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With friends like Turkey, who needs enemies?

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Turkey's rash decision to shoot down a Russian plane for allegedly violating its airspace isn't likely to trigger World War III. But Ankara demonstrated that it stands with the Islamic State and against the West.

The Obama administration's war against Islamic State is turning into another interminable conflict that serves the interests of other nations far more than America. U.S. policy has been impossibly incoherent.

While Russia's September entry into the war outraged Washington, Moscow showed clarity and realism. Russia simply sought to bolster Syria's President Bashar Assad against insurgents dominated by radical Islamists. Ironically, this approach is far more likely than the administration's confused policy to advance America's core interest of defeating the Islamic State and al-Qaida affiliates such as al-Nusra.

However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan played the fool when his military downed a Russian aircraft for allegedly violating his nation's airspace. The two governments' accounts conflict, but no one believes that Moscow had any hostile intent against Ankara.

It's not enough to "discourage any escalation," as President Barack Obama insisted. Washington should absorb the bitter lessons of Turkey's perfidy and drop the alliance relationship.

Turkey is a growing threat to Western interests and values. Ankara never has been a true friend of the West. Turkey was a useful ally during the Cold War, though it always seemed readier to go to war with Greece than the Soviet Union. In those years Turkey was only vaguely democratic.

Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, sweeping away a coalition of discredited parties. Initially then-Prime Minister Erdogan played the liberator. But he eventually gained control of the police and judiciary; conducted multiple mass conspiracy trials; and attacked independent journalists, opposition politicians and business critics.

Erdogan also is moving Turkey in a more Islamist direction. Although no one expects him to turn his nation into another Saudi Arabia, he is doing more than end what had been strict secularism. Worse, his government has aided the Islamic State. Despite agreeing to assist Washington, the Erdogan government appears to have played the U.S., directing most of Turkey's fire against America's Kurdish allies.

Shooting down the Russian aircraft was even more irresponsible. Ankara knew that no attack on Turkish forces was planned. Downing the plane was a direct attack on Moscow for supporting the Assad government. The U.S. should shun Ankara for playing chicken with Moscow.

Turkey demonstrates that NATO is a bad deal for America. Military alliances should serve U.S. interests. But any existential threat against Turkey ended along with the Cold War.

At the same time, the shared interests between Turkey and the West dissipated. The alliance should not be responsible for defending Ankara as the latter attempts to overthrow the Assad government and, even worse, commits a gratuitous act of war seemingly designed only to provoke Moscow.

Indeed, Turkey is merely the latest example of alliance members seeking to drag the U.S. into conflicts of no interest to America. Britain and France largely orchestrated the Libya war, in which Washington helped deconstruct yet another Muslim country without purpose. The U.S. should disentangle itself from the defense of free-riding "allies."

Moscow is a better and more reliable partner than Turkey for America in the Middle East. Russian President Vladimir Putin is a nasty character. He has created an ugly autocracy at home, suppressing the civil liberties and political freedoms Americans and Europeans value. But Erdogan differs little from Putin in this regard.

Where Putin and Erdogan dramatically diverge is their policies toward radical Islamists. As noted earlier, Ankara has consistently backed the murderous jihadis of most concern to America.

In contrast, in the Middle East U.S. and Russian interests broadly coincide. Exactly why the U.S. feels duty-bound to oust Assad isn't clear. Both Iraq and Libya dramatically demonstrated that it's not enough to get rid of the bad guy. You need a good guy as successor. Washington has none in Syria.

In fact, American policy in the Mideast has failed catastrophically. Yet the Obama administration is committed to doing more of the same in the forlorn hope of achieving a different result.

Cooperating with Russia doesn't require befriending Putin or creating a formal alliance. Rather the two governments simply should work together where and when doing so serves both nations' interests. That's more than occurs with Turkey today.

The Turkish shoot down of the Russian jet moves the Mideast conflict into a dangerous new phase. The West should abandon outdated alliances and stop covering for Turkey. Russia may not be an ally, but at least it is friendlier and less dangerous than Ankara today.

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