy

By [Moon of Alabama](#)

Global Research, April 19, 2017

[Moon of Alabama](#) 18 April 2017

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

Theme: [History, US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Trump contradicted his speaker, the State Department and his allies by congratulating the Turkish President Erdogan for winning Sunday's referendum vote. He undermined his diplomacy.

Sundays referendum in Turkey makes the presidential office a quasi dictatorial position that leads the executive and can, via decrees, also overrule the legislative and judiciary elements of the state. President Erdogan is now in a dictatorial position. It maybe that a majority of the Turkish voters voted for this change but it is far from certain. The number of votes in doubt because they were not taken in accordance with the legal procedures (2-3 million) is higher than slight majority lead (1.5 million) for the "yes" side.

Official international election observers [noted](#) (pdf) that the vote was neither free nor fair. The Turkish state is under emergency rules which give the president (temporarily) extraordinary powers. The vote happened after an extreme hunt against anyone that could have endangered Erdogan's position. He jailed opposition politicians and civil servants, forbade some political groups and closed down opposition media. All state institutions were used in support for Erdogan's side. If he [could only](#) win by 1.5 million votes in a 80 million strong society after this extreme anti-opposition campaign how many Turks would really have agreed with him on more leveled grounds?

Twenty years ago, when he was mayor of Istanbul, Erdogan said in a Milliyet interview:

"Democracy is like a tram ride: when you reach your stop, you get off". On Sunday Erdogan stepped off the tram.

Turkey is now a Tyranny of the Majority. There are no longer any institutional constraints to remove any minority group from the political scene or maybe even from the physical world. Turkey as we knew it [is no more](#).

EU members refrained from accepting the vote before the ongoing legal fight over it is decided. Only Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf and Central Asian dictatorships congratulated him. The terrorist group Ahrar al Sham, which fights the people and government of Syria, also [congratulated](#) Erdogan. Al-Qaeda in Syria, under its new alliance name HTS, [joined in](#) as well as [other Takfiri groups](#) in Syria.

Like the EU countries the U.S. State Department held out on congratulations. It only released [a statement](#) that noted reports of voting "irregularities" and an "uneven playing

field". It voiced support for inner-Turkish dialog and legal processes. White House spokesman Sean Spicer [said](#) the U.S. administration would wait until the final report by the international observers mission was released.

The State Department and the spokesman were quickly undermined by President Trump. Only an hour later the Turkish side [reported](#) of a Trump-Erdogan telephone conversation:

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday called Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to congratulate him on the referendum victory.

The two leaders had a "pleasant" call which lasted for 45 minutes, diplomatic sources said.

This was later confirmed by a White House readout of the call. (The [readout](#) is not yet on the White House website but was sent out to the press via email).

The published content of the call does not bode well for Turkey, Syria and Iraq (emphasis added):

"President Trump and President Erdogan also discussed the counter-ISIS campaign and the need to cooperate against all groups that use terrorism to achieve their ends," the White House statement said.

The Turkish version of the readout was worse:

The two leaders also discussed an alleged chemical attack by the Syrian government on April 4 that killed approximately 100 civilians and injured 500 others in the opposition-held town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province.

..
Trump and Erdoğan agreed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was responsible for the attack.

The U.S. president also thanked Turkey for its support for U.S. missile strikes on the Shayrat air base on April 7 in retaliation for the chemical attack.

Both leaders also stressed the need for cooperation in the fight against terror groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The Khan Sheikhoun incident was [likely](#) a "false flag" attack initiated by the terrorists on the ground -possibly with Turkish support. The proven number of casualties was far less than the statement claims. The only purpose of the following U.S. missile strikes was to [dispel allegations](#) that Trump is in cahoots with Russia.

A question now is who the two countries regard as terrorist groups. The mostly Shia Hizbullah fighting on the Syrian government side is seen as such by both even while it holds parliament positions in Lebanon. While the U.S. agreed to UN Security Council resolutions designating al-Qaeda in Syria as a terrorist group that must be "eradicated", Erdogan is sponsoring and supporting the group. The U.S. is allying with parts of the Kurdish YPK/PKK groups in Syria while Turkey has designated those as terrorist entities. Does the "against all groups that use terrorism" formulation include the Iraqi militia in Syria? Does it include Iran?

What is most concerning is the fact that a 45 minute call is extremely long for such an occasion. We can be sure that plans were made in it that have not yet been published. It is likely that a new, higher level of war against Syrian (and Iran) was agreed upon. Besides the battlefields of Syria there is Turkish military interference in Iraq. Were common plans made for that country too?

Still one wonders why Trump would undermine his speaker, his State Department and his European allies by contradicting their statements and positions with his Erdogan call. A precedent was set. Foreign countries can no longer rely on official U.S. administration statements unless Trump personally voices his agreement with them. (Which he may then retract and reverse on a moments notice.) The basis of diplomacy is a certain level of trust in reliability – words and standing by those words matter. The diplomatic standing of the United States was severely damaged by this unprecedented move.

The reversal of the original position of the Trump administration is extreme. From a realist standpoint a much more neutral position towards Erdogan's shenanigans, as shown by the State Department, would be advisable.

Why did Trump reverse it? Has [this](#) five year old tweet something to do with it?

Ivanka Trump @IvankaTrump
Thank you Prime Minister Erdogan for joining us yesterday to celebrate the launch of #TrumpTowers Istanbul!
1:56 PM – 20 Apr 2012

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