

The United Hellenic Voters of America statement on Turkey

February 2018

Currently, the United Hellenic Voters of America and all Greek-Americans are deeply concerned about Turkey's provocations and aggressive military actions in the eastern Mediterranean. Although Turkey has had a long history of provocative actions toward its neighbors and particularly toward Greece and Cyprus, in recent years under Mr. Erdogan, those actions have reached an alarming and dangerous level. There have been numerous violations of Greek airspace and territorial waters by the Turkish military, while Mr. Erdogan has openly stated his disregard for international laws and treaties.

Turkish warships have been blocking a vessel belonging to an Italian energy firm from exploring for natural gas in the waters within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Republic of Cyprus. Mr. Erdogan has threatened to also send his warships to stop the American firms ExxonMobil and Noble Energy, which have obtained energy exploration licenses by the Republic of Cyprus. The United States government has clearly stated that it supports the Republic of Cyprus' right to explore for energy in its lawful EEZ.

In a separate incident, just a few weeks ago, a Turkish warship rammed a Greek coast guard vessel within the territorial waters of Greece in the Aegean Sea. The U.S. Ambassador to Greece, Mr. Geoffrey Pyatt, has stated that he is concerned that such actions could lead to an "accident" occurring in the Aegean. It is important not to forget, that Turkey is a member of NATO, and thus it is supposed to be an "ally" and a "partner". As a measure of protection against Turkey's belligerent actions and threats, Greece, which is in the midst of an economic crisis, is forced to spend large sums of money on defense - a greater percentage of its GDP than any other NATO country except the United States.

Last week, two Greek soldiers while on patrol to prevent illegal immigrants' crossings along the border with Turkey, accidentally found themselves a few meters into Turkish territory and they were arrested by the Turkish army. Such incidents are not that unusual, and they are routinely settled through talks among the officials of the two countries, which happen to be NATO allies. Yet, Turkey is holding the two soldiers prisoners, and it has decided to put them on trial at an undetermined date.

Turkey is also undermining the efforts and the strategic goals of the United States and its allies in the Middle East. Mr. Erdogan and Turkey, on a number of occasions have tried to violate U.S.-sponsored international sanctions on Iran. Mr. Erdogan has formed alliances with Russia and Iran to attack the Kurds, who have been the closest and most

reliable allies of the United States in the fight against ISIS. U.S. officials stated recently that the Kurds were forced to stop their fight against the ISIS terrorists in order to defend themselves against the Turkish military. Moreover, Mr. Erdogan has been threatening to attack the U.S. military personnel that operate in the area. Recently, Mr. Erdogan has been increasing his ties with Mr. Putin, and he is purchasing Russian S400 missile systems.

We ask our Congressmen and Senators to take these matters seriously, and to clearly and explicitly urge Mr. Erdogan, an unreliable and unpredictable leader with a dismal human rights record, to immediately cease his aggressive and expansionist activities against Greece and Cyprus, two countries with a long history in western democratic values. Moreover, the United States government should stop the proposed sale of modern F-35 fighter planes to Turkey, since there is always a real danger that those planes could be used by Mr. Erdogan against NATO allies.

As Mr. Eric Edelman, a former U.S. ambassador to Turkey emphasized in a recently published report, "Mr. Erdogan's Turkey is out of control".