THE DAY(S) THAT TURKISH PRESIDENT ERDOGAN HUMILIATED AMERICA

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Category: Opinions

By David Boyajian, Massachusetts, 4 May 2024

Weak. Deceitful. Cowardly.

Those describe America's ongoing responses to the savage, unprovoked attack on peaceful protestors by Turkish President Erdogan's security detail in Washington, DC.

It happened on Tuesday afternoon, May 16, 2017 following his meeting with President Trump.

Shortly after his motorcade arrived at the Turkish ambassador's Sheridan Circle residence, where protestors had lawfully assembled across the street, Erdogan commanded his bodyguards to "attack, attack."

Breaking through police lines, they kicked, punched, and bloodied the protesters, including women. Other Turks, purportedly not in Erdogan's entourage, did the same.

The motorcade then brutalized a female demonstrator on its way to the Turkish Embassy. Assaults on Americans continued there.

The day saw a minimum of 11 persons, some with severe injuries, transported to the hospital.

Among those set upon and injured: Two U.S. Diplomatic Security members, six Secret Service agents, and a DC police officer.

Turks Allowed to Escape

Turkish Ambassador Serdar Kilic promptly asked that the bodyguards not be detained.

Sure enough, some 90 minutes later, U.S. security released them and accompanied Erdogan's caravan to Joint Base Andrews where they jetted off to Turkey.

It was the fastest "joint move and departure I've ever seen," said one U.S. agent.

The administration let the Turkish bodyguards flee, *allegedly* because they had diplomatic immunity.

Indignation

Then, too late, came the indignation, such as:

- The State Department expressed its "concern to the Turkish government in the strongest possible terms."
- The bodyguards should be "charged & prosecuted," said a unanimous House resolution in June.

Astonishingly, Trump said nothing about the attack. Perhaps this was due to his and his associates' close relationships with Turkey and Erdogan.

There was good news though.

On August 29, 2017, a federal grand jury indicted 15 Turkish bodyguards on felony charges.

That suggested that releasing them had been a serious error.

But then came Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's disgraceful meeting with Erdogan in Ankara on February 15, 2018.



America Caves in to Turkey — Again

Tillerson ordered that *no* American translator, aide, or transcriber attend the meeting.

That violated State Department protocol *and* ensured that no American could witness what Tillerson would bargain away.

Just the day before, the Justice Department moved — surely *not* coincidentally — to drop its case against most of Erdogan's bodyguards. Charges were dismissed eight days later. Apparently, the entire detail has since dodged U.S. justice.

Tillerson obviously struck a Faustian deal to let Turkey's unhinged president and his thugs off the

hook.

That betrayed the American security agents, police, and demonstrators whom the Turks had assaulted and injured. It also mocked the First Amendment's freedoms of assembly and speech.

American credibility took a hit as Ankara got away — like so many times before and since — with its crimes.

Turkish Thuggery and Western Cowardice

- 2009: Erdogan's bodyguards brawled with President Obama's Secret Service detail and police in NYC.
- 2011: Inside the UN, Erdogan's detail battled with the organization's security staff, two of whom were injured with one taken to the hospital.
- 2014: Turkish security threatened and pushed around journalists while the latter covered a meeting between Vice President Biden and Erdogan in NYC.
- 2015: Over the course of two days in Brussels, Erdogan's squad clashed with police and elbowed a Belgian VIP security agent.
- 2016: Outside DC's Brookings Institution, Erdogan's detail "roughed up protesters tried to drag away 'undesired' journalists."
- 2016: In Ecuador, Erdogan's crew broke a parliament member's nose.
- 2018: While Erdogan visited South Africa, Turkish Embassy guards attacked peaceful protesters, leaving at least one bloodied.
- 2019: A scuffle between Erdogan's team and Sarajevo airport police broke out after the Turks refused to hand over their firearms as required by Bosnian law.

No wonder Turkish security details act with impunity.

America has learned nothing from these attacks or, more likely, is OK with being spat on by Turkey.

More *generally*, and contrary to popular belief, neither military power nor diplomatic skill explains Ankara's feats.

Rather, it's America's, Europe's, and others' cowardly reactions to Ankara's incessant temper tantrums, bullying, and threats.

Erdogan sees that. So do Washington's enemies.

More American Impotence

In October of 2019, a White House letter warned Erdogan not to attack America's Kurdish allies in Syria.

Erdogan attacked anyway, confident in U.S. weakness.

Nevertheless, he again received the honor of a White House invitation. Arriving on November 13, 2019, Erdogan outright insulted the president by handing him back the letter.

U.S. presidents' failures to hit back at Turkey have bred contempt.

Erdogan's scheduled — and wholly undeserved — visit to President Biden on May 9, 2024 has, fortunately, been postponed.

Given Ankara's destabilizing role in the Middle East's recent crises, the invitation was especially unwarranted.

Though this isn't the place for a fuller discussion of the West's long-standing kowtowing to Turkey — going back 100+ years — a recent example proves the point.



The Sick West

Since 2022, Erdogan had blocked Finland and Sweden's joining NATO.

He claimed, without evidence, that the two countries were assisting Kurdish terrorists.

Yet Turkey itself is a major supporter of ISIS and other jihadist terrorists. The country is a state sponsor of terrorism.

The two Nordic nations, the U.S., and NATO were simply too cowardly to have pointed that out. Hard to believe but true.

Erdogan eventually lifted his baseless veto of the two nations' NATO memberships but only after the West needlessly agreed to deliver F-16s jets to Turkey.

May 16's anti-Erdogan protesters, thankfully, are proving to have more guts.

Putting the West to Shame

In 2018, the protesters filed two lawsuits that asked for over $100 million in damages from the Turkish government.

Citing "Foreign Sovereign Immunity," Ankara has rebuffed the suits.

In 2021 and 2022, federal courts, including the Supreme Court, rejected that defense.

The main reason: The Turkish bodyguards' "conduct was not plausibly related to protecting President Erdogan."

Permitting the bodyguards to flee to Turkey and subsequently dismissing charges against them were clearly grave, intentional concessions.

Congress must grow a spine, cease being intimidated by Ankara's bluster, and put its foot down.

Otherwise, American presidents and the State Department will continue to put the interests of Turkey above those of the American people.

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David Boyajian's usual focus is the Caucasus. His work can be found at https://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/David_Boyajian.

Comments



Pat – 2024-05-10 19:22:10
Thank you, Mr. Boyajian, for your concise and accurate reportage. Armenians are right to document everything, especially as they seem to be the only ones doing so and telling the truth while doing it.