

U.S. Ally Turkey Arrests Academics for the Crime of Signing a Peace Petition

A senior Western official familiar with a large cache of intelligence obtained this summer told the Guardian that “direct dealings between Turkish officials and ranking ISIS members was now ‘undeniable.’”

ISIS, in other words, is state-sponsored—indeed, sponsored by purportedly Western-friendly regimes in the Muslim world, who are integral to the anti-ISIS coalition. Which then begs the question as to why Hollande and other Western leaders expressing their determination to “destroy” ISIS using all means necessary, would prefer to avoid the most significant factor of all: the material infrastructure of ISIS’ emergence in the context of ongoing Gulf and Turkish state support for Islamist militancy in the region.

There are many explanations, but one perhaps stands out: the West’s abject dependence on terror-toting Muslim regimes, largely to maintain access to Middle East, Mediterranean and Central Asian oil and gas resources.

– From the post: [So Who’s Really Sponsoring ISIS? Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Other U.S. “Allies”](#)

There’s been a lot going on lately, so I wouldn’t be surprised if you missed the latest drama from of U.S. ally, and sometimes ISIS/al-Qaeda supporter Turkey.

Recently, a peace petition circled the globe calling on the Turkish government to end fighting against Kurdish militants in the country’s southeast, which has reportedly led to thousands of civilian deaths. By January 15th, 2,000 Turkish academics had signed the petition, which was too much for authoritarian president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to handle. He not only publicly denounced the entire affair, he went ahead and started arresting people.

[Nature](#) reports:

Hundreds of Turkish academics are waiting to find out whether they will be prosecuted or sacked for spreading “terrorist propaganda”, after they signed a petition calling for violence to end in Turkey’s southeast, where government forces have been fighting Kurdish separatists.

*After the petition provoked a furious response from Turkey’s president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, several universities in the country have begun investigations into signatories among their faculty — which could lead to their dismissal if accusations of unlawful political agitation hold up. **On 15 January, police arrested and later released 27 academics, according to local media reports, including economists, physicians and scientists.***

“We are accused of defamation of the state and of terrorist propaganda,” says Zeynep Kivilcim, a law professor at Istanbul University, who has signed the petition and said she knew of several arrests. “We are all waiting for the police,” she told Nature on 15 January.

Turkey’s government has previously [clamped down on scientists and students who question its policies, imprisoned scientists charged with terrorism offenses](#), and restricted the freedom of funding agencies and scientific academies. But the number of arrests and investigations makes the current episode one of the larger Turkish attacks on freedom of expression in

recent years, prompting outrage among human-rights advocates.

By 15 January, almost 2,000 Turkish academics from 90 or so universities had signed a petition — launched a week earlier — that called on the Turkish government to end the fighting against Kurdish militants. Thousands of civilians have been killed in the longstanding conflict, which [flared up again last July](#) after a ceasefire collapsed.

In an 12 January speech (made in the wake of terrorist attacks in Istanbul) Erdoğan accused signatories of spreading and supporting Kurdish terrorist propaganda and undermining Turkey's national security. "I call upon all our institutions: everyone who benefits from this state but is now an enemy of the state must be punished without further delay," he said.

In response, the Turkish Higher Education Board (YÖK) and public prosecutors in several Turkish university cities launched investigations against academics who signed the petition. And several Turkish universities launched their own investigations into signatories at their institutions; some of them, including Abdullah Gül University in Kayseri, have asked signatories to resign. The rector of that university, İhsan Sabuncuoğlu, has not responded to Nature's e-mail requests for comment.

The drama doesn't end in Turkey. Both the U.S. ambassador to Turkey and Noam Chomsky are involved. As relates to the U.S ambassador, let's turn to [Al-Monitor](#):

[Melih Gokcek](#) has been the mayor of the Turkish capital, Ankara, since 1994. He is known as a flamboyant and loquacious member of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and is quite active on social media. He appears on television frequently and has over 3 million followers on [Twitter](#). He frequently engages pundits and colleagues into virtual duels.

The mood changed quickly when the US Embassy posted a brief message indicating the ambassador's support for [freedom of expression](#) for academics who signed a petition titled "We do not want to be partners to the crime," which asked the Turkish government to find a way for peace in the southeast. As [Al-Monitor's Cengiz Candar](#) has written, the government sees the petition as supporting terrorism. Consequently, the academics were targeted on multiple fronts, with some being [detained or suspended](#). The social pressure against them was not limited to traditional virtual attacks. It also involved marking office doors of academics who signed the petition, and even publicizing their home addresses, the religious affiliation of their spouses and occupations of their parents.

Bass' statement read: "Expressions of concerns about violence do not equal support for terrorism." Bass said that while the United States "may not agree with the opinions expressed by those academics," he emphasized US support for freedom of expression, regardless of the contents of the petition.

Yet, what might seem to many a simple generic document from the US Embassy was branded as a direct attack on the government by the mayor. Gokcek shared [10 consecutive tweets](#) on Jan. 15 directly addressing Bass. His tweets received hundreds of retweets and promptly became a trending topic in Turkey. The news that Gokcek declared [Bass persona non grata](#) made the headlines in national media outlets.

In his [Twitter feed](#), Gokcek said, "Bass is incapable of comprehending what he reads. Those shady academics are saying there is a massacre against the armed terrorists. Dear Bass, in the US, the police shoot citizens like pears for simply [not putting up](#) their hands." "And you guys call this [method] security? In our country, heavily armed terrorists are attacking the police and soldiers. You tell us to

accept it in the name of democracy. *Well, we cannot.*” Gokcek then shared some photos of the PKK’s devastating attacks, with collapsed buildings and a few YouTube videos displaying PKK violence. He wrote: “Bass, apologize to Turkey. Take a look at these [videos and photos] where *PKK killed babies yesterday*. Perhaps your blind eyes will see. You are the wrong choice for Turkey. **I think you should go back to your country.** Another ambassador who knows us should take your place.” Gokcek concluded by stating that Turkish officials are trying to *bring US-Turkey relations* to their best level, while Bass is personally damaging the relationship. He *recommended that Bass* should at least know when to *remain silent*, and “not back *these academics* who support murderers.”

Well then.

Now on to Chomsky, who was one of the non-Turkish academics to sign the petition. *The Guardian* reports:

The leftwing US academic Noam Chomsky has hit back at Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after the Turkish president accused him of ignorance and sympathizing with terrorists.

Hours after Tuesday’s bomb attack on a tourist area of Istanbul, Erdoğan delivered a sneering criticism of Chomsky and “so-called intellectuals” who had signed a letter calling on Turkey to end the “deliberate massacre” of Kurdish people in the south east of the country,

Chomsky came back with the perfect response:

Turkey blamed Isis [for the attack on Istanbul], which Erdoğan has been aiding in many ways, while also supporting the al-Nusra Front, which is hardly different. He then launched a tirade against those who condemn his crimes against Kurds – who happen to be the main ground force opposing Isis in both Syria and Iraq. Is there any need for further comment?

Game. Set. Match. For additional Turkey-related stories, see:

[So Who’s Really Sponsoring ISIS? Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Other U.S. “Allies”](#)

[Turkey Bombs Kurds Fighting ISIS, Then Hires Same Lobbying Firm Supporting U.S. Presidential Candidates](#)

[Tor Usage Soars in Turkey Following the Government’s Attempted Twitter Ban](#)

[Turkey’s Prime Minister: “There is a Now a Menace Which is Called Twitter”](#)