

Erdogan Warns Trump That Alliance Is at Risk as Tensions Climb

- Turkey may start 'looking for new friends,' Erdogan writes
- Trump boosted U.S. sanctions amid rout in Turkish markets



Donald Trump with Recep Tayyip Erdogan on July 11. Photographer: Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the U.S. that its decades-long alliance with the country is at risk after rising political tensions between the two nations erupted and helped stoke a financial crisis that shook global markets.

Erdogan, in an editorial Friday in the New York Times, cited Turkey's cooperation with the U.S. dating back to the Cuban missile crisis and the Korean War as evidence of a long-standing partnership between the NATO allies. But he added that more recent disputes over a failed 2016 coup, the conflict in Syria and sanctions imposed this week against top Turkish officials and the country's steel

industry were straining that alliance to its breaking point.

“Before it is too late, Washington must give up the misguided notion that our relationship can be asymmetrical and come to terms with the fact that Turkey has alternatives,” Erdogan wrote. “Failure to reverse this trend of unilateralism and disrespect will require us to start looking for new friends and allies.”

Turkey’s economy was already taking a beating — with the lira plunging as Erdogan urged his citizens in a nationally-televised speech to sell their gold and dollar holdings to help prop up the lira — when President Donald Trump unexpectedly announced on Twitter that he was doubling tariffs on steel and aluminum from Turkey.

Market Rout

“Our relations with Turkey are not good at this time!” Trump said in a move that accelerated a market rout in Turkey that spread across emerging markets. The lira plunged as much as 17 percent on Friday alone, bringing its loss for the year to 42 percent. Beyond investor fears about measures the U.S. could take, the sell-off represented a vote of no-confidence in a new system of government that earlier this year handed Erdogan unrivaled authority, essentially paralyzing the bureaucracy in Ankara.

While Trump’s announcement added fuel to the crisis, many investors say the \$900 billion economy was already headed toward a cliff, and only needed a push.

The deterioration in ties with the U.S. had been under way for years and began accelerating after the failed 2016 coup. Even before the latest tensions this week, Erdogan had been courting Moscow, inking an agreement to buy a Russian missile defense system.

NATO Concern

That raised alarms in Western capitals and the U.S. Congress that Turkey was becoming a less-reliable partner in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization despite hosting the U.S. and other allies at its Incirlik air base for the fight against Islamic State. Erdogan has also expanded his outreach to Iran and China.

In his article, Erdogan cited a series of well known grievances he said were

poisoning ties. He said the U.S. has dragged its feet on Turkey's request to extradite Fethullah Gulen, an Islamic cleric and former ally living in Pennsylvania who Erdogan blames for the 2016 coup. The U.S. Justice Department has said it's reviewing documents Turkey has provided as evidence Gulen should be deported, but no legal action has been taken.

Erdogan also cited U.S. support for Kurdish militias in the Syrian war. Ankara views those groups as linked to Turkish Kurds it says are terrorists. The U.S. says they aren't linked.

Sanction Anger

The Turkish leader was angered by Washington's decision this week to sanction two top officials it says have been involved in detaining an American pastor, Andrew Brunson, since 2016. The U.S. says Turkey has no evidence to keep detaining Brunson, an evangelical whose case has been championed by Vice President Mike Pence.

The Trump administration has said it believes Erdogan reneged on an agreement to free Brunson, who is next due to appear in a Turkish court on Oct. 12. A call earlier this year between Trump and Erdogan broke down over the issue of detainees. Besides Brunson, Trump railed about Turkey's holding of Serkan Golge, a NASA scientist who, like Brunson, has been imprisoned since 2016, according to a person familiar with the call.

While Erdogan's article didn't cite Trump by name, the standoff has increasingly had a personal feel to it and it's not clear how either side can politically afford to lower the rhetorical volume and reach a deal. A one-day visit to Washington by Turkish officials this week produced no solution.

"The United States has repeatedly and consistently failed to understand and respect the Turkish people's concerns," Erdogan wrote on Friday. "Unless the United States starts respecting Turkey's sovereignty and proves that it understands the dangers that our nation faces, our partnership could be in jeopardy."

— *With assistance by Justin Sink, Constantine Courcoulas, and Benjamin Harvey*

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