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## Turkey, US at crossroads

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Turkey and the United States have once again come at a crossroads in their troubled-allied relationship. The opposing security perceptions and interests of Ankara and Washington landed the two countries on a very difficult and challenging decision time. The question is indeed rather simple; has the U.S. abandoned its 60-year partner and ally Turkey and replaced it with the Democratic Union Party (PYD) that Ankara, for the time being, considers it nothing further than a Syrian extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) separatist gang, which is also listed as a terrorist group by the U.S. and Europe.

Turkey's absolute power-holder President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who with an April 16 referendum was given vast super presidential powers, will be travelling to the American capital next week on May 16 for a first face-to-face meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House. Ahead of his visit, Erdoğan dispatched Turkey's top commander Gen. Hulusi Akar, National Intelligence Organization (MIT) chief Hakan Fidan and Presidential Spokesman İbrahim Kalın to explain to the Trump administration the existential threat the American collaboration with the PYD and its military wing, People's Protection Units (YPG), could pose to Turkey. The trio had met with State Department and White House executives, and there were also claims that they were even given a very high reception by some senior administration executives.

According to an American joke, an optimist falls off a 10-story building. As he walks past the

sixth story, someone yells from the window, “How’s it going?” The man yells back, “So far, so good!” That’s perhaps where we are now in regards to Turkish-American relations. So far so good, but definitely heading toward a crash. Akar, who on the day the first-ever Turkish commander was taken hostage by his own comrade-in-arms, Fidan, who just could not wake up from his deep sleep when a coup was underway in Ankara, and Kalin met with top representatives of the Trump presidency, Trump signed an executive order to directly arm the YPG units.

Why have the Americans accepted such a humiliating - and threatening - move in total disregard of its ally Turkey? Was it just a response to a wave of Turkish air strikes on April 25 that targeted Mount Karachok near the town of Derik and left 25 YPG militants dead? Striking the Karachok position of the YPG was a unilateral undertaking of Turkey with no prior coordination with the coalition or American forces. According to Turkish accounts, the Turkish military informed the Americans, Russians and other allies in the fight against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists two hours ahead of the start of the Turkish operation. Yet, in a humiliating move for Turks, immediately after the attack, American troops were deployed along the Syrian border, apparently in a bid to deter Turkey from carrying out further attacks against Washington’s newfound Syrian Kurdish allies. As the deployment has done little to melt Turkish resolve, Trump has apparently decided to send a stronger “Mind you” message to Erdoğan by signing an executive order to provide heavy arms to the YPG.

Already, through all channels possible, Americans were reportedly trying to soothe Turkey’s anger and irritation from the development by assuring that once the fight against ISIL was over those heavy arms would all be taken back from the Syrian Kurds. Yet, Turkey has been complaining all along since the American flirting with the PYD began that whatever was provided to the Syrian Kurds would immediately end up in the hands of the PKK terrorists, be it the sophisticated air defense arms, ammunition, the very valuable drones or advanced surveillance equipment, many of which were denied from Turkey despite repeated requests.

Would it be appropriate for Erdoğan to travel to the U.S. if the American administration has been taking action in such an ignorant manner disregarding Turkey’s legitimate security concerns? If Trump was providing heavy arms to the YPG despite Turkey’s warnings that the very same arms would be used against Turkish troops and the Turkish people tomorrow, can such an attitude befit an ally, partner or a friend? If, in a very insulting style, just days before Erdoğan’s visit, Trump can undertake such a humiliating move, could there be any sense in a presidential visit to the U.S.?

Can Erdoğan’s visit to the White House achieve a change for the better?