

Turkey Supports ISIS. ... Now Declares “War Against ISIS”, But Instead Bombs Its Political Rival, Which Is the Most Effective Force Fighting ISIS

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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NATO member Turkey has been busted supporting ISIS.

The Guardian [reported](#) this week:

US special forces raided the compound of an [Islamic State](#) leader in eastern Syria in May, they made sure not to tell the neighbours.

The target of that raid, the first of its kind since US jets returned to the skies over Iraq last August, was an [Isis official responsible for oil smuggling, named Abu Sayyaf](#). He was almost unheard of outside the upper echelons of the terror group, but he was well known to Turkey. From mid-2013, the Tunisian fighter had been responsible for smuggling oil from Syria's eastern fields, which the group had by then commandeered. Black market oil quickly became the main driver of Isis revenues – and Turkish buyers were its **main clients**.

As a result, the oil trade between the jihadis and the Turks was held up as evidence of an alliance between the two.

In the wake of the raid that killed Abu Sayyaf, suspicions of an undeclared alliance have hardened. One **senior western official** familiar with the intelligence gathered at the slain leader's compound said that direct dealings between Turkish officials and ranking Isis members was now **“undeniable”**.

“There are hundreds of flash drives and documents that were seized there,” the official told the Observer. “They are being analysed at the moment, but the links are already so clear that they could end up having profound policy implications for the relationship between us and Ankara.”

However, Turkey has openly supported other [jihadi groups, such as Ahrar al-Sham](#), which espouses much of al-Qaida's ideology, and Jabhat al-Nusra, which is proscribed as a terror organisation by much of the US and Europe. “The distinctions they draw [with other opposition groups] are thin indeed,” said the western official. “There is no doubt at all that they militarily cooperate with both.”

One Isis member says the organisation remains a long way from establishing a self-sustaining economy across the area of Syria and Iraq it controls. “They

need the Turks. I know of a lot of cooperation and it scares me,” he said. “I don’t see how Turkey can attack the organisation too hard. There are shared interests.”

While the Guardian is one of Britain’s leading newspapers, many in the alternative press have [longpointed out](#) Turkey’s support for ISIS.

And [experts](#), [Kurds](#), and [Joe Biden](#) have accuses Turkey of enabling ISIS.

Has Turkey Changed Its Ways?

On Tuesday, Turkey proclaimed that it will now help to *fight* ISIS.

Don’t buy it ...

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson - former chief of staff to Colin Powell, and now distinguished adjunct professor of Government and Public Policy at William & Mary - [asked](#) yesterday:

What is [Turkish president] Erdogan’s ultimate purpose? He hates Assad. He’d love to bring him down. Is that why he’s doing this?

There’s also the Kurds ...

As Time Magazine [pointed out](#) in June:

Ethnic Kurds—who on Tuesday scored their second and third significant victories over ISIS in the space of eight days—are **by far the most effective force fighting ISIS** in both Iraq and Syria.

And yet Turkey is trying to destroy the Kurds. Time [writes](#):

Since [Turkey announced that it was joining the war against ISIS] it has arrested more than 1,000 people in Turkey and carried out waves of air raids in neighboring Syria and Iraq. But **most of those arrests and air strikes**, say Kurdish leaders, **have hit Kurdish and left wing groups, not ISIS**.

Kurds are an ethnic minority that live in parts of Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. They have been persecuted for decades — from Turkey’s suppression of Kurdish identity and banning of Kurdish language to Saddam Hussein’s use of chemical weapons on Kurdish communities. Their leaders, from the numerous different parties and rebel groups that represent them, have long sought an independent Kurdish state encompassing that territory and have fought against their respective governments to try to achieve that.

Hoshang Waziri, a political analyst based in Erbil, says **the Kurds’ recent territorial gains in Syria along Turkey’s border and their increasing political legitimacy in the eyes of the West, have made the Kurds a bigger threat to Turkey than ISIS**. “The fear of the Turkish state started with the Kurdish defeat of ISIS in Tel Abyad,” says Waziri.

The image in the West of the Kurds as a reliable ally on the ground is terrifying for Turkey,” says Waziri. “So before it’s too late, Turkey waged its war — **not against ISIS, but against the PKK.**

Some see the war against ISIS simply as a cover for an attack on Kurdish groups. Of the more than 1,000 people Turkey has arrested in security sweeps in recent days, 80% are Kurdish, associated either with the PKK or the non-violent Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), says İbrahim Ayhan, a member of parliament for the HDP.

Ayhan says the AKP needs a state of “chaos” to persuade voters that it is the only bulwark against chaos. As of yet no new government has been formed in Turkey and if that doesn’t happen in the next few weeks, new elections will be called. By that time Ayhan fears many of the leaders of his HDP party will be in jail and some even worry the HDP will be outlawed. At the same time, Erdoğan and his AKP hope they will have shown only they can defend Turkey from internal and external threats.

The Wall Street Journal [reports](#):

Turkey’s military activity against Islamic State does not stem from sudden realizations about threats from ISIS but appears designed to elicit international support for its fight against the Kurds.

The Kurdish Workers’ Party, known as the PKK, was locked in a bloody war with the Turkish state from the mid-1980s until 2013. The cease-fire has, for all intents and purposes, been destroyed. Turkey is battling both ISIS and the PKK under the guise of fighting terrorism. Yet Turkish attempts to conflate ISIS and the PKK—even in the wake of the suicide bombing in a Kurdish border town that killed 32 young people—effectively ask people to overlook some salient facts:

The Kurds are Islamic State’s ideological opposites. The Kurds have been fighting ISIS in Syria and Iraq for some time; in particular, the Kurdish People’s Protection Unit (YPG) in northern Syria has been among the most effective forces at repelling ISIS efforts to take control of the Syrian-Turkish border. Kurdish military resistance in Syria and, to a lesser extent, the Kurdish autonomous government in Iraq have shouldered the lion’s share of the ground conflict against Islamic State, standing their ground at high cost and with limited support from the Western coalition.

A declaration of a state of emergency in Turkey would give the Justice and Development Party (or AKP), which lost its parliamentary majority in June elections, more flexibility to crack down on political opponents such as the Kurdish majority People’s Democratic Party. More than 1,300 people have been detained recently under the guise of cracking down on domestic PKK and ISIS elements in Turkey.

The AKP has declared the peace process with the Kurdish separatists dead and is trying to discredit the only recognized political representatives of the Turkish left and the Kurdish population; the Kurdish People’s Democratic Party won a 13% share of the Turkish parliament in the June elections—a sign of its rising

popularity not only among Kurds but also with increasingly disgruntled Turkish liberals.

If a governing coalition isn't formed, early elections will be held. The AKP appears to be hoping for that—under the thinking that a majority of voters would seek to maintain the status quo in a time of uncertainty and potential civil war, and that AKP's standing in parliament would, in turn, be strengthened.

Zero Hedge [adds](#):

Even the most mainstream of news outlets are unable to completely obscure the fact that Turkey's ISIS "offensive" may amount to nothing more than a smokescreen, as Erdogan launches a renewed effort to crush the PKK and nullify opposition gains won at the ballot box early last month when, for the first time in more than a decade, AKP [Erdogan's party] lost its parliamentary majority.

Coalition building efforts since the election have gone largely nowhere, and in what amounted to a sure sign that some manner of crackdown was likely just around the corner, Erdogan warned on June 21 that "if politicians are unable to sort [it] out, then the people are the only recourse" – a nod to his right under the constitution to call new elections.

Critically, AKP doesn't need much to push them back over the top in terms of regaining their majority in parliament. Consider the following [from WSJ](#):

Turkey's government—which lost its parliamentary majority last month—bills its new two-front war against Kurdish militants and Islamic State as a much-overdue reaction to terrorism. **But, on the third front of domestic politics, this violence could also help President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his party regain control.**

In the June 7 parliamentary elections, Mr. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, or AKP, lost its majority for the first time in 12 years, and has been in coalition talks since. If these negotiations fail in coming weeks, Mr. Erdogan has said he will send the country back to the polls.

A rise in nationalist feelings amid the bloodshed and an unfolding crackdown on the government's Kurdish political foes could bolster AKP's chances in such a new election, many analysts say.

A two-percentage point shift from the last election could restore AKP's absolute majority, making concessions demanded by its potential coalition partners on press freedom, corruption prosecutions and foreign policy unnecessary. This could also allow Mr. Erdogan to proceed with controversial plans to turn Turkey into a presidential republic and solidify his personal power.

The last passage there is critical.

AKP needs but a two percentage point swing in order to pave the way for Erdogan's power grab and there's no better way to stoke a renewed sense of nationalism and turn voters away from HDP than to invent a conflict and then trot out a few casualties as proof of what can happen when Kurdish "terrorists" are emboldened by a victory at the ballot box.

Given this, one could be forgiven for casting a wary eye at the rather convenient series of events that has now culminated in Ankara going back to war with the PKK. Here's a recap:

NATO representatives met in Brussels on Tuesday after Turkey made a rare Article 4 request which compels treaty parties to convene in the event a member state is of the opinion that its "territorial integrity, political independence or security" is being threatened.

That's the case in Turkey, where the security situation has rapidly deteriorated over the past two weeks **following a suicide bombing in Suruc (claimed by Islamic State) and the murder of two Turkish policemen in the town of Ceylanpinar (at the hands of the PKK, which claims the officers were cooperating with ISIS). Ankara responded by launching airstrikes against both Islamic State and PKK.**

So, ISIS launches a suicide attack and the PKK (whose Syrian affiliate YPG is battling ISIS just across the border) retaliates by killing two Turkish policemen, an event which gives the government an excuse to tighten the screws on the Kurds with virtual impunity under the guise of stepping up its efforts against ISIS.

Better still, the ISIS red herring has allowed Ankara to effectively obtain NATO's blessing for a brutal crackdown on its Kurdish political rivals. To wit, [from Salon](#):

The choreography attaching to the accord authorizing Turkey's entry into war as a combatant is, as often, so careful and predictable as to be self-evident. On Sunday Ankara announced that it had requested a meeting of NATO ambassadors to consider its new circumstance. The outcome was obvious from the first.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's Norwegian secretary-general, suggested Monday that Turkey was unlikely to get "any substantial NATO military support."

This was a straw man: Material support is not what the Erdogan government wants. In its fight against ISIS and the Kurds—against both, note—it wants "solidarity and support from our NATO allies," as the foreign ministry in Ankara later made clear.

Legitimacy, in other words. And it got it Tuesday in Brussels, where Stoltenberg announced, "We all stand united in condemning terrorism, in solidarity with Turkey." See the problem? Not "united against ISIS," but "united in condemning terrorism."

Erdogan understood. Within hours he declared that no

peace process with the Kurds is possible—and then urged parliament to strip legislators with ties to the PKK of immunity from prosecution. An Istanbul source wrote Tuesday afternoon to say that some sitting parliamentarians have already been arrested.

So there you have it - mission accomplished. Erdogan has now secured Western support for his effort to nullify an election result he did not like.

Consider the following [from Al Jazeera](#):

“When AK party lost [its] absolute majority [in parliament] on June 7, while HDP won, getting over the 10 percent barrier, the results showed how people started seeing that not every Kurd is a terrorist,” Ilya U Topper, an Istanbul-based analyst on foreign affairs and democracy for the M’Sur, a Spanish media outlet added.

He noted that HDP was able to perform so well in June’s elections because there was peace.

“Two years of peace make people forget bloodshed and give them hope. Now we are back to square one. Kurds are ‘terrorists’ again,” he said. “If elections are repeated, HDP might fall under the barrier and AK party will achieve [an] absolute majority in the elections. The big question is why the PKK accepted that game.”

And that is a very good question.

Why would the PKK, whose political affiliate had just won a major victory at the ballot box, suddenly decide that now is the time to break a fragile cease fire, likely knowing that doing so would imperil further political gains and legitimacy for HDP?

In the final analysis, Turkey wants Assad out of Syria and that means backing anyone and everyone who is willing to help make that happen (including ISIS) with the exception of the PKK, who Ankara is keen on crushing especially after June’s election results. So now, Turkey will use ISIS as an excuse to procure NATO support for a politically motivated rout of Kurdish “terrorists”. The West will hope that ISIS will suffer more damage than YPG, Turkey will hope that PKK and, by extension, YPG will suffer more damage than ISIS, and everyone - Ankara, Washington, ISIS, and PKK - will hope the when the dust (and blood) finally settles, Bashar al-Assad will have met a Gaddafi-esque end.

So Turkey isn’t really going after ISIS ... instead, the ruling party is going after its main political threat - the Kurds - and continuing its long-term effort to overthrow Syria’s Assad.

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