

***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Turkey's value for the West is not about the good it can offer but the evil it might choose not to spread. In recent years western tolerance of Turkey has stemmed not from the appreciation of its advanced democratic culture but from fears of the chaos it can unleash.***

This author coined the term "Turkey's nuisance value" in an article published 14 years ago to explain what made the country an asset for the EU it aspired to join. The article challenged Western euphemisms about the potential entrance into the European club of explicitly non-European culture. At the time, Western media and academic papers were full of "Yes to Turkish membership" naiveté dancing around clichéd themes like "Turkey is strategically important," "Turkey is a bridge between East and West," and "Turkey's post-modern Islamists [then PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan et al] are reformist democrats."

***From the June 2005 article published in Hürriyet newspaper:***

... if Turkey's EU vision fades and the EU leaves Turkey out in the cold, Ankara, with already rising nationalist sentiment, [may] turn into a loose cannon, a dangerous failed state in the EU's (and possibly America's) backyard.

Turkey's membership perspective is as wide as 10-15 years. During that period, no doubt, most of the present day dynamics will change in this or that direction. Nevertheless, judging by the present day parameters, it would not be wrong to predict a "third way as alternative to a "Yes" (Crescent and Star in the EU) and a "No" (Crescent Star as a loose cannon at the EU's doorstep). The "third way" can be a Turkey strongly attached to the EU under a privileged partnership accord...

Security, trans-European energy corridor and all the usual talk may not suffice for [membership]. One may like it or not, but the grandiose benefit for the club from Turkish membership would possibly be "the nuisance value."

As a starter... the EU ideologues may try to guess, for example, to what extent an offended, nationalistic and quietly hostile Turkey ... should care about human trafficking into the EU zone via its territory. Or about drug trafficking which, as bonus with no "national damage," may inject extra billions of dollars into its underground economy as a "lubricant" if officially tolerated.

Fourteen years later, Turkey is challenging the West with its nuisance value more threateningly than ever before. Its army has held air and land force exercises with the militaries of China and Syria. It selected a Chinese bidder to build its first air and anti-missile defence architecture. Scrapping that decision, Turkey then acquired and deployed the Russian-made S-400 system for the same purpose. When it was suspended in retaliation from the US-led, multinational consortium that builds the next-generation F-35 Lightning II fighter jet, Ankara responded: "We will then look to Russia for our fighter requirements and other strategic weapon systems."

### **And that's not all.**

During the period when northern Iraq was more in the headlines than northern Syria, Turkish diplomats quietly threatened to "turn life into hell" for any western force deployed in the Kurdish-held area. Those threats came after US soldiers in northern Iraq arrested 11 Turkish commandos who were linked to a plot to assassinate the newly elected governor of Kirkuk in order to destabilize the region and create a need for Turkish forces to restore order. (American soldiers seized 15kg of explosives, sniper rifles, grenades, and maps of Kirkuk with circles drawn around positions near the governor's building when they raided Turkish offices in Suleimaniya.) This Turkish plan led to the rare spectacle of NATO soldiers arresting NATO soldiers.



Image: The Independent

Today northern Syria dominates the headlines, with Turkey once again posing as a destabilizing force and uniting world leaders, east and west, in condemning its military incursion into Syria's Kurdish-held soil. Under pressure, President Trump announced sanctions against key Turkish cabinet ministers and higher import tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminium. Meanwhile, President Erdoğan and his senior officials have overtly threatened Europe that "We will open the gates and send 3.6 million refugees your way."

Then there is the matter of hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean. Ankara is threatening to take naval military action if it is not included in the game. Early in October, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned Turkey not to engage in "illegal" and "unacceptable" drilling off Cyprus. "We've made clear that operations in international waters are governed by a set of rules. We've told the Turks that illegal drilling is unacceptable and we'll continue to take diplomatic actions to ... ensure that lawful activity takes place," he said. "No country can hold Europe hostage." Too late. Ankara learned to cherish the strategic benefits of the hostage game years ago when western leaders were in

a race to praise Erdoğan's democratic credentials.

In keeping with its nuisance policy, Turkey is promising to “kick out the American troops from two critical military bases in Incirlik and Malatya.” Notwithstanding the end of the Cold War, the US nuclear warheads at Incirlik remain at the disposition of the US military under a special US-Turkish treaty. The early warning radars stationed at the Malatya base, which are linked to the US Aegis system (deployed in the Mediterranean), provide a shield for Israel against any air or missile attack from a rogue regime.

Then there is the nuclear option. In 2008, Erdoğan said that “Countries that oppose Iran's nuclear weapons should not have nuclear weapons themselves,” and added in 2010 that Israel is “the principal threat to peace” in the Middle East. On September 4 of this year, he said: “They say we can't have nuclear-tipped missiles though some have them. This I can't accept.” Turkey signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1980 and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which bans all nuclear detonations for any purpose.

In their dealings with Turkey, Western countries are paying the price of their former leaders' naiveté and willingness to tout the “mild political Islam” they ridiculously hoped would be a role model for other Muslim countries. Game over. Now it's time to assess present and future damage.

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