

February 20, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is increasingly undermining a central pillar of the decades-long, strategic U.S.-Turkish partnership: Turkey's growing democracy. We are writing because of our deep dismay at this development and to urge you to make clear to the Turkish public America's concern about Turkey's current path. Silence will only encourage Prime Minister Erdoğan to diminish the rule of law in the country even further.

Turkey is a long-time ally of the United States and one of only two democratic, stable partners we have in the Middle East. But it might not remain either for long. The response of Prime Minister Erdoğan to potential challenges to his rule—first large public protests beginning in May 2013, more recently allegations of massive corruption that reach the highest levels of his government—threaten to take Turkey from an imperfect democracy to an autocracy. He and many in his party have abused their positions and compromised the rule of law by shutting down the investigations, dismissing or reassigning hundreds of prosecutors and thousands of police officers, muzzling the media, demonizing critics, and incriminating imagined foreign conspirators, including the U.S. ambassador. Worse, the ruling AKP has pushed through institutional changes—such as bringing the judiciary under executive control and expanding state authority to censor the internet—that would eliminate the hallmarks of democracy: separation of powers, checks and balances, and civil liberties.

These developments have already roiled Turkey's economy, polarized its society, and endangered its political stability. Some might argue that because the United States has many interests with Turkey—not least of which is ending the violence in Syria and easing the suffering of its people—it should not risk alienating its ally. Should Turkey succumb to the authoritarian impulses currently on display, however, it would have profound implications for our ability to work together and, therefore, for our deepest interests.

We fear that Prime Minister Erdoğan and the Turkish public have taken American silence to mean that the Prime Minister retains U.S. support and can proceed as he wishes. In the meanwhile, the damage to Turkey's democracy keeps worsening. We believe it is important now to make it clear, privately and publicly, that Prime Minister Erdoğan's autocratic actions and demagoguery are subverting Turkey's political institutions and values and endangering the U.S.-Turkey relationship.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Morton I. Abramowitz
Elliott Abrams
Dr. Kenneth Adelman
Dr. David Adesnik
Ilan Berman
Ambassador David Birenbaum
Ambassador John R. Bolton
Max Boot
Ellen Bork
Ambassador L. Paul Bremer
Dr. Eliot A. Cohen
Senator Norm Coleman
Susan Corke
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