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Turkey: No friend of the West

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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 ISIL 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 al-Assad against insurgents dominated by radical Islamists. However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan played the fool when his military downed a Russian aircraft for allegedly violating his nation's airspace. It's not enough to "discourage any escalation," as President Barack Obama insisted.

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.

Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. 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. 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. Turkey demonstrates that NATO is a bad deal for America. Military alliances should serve U.S. interests. But any 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 promotes Islamist radicals 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.

Moscow is a better and more reliable partner than Turkey for America in the Middle East. Vladimir Putin is a nasty character. At home he has suppressed the civil liberties and political freedoms Americans 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 jihadists of most concern to America.

In contrast, as I point out on Forbes online: “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. Rather the two governments simply should work together when doing so serves both nations’ interests. That’s more than occurs with Turkey today.

Washington should abandon outdated alliances and stop covering for Ankara. Russia may not be an ally, but at least it is friendlier and less dangerous than Turkey today.

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