



Erdoğan's Turkey should be tossed from NATO - analysis

April 4, 2019

Despite the promising results of Turkey's local elections, NATO should suspend or terminate the membership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey, which is no longer an ally of the West, said an analysis in U.S. magazine the American Conservative on Thursday.

According to the unofficial results of the polls on Sunday, the opposition has won in five of the country's six most populous cities, including Istanbul and the capital Ankara, yet the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) appealed the results in Istanbul and the recounting of the votes still continues.

Losing both Istanbul and Ankara will be a major blow to Erdoğan according to many analysts evaluating the local election results.

"Erdoğan, seemingly on his way to being a modern sultan, no longer seems invincible," Doug Bandow, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, wrote for the magazine.

His greatest weakness, the economy, was once his strongest advantage, said Bandow. But Turkey has slid into a recession, unemployment and inflation have surged and the lira fell nearly 30 percent last year.

"The opposition's revival is good for the people of Turkey, who are suffering under Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian rule, as well as for Western governments, which should no longer view Ankara as a friend and ally," said Bandow. "In fact, the transatlantic alliance should suspend or terminate Turkey's membership in NATO."

The Republic of Turkey has long been a military-nationalist state, with the armed forces occasionally ousted elected leaders, most recently in a "postmodern" coup in 1997.

Erdoğan, then mayor of Istanbul, was ousted from office the next year and jailed for reciting an Islamist poem. In 2001, he co-founded the AKP, which won the 2002 election.

Once in office, Erdoğan slowly drained the military of its influence, then moved in an authoritarian direction, seizing media control and punishing countless critics, according to Bandow.

“The attempted coup in 2016 became his Reichstag fire—in fact, some suspected, without proof, that he engineered the operation,” said Bandow. “It gave him an excuse to purge anyone with the slightest (and often imagined) connection to the aged Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who he improbably blamed for the attempted putsch.”

Some 80,000 people, including politicians and journalists, have been jailed, and more than 160,000 forced out of public and private jobs, said Bandow.

The government replaced 95 elected mayors officials in the southeast with appointees, and Human Rights Watch says Turkey remains the world’s leading jailer of journalists, with some 175 journalists and media workers in pretrial detention or behind bars.

Freedom House rates Turkey as “not free,” adding “the government’s authoritarian nature has been fully consolidated since a 2016 coup attempt triggered a more dramatic crackdown on perceived opponents of the leadership.”

“Turkish agents kidnapped alleged enemies abroad,” said Bandow. “Ankara shut down thousands of schools and foundations, and scores of media enterprises, publishing houses, universities, and trade unions. The regime displayed its brutal character in 2017 when during a state visit to Washington, Erdoğan’s bodyguards beat up peaceful American protestors.”

Ankara’s foreign policy has also drifted away from that of the West. Turkey’s relations with Israel have sharply deteriorated, with a recent exchange of insults between the two leaders.

Ankara initially allowed the Islamic State to operate within its borders against the Assad government, until it shifted its position and began collaborating with Moscow and Damascus, Bundow said.

Turkey is also at odds with the United States over its decision to buy the Russian S-400 missile defence system, despite the objections of other NATO members. Washington threatens to halt the continued sales of F-35 aircraft to Turkey in response.

“Increasingly, Ankara is no friend to America or the West,” said Bandow, pointing to deep-seated anti-American in Turkey that will linger no matter who leads the country.

“Rather than desperately attempting to hold Ankara in NATO, the allies should begin considering how to ease Turkey out,” he wrote. “Washington should stop making policy based on illusions of friendship with a government seeking to revive the Ottoman Empire.”