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Double Standards and Downright Hypocrisy – US Policy on Turkey

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4/8/2016

On March 26 President Erdogan of Turkey «harshly criticized» foreign diplomats for being present at the trial of two journalists in Istanbul. At a meeting of businessmen he erupted in fury and expostulated that «*The consul-generals in Istanbul attended the trial. Who are you? What business do you have there? Diplomacy has a certain propriety and manners. This is not your country. This is Turkey*».

President Erdogan had made it clear that «this is Turkey» by declaring, before the trial even began, that the accused journalists will «pay a heavy price» for reporting that his National Intelligence Agency (MIT) had been smuggling weapons to rebel groups in Syria. Naturally, there was international interest in such a judicial process and, as is usual around the world, foreign diplomats attended the hearing in order to report to their governments the facts of the case as presented in court.

But the President of Turkey informed the world that diplomats accredited to his country are not expected to be present in his country's law courts to witness judicial proceedings. He went even further by telling foreign diplomats in Istanbul that they «*can move inside the Consulate building and within the boundaries of the Consulate. But elsewhere is subject to permission*».

Mr Erdogan is telling the world that international law means nothing to him. He rejects with contempt the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations which lays down that in all countries foreign diplomats are to be granted «*freedom of movement and travel*» provided, of course that these should be «*subject to laws and regulations concerning zones, entry into which is prohibited or regulated for reasons of national security*».

Prohibited zones do not include courts of law. And the trial of the journalists, who had been in solitary confinement for half their 90-day detention, has nothing to do with national security – only national dishonesty.

Western media reporting of Mr Erdogan's violation of international rules and values has been low-key to the point of self-induced evaporation and there has been little condemnation of his open scorn for the basic principles of diplomatic conduct – and none at all from the Consul General of the United States in Istanbul, Mr Charles F Hunter, on whose website on the day of Mr Erdogan's abusive outburst the main headline was «World erupts over Russia's unjust sentence of Ukrainian pilot».

Mr Hunter wrote that «*the global community has been quick to condemn the 22-year sentence handed out by a Russian court to Ukrainian pilot and parliamentarian Nadiya Savchenko*», which was absolute nonsense, because even the western media had not given the trial much cover. Not only that, but Mr Hunter omitted to mention that Savchenko's status as a «parliamentarian» had been granted by the Ukrainian government after the prosecution had begun. Savchenko had never even set foot in Ukraine's parliament, but Wikipedia, an easily manipulated online information site, describes her as «*a Ukrainian politician and former Army aviation pilot in the Ukrainian Ground Forces*».

As part of the anti-Russian propaganda campaign about Savchenko, US State Department spokesman John Kirby stated that Russia has «*blatant disregard for the principles of justice*», which is an absurd declaration, coming from the nation that for fifteen years has maintained a prison camp in a colonial enclave in Cuba in which not a single wretched captive has been permitted access to the process of international law. It's a bit much, too, coming from a nation that refuses to release the thousands of photographs that were taken of torture by its soldiers.

Some photos were published in the media, but the really horrible ones have never been seen, except by some selected Senators and Members of Congress who were sworn to secrecy.



A smiling female torturer in a US prison camp in Iraq

The US Supreme Court agreed with the *«the judgment of the President and the Nation's highest-ranking military officers that disclosure of the photographs at issue here would pose a substantial risk to the lives and physical safety of United States and allied military and civilian personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan»*.

Given the policy of the US Establishment – the President, the Congress and the Supreme Court – concerning the importance of concealing disgusting and potentially embarrassing facts it is not surprising that there has been no criticism in Washington of President Erdogan for his persecution of journalists who revealed embarrassing facts about his illegal action in supplying Syrian-based terrorist groups with weapons, or about his insulting diatribe concerning the presence of a US diplomat at their trial.

On March 18 the UK's *Independent* newspaper reported that *«the President of Turkey has said democracy and freedom have 'absolutely no value' in the country after calling for journalists, lawyers and politicians to be prosecuted as terrorists»*. But this means nothing to the US or British governments which both support President Erdogan without demur. While at the recent (and totally useless) summit on nuclear security in Washington on March 31, five days after he insulted their country, Mr Erdogan met with both the president and vice president of the United States.

Following the meetings, the *Voice of America* reported that President Obama *«assured his Turkish counterpart of American commitment to the security of Turkey»* and *«extended condolences to Erdogan for a terrorist attack earlier in the day in the Kurdish-majority south-eastern city of Diyarbakir»*. And Vice President Biden *«reaffirmed the close alliance between the United States and Turkey ... [and] discussed ways to further deepen our military*

cooperation». So Mr Erdogan felt free to continue his anti-democratic diatribes after he returned home.

Like many national leaders who have managed to get to a rank and position whose demands vastly exceed their modest capabilities, Mr Erdogan continued to justify his erratic behaviour by abusing *«those who attempt to give us lessons in democracy and human rights»*. On April 4 he said that the press was free in Turkey and claimed that some publications had branded him a «thief» and a «killer» without being shut down and that *«[s]uch insults and threats are not permitted in the West»*.

Then he said that Turkey's Constitutional Court had *«betrayed its very existence»* because it had ordered release from pre-trial custody of the two journalists who, as noted above, he had declared would «pay a heavy price» for reporting that his Intelligence operatives had been smuggling weapons to rebel groups in Syria.

Turkey is in chaos. As Human Rights Watch records, its ruler *«has demonstrated a growing intolerance of political opposition, public protest, and critical media. Government interference with the courts and prosecutors has undermined judicial independence and the rule of law»*.

When they met with President Erdogan, neither President Obama nor Vice President Biden offered the mildest criticism of him for his hysterical outbursts rejecting democracy and international law.

Perhaps their advisers pointed out to them that Mr Erdogan had a reasonable point to make, in that *«those who attempt to give us lessons in democracy and human rights must first contemplate their own shame»*.