

Turkey: NATO expands - Kurds betrayed

Monday 25 July 2022, by [HEARSE Phil](#), [PARKER Sarah](#) (Date first published: 20 July 2022).

Phil Hearse and Sarah Parker report on the betrayal of the Kurdish people as Erdoğan of Turkey uses the threat of veto on NATO membership for Finland and Sweden.

For a new country to join NATO, the agreement of all existing members is required. But until the beginning of July, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan vetoed Finland and Sweden getting on board. Erdoğan's approval to admit Sweden and Finland was now needed by the NATO countries, and he knew he could drive a hard bargain. According to the US State Department, no concessions were made to Turkey to shift its veto, but the evidence strongly suggests otherwise.

Erdoğan sensed a key opportunity and played his cards well. The United States agreed to sell Turkey the most advanced version of the F-16 fighter plane, and Sweden and Finland in return agreed to deport Kurdish 'terrorists' back to Turkey.

Erdoğan's government says supporters of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) are terrorists, but also members of the YPG (the Kurdish-led People's Protection Units in Northern Syria) and the left wing HDP (People's Democratic Party) in Turkey. Members and supporters of all these movements are dubbed terrorists, including Turkey's 59 HDP parliamentary deputies. Evidence does not much concern the Erdoğan government as it hands out the 'terrorist' label.

Faced with upcoming elections, Erdoğan's party, the Islamist AKP, is beating the Turkish nationalist drum to mobilise its right-wing supporters. On 17 June, 20 journalists were arrested in southern Turkey and sent to jail, accused of membership of various left-wing and Kurdish nationalist parties. All of this is part of the expected nationalist crescendo which will grow louder as the elections approach.

All radical opposition parties in Turkey are characterised as terrorist organisations. From Erdoğan's perspective, now that Sweden and Finland have signed up to be his police force in the two Nordic countries, he can make demands for the extradition of any Kurdish or Turkish oppositionists, and provoke Turkish nationalist outrage if any are not deported.

There is a lot for Erdoğan to work on, with 100,000+ Turkish and Kurdish people in Sweden, plus up to 10,000 in Finland. The Finnish prime minister Sana Marin has stressed that in considering any demands Finland will 'respect all human rights'. In fact anyone sent into the hands of the Turkish state is likely to suffer torture and a very long prison sentence—or death in prison.

The total size of the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in Europe includes at least 5 million in Germany; one million in France; 500,000 in the United Kingdom; 270,000 in Austria and 50,000 in Italy. All are potentially now under threat, as Erdogan steps up his demands for all NATO countries to deport 'terrorists'.

There is another more worrying aspect of the deal with NATO. One well informed website says Erdogan is planning a new massive military incursion into northern Syria and northern Iraq, with the aim of the aim of crushing Kurdish-led resistance forces there. They say:

The Turkish president is clear. He has already drawn up a military plan to “liberate” Syrian Kurdistan and now wants NATO’s backing. This fight against the Kurds would also include members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a mixture of Arab and Kurdish members, led by the latter, who led the fight against Daesh [Islamic State-ISIS] in the context of the Syrian civil war.

Deepening massive repression has been the lot of the opposition in Turkey since the 2016 attempted coup, organised mainly by dissident military officers and the ‘soft’ Islamists who follow the exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen. More than 100,000 have been imprisoned and a similar number have lost their jobs.

The agreement of Finland and Sweden to deport ‘terrorists’ is likely to hit Kurdish and Turkish residents very hard. In any case, the attempted deportations are likely to cause political uproar, encouraging Erdoğan to once again use Turkish nationalist outrage to garner political support for his AKP party.

The second major agreement with Erdoğan was for the US to sell Turkey the latest F-16 American fighter planes, and update kits for the 40 older F-16s already in Turkish hands. The United States excluded Turkey from the project to build its latest stealth fighter, the F-35, as a punishment for Turkey buying the Russian S-400 air defence missile, a system certainly cheaper than anything the Americans had on offer and according to many observers, more capable.

Having been excluded from the F-35 project, Turkey demanded the next best thing, the upgraded F-16B. The updated F16B does not have all the capabilities of the F-35, in terms of being able to ‘see’ a battlefield over a vast area, and engage 20 targets simultaneously. The F35 capabilities might be needed for a war with China, but are not necessary for combatting the mainly infantry guerrilla forces of the PKK and YPG.

And the F-16s come in at a more affordable \$10-12 million each, whereas the F-35B costs upwards of \$80 million. And the new F-16 planes put Turkey in a much more equal position to others in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Erdoğan may also resent his Mediterranean rival Greece being able to buy the F35, but an armed clash between Turkey and Greece is unlikely. And in training exercises the new F-16 has ‘shot down’ F-35s on a number of occasions.

Another tack of Erdoğan’s attempt to break out of recent regional isolation is by repairing bridges with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States under the Saudi’s thumb. These super-rich and oil-providing states have been at loggerheads with Erdoğan over which country has leadership of the Islamic world. Erdoğan deepened his anti-Saudi line, using the fact that the Saudi crown prince Mohamed bin Salam gave the order for the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a vocal Saudi critic of the regime—in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Now Erdoğan has been touring the Middle East, from Libya to Riyadh to Dubai, ensuring all that he is not challenging for leadership of the Muslim world and would welcome their investment in Turkey. Needing financial support, Erdoğan bowed to his regional neighbours, who are awash with petrodollars, especially when oil prices are so high.

At the start of the Ukraine war, Erdoğan reckoned he could maximise his benefits through taking a neutral stand and helping to broker a negotiated settlement, although a neutral position did not rule out selling Turkey’s home-made and very advanced drones to Ukraine. Now in the face of absolute Russian intransigence to a negotiated peace, as well as Ukraine and its allies ruling out negotiations at this stage, he is moving away from Russia towards a friendlier attitude to the Western powers.

Erdoğan and his ruling Islamist party the AKP, have imprisoned tens of thousands since the bungled 2016 military coup. More than 100,000 have been sacked from their jobs, as alleged supporters of terrorism. This included thousands of activists in the broad left party, the HDP (Peoples Democratic Party).

At the end of June, 22 people, 21 of them journalists, were arrested. The arrests were in the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in southern Turkey—what the Kurds called ‘North Kurdistan.’

There have been demonstrations in both Sweden and Finland against joining NATO, but these have been mainly confined to the political left, and have been much larger in Sweden than Finland. Some reports have alleged that there is an age difference in attitudes to NATO, with older and middle-aged people in Sweden being against joining NATO, nostalgic for its neutral position during the Cold War (roughly 1950-90).

But actually the demographic most opposed to joining NATO is young men aged 18-25. And you don’t have to think very hard to guess why. Overall in Sweden about 38% are said to be against NATO membership, a huge swing away from Sweden’s traditional neutrality, caused of course by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Pro-NATO feeling, has grown in the Russia borderlands, from Eastern Europe to Scandinavia, thanks to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Support for NATO goes hand-in-hand with support for intensifying the militarisation of the continent. The military and their right-wing political supporters are using the invasion to build support for NATO and increased arms spending. The mantra of increased arms spending is unanimous in the Tory party election. Militarisation goes way beyond what is needed to arm Ukraine to resist the invasion. Everything that is needed by Ukraine could be supplied from current inventories, absolutely massive in the NATO forces. Heavy weapons are being doled out to Ukraine with an eye-dropper, for political reasons and not because NATO needs to acquire more weapons to meet Ukraine’s military needs.

In Britain the labour movement and left political organisations should of course oppose deportations to Turkey. We should also stand with those in Sweden and Finland opposed to NATO membership, as that alliance resumes its 70-year role of tying countries in Europe and beyond to American political and military leadership.

STOP PRESS: The Turkish offensive against Kurds in northern Iraq and northern Syria, predicted in this article, may have already begun. On Wednesday (20 July) Turkish shells hit the Iraqi tourist resort of Zakho, killing 9 people. Turkey blamed fighters of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) for the attack, as it normally does.

Phil Hearse and Sarah Parker

P.S.

• AntiCapitalist Resistance. 20 Jul 2022:
<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/nato-expands-kurds-betrayed/>