

**ISLAMIST ERDOGAN CHALLENGES RUSSIA & OPPRESSES  
TURKISH MINORITIES**

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Isranet Daily Briefing, November 30, 2015

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**[Putin vs Erdogan](#)**: Jonathan Spyer, *Middle East Forum*, Nov. 28, 2015 — The downing of the Russian Sukhoi SU-24 bomber over Turkish airspace this week is a dramatic escalation in an already existing situation of tacit conflict between Moscow and Ankara in and over the ravaged landscape of northern Syria.

**[Is Turkey Really at the Table?](#)**: Steven A. Cook, *Politico*, Nov. 24, 2015 — To Westerners, it might seem that Vladimir Putin was exaggerating in anger when, after a Turkish F-16 on Tuesday shot down a Russian fighter jet allegedly violating Turkish airspace, he referred to the government in Ankara as “terrorists’ accomplices.”

**[Turkey's Oppression Machine](#)**: Burak Bekdil, *Gatestone Institute*, Nov. 22, 2015 — It was 1942 when, one day, Hayim Alaton, a Jewish yarn importer in Istanbul, received two payment notices from the tax office...

**[Why Aren't There Ethnic Nation-States in the Middle East?](#)**: Seth J. Frantzman, *Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 29, 2015— On November 20 a map proclaiming “a Turkmen state should be established” circulated on Facebook after reports that minority Turkmen communities had clashed with other groups in Iraq and Syria emerged.

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*Jonathan Spyer*

[\*Middle East Forum\*](#), Nov. 28, 2015

The downing of the Russian Sukhoi SU-24 bomber over Turkish airspace ... is a dramatic escalation in an already existing situation of tacit conflict between Moscow and Ankara in and over the ravaged landscape of northern Syria. The Turkish action is unlikely to pass without retribution of some kind. This will not necessarily come immediately. Russian President Vladimir Putin's record in international affairs suggests that revenge is a dish he prefers to serve cold. But it will come.

Nevertheless, the broader Turkish-Russian relationship and the important but limited status of Syria as a proxy war are likely to prevent a complete deterioration in relations between the countries as a result of this event. This latest development serves to highlight the complexity of events in northern Syria. While all sides like to proclaim themselves the opponents of Islamic State, a far more complex set of clashing interests and ambitions are being played out in reality.

Despite the dutiful statements and occasional gestures, Russia regards Islamic State as an enemy of secondary importance. For Turkey, meanwhile, it is hardly an enemy at all. Since the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011, Russia and Turkey have been arrayed on different sides, as active and energetic backers for their chosen proxy. Putin's support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been perhaps the single most crucial factor in enabling the dictator's survival to this point. Russian veto power at the UN Security Council prevented the possibility of international action against the dictator sanctioned by the UN (with the quiet additional backing of China).

Russia's continued willingness to provide weapons to its client of long standing kept the dictator's armouries full. And, of course, when Assad found his western

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coastal enclave menaced by the rebels of the Jaysh al-Fatah (Army of Conquest) coalition in the course of the northern spring and summer, it has been Russian direct intervention that has turned back the immediate threat. The reasons for Russia's staunch backing of Assad have been well-rehearsed and do not need to be reiterated at length: the naval depot at Tartus on the western coast; the planned port at Latakia; the long relations between Syrian Baathists and the Soviet predecessors of the current Russian state dating back to the 1960s; concern over Sunni jihadi proliferation.

Add in Putin's brutally realist view of foreign affairs, according to which the worth of the strategic coin of a country in any given region will be measured in large part by its ability to give effective backing to its clients, and the reasons for the Russian stance become clear. The point of relevance here is that this Russian stance has long placed Moscow on a direct line of confrontation with Turkey.

Ankara, for its part, has followed precisely the opposite line on the Syrian crisis. Having judiciously developed relations with the Assads before 2011, Turkey's imperious Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then prime minister, rapidly abandoned the relationship when the rebellion started, throwing his country's full weight behind the rebels. The Syrian rebels, almost all Arab Sunni Muslims, have had no better friend than the government of Erdogan. This reporter accompanied rebel arms convoys travelling from Turkey into northern Syria bringing guns for the rebellion as early as February 2012. The convoys were moving with the obvious tacit consent of the border authorities.

Similarly, the traffic of refugees to and from northern Syria into Turkey, the easy crossing of the border and the friendly relations between rebel fighters and Turkish soldiers offered ample evidence of the co-operation between the sides. This ground-level evidence was part of a broader strategic choice by the Ankara government. Turkey saw the rebellion as part of a process of change in the Arab world, which fitted with the ambitions of Erdogan strategically and ideologically. Ankara correctly understood the mainly Sunni Islamist rebels to be on a similar ideological page to the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, in Turkey

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and decided that bringing them to swift victory over Assad would produce a Sunni Islamist-dominated Syria whose natural inclination would be to align with Turkey.

Of course, Erdogan miscalculated in expecting a swift victory for the rebels. But he was hardly alone in that. Unlike in the case of Western powers, Turkish support for the rebellion has never wavered. The Turks are among the backers of the Jaysh al-Fatah coalition, whose progress in northern Syria was the precipitating factor for the Russian intervention in Syria.

The main Russian efforts in Syria so far have been directed not against the Islamic State further east but against the rebel coalition directly adjoining the regime enclave on the western coast that the Russians joined the war to preserve. This coalition is the direct ally of the Turks. This is the background to the Turkish decision to down the Russian jet. It needs to be clearly understood. The Russian war in northern Syria is being conducted against forces with which the Turks are - directly aligned.

Further complicating the picture is Ankara's own ambiguous stance towards Islamic State. Putin's remarks following the downing of the SU-24 directly accused Turkey of support for the jihadi entity. "IS has big money, hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars, from selling oil," the Russian leader said. "In addition they are protected by the military of an entire nation. One can understand why they are acting so boldly and blatantly. Why they kill people in such atrocious ways. Why they commit terrorist acts across the world, including in the heart of Europe."...

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## IS TURKEY REALLY AT THE TABLE?

*Steven A. Cook*

[\*Politico\*](#), Nov. 24, 2015

To Westerners, it might seem that Vladimir Putin was exaggerating in anger when, after a Turkish F-16 on Tuesday shot down a Russian fighter jet allegedly violating Turkish airspace, he referred to the government in Ankara as “terrorists’ accomplices.”

Americans aren’t used to thinking of Turkey—our NATO ally and most powerful backstop in the Muslim world—in this way. And surely Putin is just engaging in some saber-rattling. But as Turkey and Russia dispute the incident, it is casting a spotlight on one of the most troubling developments in the evolving struggle in the Middle East: When it comes to fighting the Islamic State and extremism more generally, Turkey—and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan—has become a significant part of the problem, rather than part of the solution.

You wouldn’t know this from the official rhetoric. NATO is standing firmly by Turkey in the wake of Tuesday’s incident. And the Obama administration often trumpets the critical importance of Turkey’s participation in the international coalition to counter ISIL. Brett McGurk, the special presidential envoy for that coalition, told Turkey’s *Hurriyet Daily News* this summer that the United States “can’t succeed against Daesh [the Islamic State] without Turkey.” And after a bloody two weeks—during which ISIL claimed credit for the Paris shooting and bombing spree, the killing of 43 people in another bombing in Beirut and the downing of a Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula—Erdogan, an Islamist who runs a country that is 99.8 percent Muslim, appeared with President Barack Obama ahead of the G-20 summit in Antalya and spoke firmly against jihadism: “We are confronted with a collective terrorism activity around the world. As you know, terrorism does not recognize any religion, any race, any nation or any country. ... And this terrorist action is not only against the people of France. It is an action against all of the people of the globe.”

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**For the uninitiated, Erdogan's statement must have seemed heartening. But close observers of Turkey know better: Over the past five years, American policymakers, Turkey watchers, terrorism experts and a slew of journalists have come to understand that while Ankara can play a constructive role in combating extremism and resolving the Syrian conflict, it has chosen not to. And as that conflict spreads and jumps borders, the Turks' myopia on jihadism in Syria may very well come back to haunt them and their Western allies.**

**Of course, the Turks didn't start the war across their border in Syria, in what has become ISIL's breeding ground. In fact, by Turkey's own accounts, it made huge diplomatic efforts with Syrian President Bashar Assad to head off that conflict when civil war began to erupt in the summer of 2011. That Syria has descended into unspeakable violence is first and foremost the fault of Assad, his enablers in Tehran and the Kremlin, and Hezbollah, which has provided the manpower to fight alongside Assad's army and militias. The Turks also deserve credit for how they have handled the flow of more than 2 million Syrian refugees into their country: Turkey has spent \$7 billion to care for these people, in well-organized refugee camps that meet international standards.**

**Still, the choices that Erdogan and top Turkish officials have made contributed to the vortex of violence and extremism that is Syria's reality. Erdogan has never paid a price for these choices either at home, where he has hollowed out Turkish political institutions to ensure his grip on power, or abroad, where Turkey's NATO allies are forced to pretend, by dint of circumstance and geography, that Ankara shares their goals.**

**It all starts with Turkey's decade-old relationship with Assad. In the mid-2000s, Erdogan, who was then the prime minister, and the three foreign ministers who served him—Abdullah Gul, Ali Babacan and Ahmet Davutoglu—cultivated Assad. Their goals were both economic and strategic: to improve and expand relations with Syria and thereby provide a land bridge for Turkish trade to the Persian Gulf**

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via Jordan, as well as to peel Damascus away from Tehran. The result was a flowering of relations that included increased trade and investment, security cooperation and joint cabinet meetings; Erdogan even invited the Assad family on vacation (though the trip never actually materialized).

But once the Syrian uprising began in March 2011, Erdogan and Davutoglu discovered they had been played. Assad lied to both men, twice reneging on promises to implement political reforms to stem the unrest in Syria, and instead turning to Iran for support. As the Syrian conflict intensified in 2011, refugees flooded across the long Turkish border and Syrian artillery shells fell on Turkish territory. Ankara looked powerless to respond. Not only was the conflict in Syria a security threat to Turkey—one that would grow over time—but Erdogan, who is not used to failing, seemed deeply livid that Assad had spurned his counsel.

By late summer 2011, Erdogan had given up on Assad, and Ankara had become the leading international advocate for the end of the Assad regime. Yet the Turks were soon caught off guard by their own diplomatic impotence and unwillingness to venture into the growing maelstrom on their own. In mid-2012, after the Syrians shot down a Turkish reconnaissance plane operating off Syria's coast, Ankara repeatedly appealed to Washington to intervene in Syria and bring the Assad regime down. This was another miscalculation. Obama, having no intention of deploying forces to the Middle East, demurred. With their Syria policy in tatters and an unwilling ally in Washington, Ankara determined that the only way to respond to Assad was to turn a blind eye to the increasing number of radicalized young men who began using their territory to wage jihad against Assad...

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## **TURKEY'S OPPRESSION MACHINE**

*Burak Bekdil*

[Gatestone Institute](#), Nov. 22, 2015

It was 1942 when, one day, Hayim Alaton, a Jewish yarn importer in Istanbul, received two payment notices from the tax office: He was asked to pay 80,000 liras in total — a fortune at that time. He ran to the tax office to object, but was told to pay the whole amount within 15 days. It was the infamous Wealth Tax, passed on Nov. 11, 1942 and it remained in effect for a year and a half until it was repealed on March 14, 1944.

The Wealth Tax exclusively targeted Turkey's non-Muslims at a time when 300,000 Orthodox Greeks and 100,000 Jews were living in Istanbul (where total population was one million). The law stated that the homes and workplaces of those non-Muslims who could not afford the tax would be sequestered. Alaton was able to pay no more than 11,000 liras. That was the start of "black years," as Alaton's son, 15 years old at that time, would later recall.

Before long, the Alaton's home and store were sequestered. The merchandise in the store and the goods in stock were sold at auction. Every item in the Alaton home, including kitchen utensils, bed frames and lamps were seized and sold too. The family of six was left only with mattresses. In later days, Alaton was taken from his home and sent to a tent camp in Istanbul where he was kept for two months. There were no meals, so his children would bring him whatever food they could find. One day the 15-year-old Ishak went to the camp and saw his father's tent empty. The Turkish authorities had put Alaton, along with many others, on a train bound for the town of Askale, in eastern Turkey, where the non-Muslims would be forced to perform physical labor, in this instance, cutting stones on a hill. Alaton would stay in the forced-labor camp for two hard winters and one summer.



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**The family would not hear from him for a year. During that time, the bodies of 20 laborers at Askale were sent home. Ishak recalls his father's return: "One evening, there was a knock on our door and an aged, wretched beggar stepped in. We wondered who he was and looked at him with curiosity. When he started to speak, we knew from his voice that he was my father." By that time, the family business had gone bankrupt and Alaton, in the grip of a crippling depression, could not leave home. He died running a small store where he sold a small inventory of imported goods.**

**In a 2011 interview, Hayim Alaton's son, Ishak, who, after turbulent years in his youth, would found one of Turkey's most successful industrial conglomerates, would praise Turkey's ruling Islamists, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) by saying "the AKP has taken many positive steps to improve the situation of non-Muslim minorities." Unfortunately, that was a premature conclusion, as the younger Alaton would learn four years later.**

**Under the AKP rule, Turkey's dwindling Jewish community, now at around a mere 17,000, as well as other non-Muslims, have come under systematic intimidation from government politicians and bureaucrats. These non-Muslim minorities are also often the targets of racist attacks. Now 90, Ishak Alaton, although widely respected as "a man of wisdom" by the Turks — Jews, Christians and Muslims alike — is under scrutiny on charges of supporting terror.**

**An Ankara prosecutor is inspecting claims that Alaton has provided financial and moral support to what the state bureaucracy calls "the parallel structure" — a movement led by an influential U.S.-based Muslim cleric, Fethullah Gulen. Gulen and his movement were staunch AKP allies until the end of 2013, when the two engaged in an all-out war. The Gulenists accuse Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP of autocratic rule and corruption, and the Turkish government has declared the Gulenists a terror organization that aims to topple the government.**

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The charges against Alaton are based on his 2013 biography, "Unnecessary Man," and were leveled after a former colleague of Alaton's filed a criminal complaint against him. Some passages in the book refer to Alaton's support for the Gulen movement schools outside Turkey, particularly one in Moscow. The probe has been ongoing for about a year. This is the passage from the biography that the prosecutors may be thinking is an evidence of the 90-year-old man's support for terror:

"This [Gulen] movement is a great educational movement. It educates people. It changes people's outlook on life and makes them into better equipped, worldly people. The Gulen movement is involved in educational efforts. I've seen the outcome of such efforts with my own eyes. Once in Moscow we, as a company, participated in the establishment of such a school. We managed to acquire the land from the Moscow municipality and the school began there. The Russian officials asked us, 'What are they trying to do? We don't know them, what do you say?' [My business partner] Uzeyir Garih and I vouched for them, we told them [the Russians], 'Don't worry, let them build the school.'" When it comes to persecution Turkey's state machinery never changes.

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**WHY AREN'T THERE ETHNIC NATION-STATES IN THE MIDDLE EAST?**

*Seth J. Frantzman*

[Jerusalem Post](#), Nov. 29, 2015

On November 20 a map proclaiming "a Turkmen state should be established" circulated on Facebook after reports that minority Turkmen communities had clashed with other groups in Iraq and Syria emerged. The source of the map goes back to July when there were calls for Turkey to establish a safe zone in Syria. "Create a Turkmen state in Syria," wrote one author on the website [ilkok.com](#).

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**“The government in Turkey should support a Turkmen state. The number of Turkmen is not to be underestimated.”** The map claimed there are 4.8 million members of this Turkish minority in Syria and 6.3 million in Iraq, about 20 percent of the population of both countries.

The “Turkmen state” is a fantasy that will never come about. It is like other fantasies for pure ethnic-religious states in the region. Last week former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton wrote in *The New York Times* “to defeat ISIS [Islamic State, aka IS, ISIL or Da’esh], create a Sunni state.” He argued that “Iraq and Syria as we have known them are gone” but that their disintegration at the hands of IS and other factors necessitated the creation of a post-IS “Sunnistan,” a state that could be an oil-producing Sunni blocking force to increasing Iranian hegemony in the region.

Bolton’s diagnosis was correct: the Sunnis have been weakened by the staying power of Assad, the Russian intervention and the growth of Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and Lebanon. But a new Sunni Arab state will not emerge (there are already two dozen of them). The “good old days” when Saddam’s legions kept the ayatollahs up at night are no more.

These days there are numerous voices advancing concepts of ethnic statelets to replace the apparently failed state structure of the region. A Druse state for southern Syria. A new Alawite mini-state in Syria. Several Kurdish states, or perhaps one large Kurdish state incorporating parts of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. A Turkmen state. A Yazidi autonomous province. An Assyrian Christian province in Iraq. Why haven’t these states emerged and why, with the exception of Kurdistan, will they probably never emerge? The current map of the Middle East is often seen as illegitimate because of its “colonial” origins.

**“What the Sunni guerrilla army’s victories aim to do is erase the lines drawn across the Middle East by the Sykes-Picot agreement,”** asserted an *Al-Jazeera*

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program in July of 2014. “What gives legitimacy to ISIL rhetoric,” asked Soumaya Ghannoushi at *Al-Jazeera* in October of last year. She claimed that the region was paying the price for the failure of “top-town modernization” and the “disintegration of artificial post-colonial national borders... we are witnessing the explosion of the complex demographics of Arab society... its myriad social configurations, religious, sectarian, tribal and ethnic.” The Sunnis, Shi’ites, Arabs, Muslims and Christians, all “turned against each other,” she claimed. In this narrative IS was liberating the Middle East from “the map ISIS hates,” in the words of Malise Ruthven at *The New York Review of Books* in June of last year. The bogeymen of the story then are the bad colonial masters with their pencils, drawing arbitrary lines on the map.

Sykes-Picot imagined zones of influence for Britain and France in 1916. Another map, prepared by T. E. Lawrence in 1918, has been described by his biographer Jeremy Wilson as “a far better starting point than the crude imperial carve-up agreed by Sykes and Georges-Picot.” In the Lawrence map most of Jordan and Syria as well as Anbar province in Iraq are given to Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein, leader of the Arab revolt. To Hussein’s second son Abdullah would go eastern Iraq, an area populated by Shi’ites. To Hussein’s fourth son Zeid would go a small state north of the Euphrates in what is now Syria. In both the 1916 and 1918 maps a province of “Armenians” was to be created, one on Turkey’s coast and one in the interior. As we know now, most of those Armenians had already been deported and massacred by this time; the Armenian rump state would be built in the Caucuses, not in what is now Turkey...

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## **On Topic**

[Thousands Mourn Kurdish Human Rights Lawyer Killed in Turkey: Ayla Albayrak,](#)

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**Wall Street Journal, Nov. 29, 2015**—Tens of thousands of mourners gathered on Sunday to bid farewell to a prominent human rights lawyer whose shooting death delivered a setback to hopes of bringing an end to months of political violence that has swept through Turkey's Kurdish region.

**Tensions with Russia Add to a Chill in Turkey's Economy: Keith Bradsher, New York Times, Nov. 29, 2015**—A new high-speed rail line, completed last year, now links Eskisehir with Istanbul to the west and Ankara to the east. A narrow, serpentine river meanders through downtown, spanned by graceful blue bridges at almost every block, drawing tourists. Factories here make everything from cakes and cookies to refrigerators, large Ford freight trucks and aircraft parts.

**Report: Turkey Collaborating with the Islamic State: Ralph Sidway, Jihad Watch, Nov. 27, 2015**—This damning report on rapidly re-islamizing Turkey's support for the Islamic State from last year is updated with fresh documentation, corroborating Russian President Vladimir Putin's charge that Turkey is an "accomplice to terrorists." Putin and French President Hollande just conducted a meeting in Moscow, indicating Russia and France will cooperate more closely in targeting ISIS' oil transport lines, one of the key components of Turkey's aid to the Islamic State, as detailed below.

**Turkey: Wrong Partner to Fight Terror: Burak Bekdil, Gatestone Institute, Nov. 28, 2015**—Racism is bad, no doubt. But it cannot be the reason why jihadists kill "infidels," including fellow Muslims in Muslim lands. Sadly, the free world feels compelled to partner with the wrong country in its fight against Islamic terror.