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AMERICAN HELLENIC INSTITUTE, INC.

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President & CEO

November 6, 2023

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The Honorable Michael McCaul
Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I write in regard to the issue of inflammatory statements made by President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan towards Israel, as well as the substantive ways the Turkish government poses a danger to U.S. interests and regional stability.

Firstly, I commend your comments that touched upon these points during an October 29 interview with Shannon Bream of Fox News. Bream asked about the contradiction between Turkey's NATO membership and President Erdogan's support for Hamas. Your response correctly highlighted that Turkey is a "precarious" NATO ally, explained that President Erdogan views himself as an "Ottoman ruler," and mentioned Turkey's obstruction of Sweden joining NATO. You also criticized Turkey's support for Hamas and said that Turkey needs to "stop this." We appreciate these comments, which are in line with the American Hellenic Institute's long-standing position that Turkey is an 'unreliable ally,' and that President Erdogan is motivated by neo-Ottoman ambitions to expand his sphere of influence throughout the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Caucasus.

However, I would encourage you to consider going even further in future remarks. During the interview, you also made a parallel point that there is a solidification between "Russia, China, and Iran," as malign actors that have coalesced against the West and the United States. I would submit that Turkey is also a part of this new 'axis of evil,' and that policymakers should start grouping Turkey in with these rogue regimes. Turkey has developed close relations with Iran and has actively assisted Iran in evading US and international sanctions, as evidenced by the Halkbank Case. President Erdogan has established a close partnership with Putin's Russia.

Turkey has engaged in actions such as purchasing Russian S-400 missile defense systems, which poses a grave threat to NATO assets, blocking NATO expansion, and assisting Russia and Russian oligarchs in sanctions-evasion in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. This year, President Erdogan openly bragged about his 'special relationship' with Putin.

Furthermore, Turkey, in addition to aligning itself with rogue regimes, is the fundamental cause of instability in the Eastern Mediterranean:

- Turkey's unilateral claims against sovereign Greek territory in the Aegean which are in violation of international law, and Turkey's refusal to refer its unilateral claims to binding international arbitration.
- Turkey's aggression against Cyprus which includes its continuing illegal occupation of 37.3 percent of Cyprus.
- President Erdogan's support for a 'two-state' solution in Cyprus, and advocacy for international recognition of the so-called 'TRNC,' which is not recognized by any country in the world as a state with the exception of Turkey.
- Turkey's numerous incursions into Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), illegal drilling in Cyprus' EEZ that were supported by Turkish warships and drones and demonstrated "gunboat diplomacy."
- Turkey history of violating Greece's territorial waters and airspace, which are in violation of international and U.S. law, including the Arms Export Control Act (AECA)

Furthermore, I want to re-emphasize that Turkey's support of Hamas is not only rhetorical. Turkey is the one of the biggest abettors of Hamas in the Middle East, along with the Iranians. Turkey supplies passports to Hamas leaders for travel, provides financial support to Hamas, and has allowed Turkey to become a base for Hamas operations. In August 2020, President Erdogan held meetings with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and al-Arouri, both of whom have been designated as Specially Designated Global Terrorists by the United States. Al-Arouri has a \$5 million bounty by the U.S. Department of State's Rewards for Justice Program.

Our Policy Recommendations

Unfortunately, Turkey is not only at this point an 'unreliable ally,' or in your words, a 'precarious ally,' but a rogue regime acting outside the international rules-based order. We believe that U.S. officials should pursue a policy of containment at this point when it comes to Turkey. Any attempt to appease an authoritarian such as President Erdogan will only end up emboldening him. A good first step would be for Congress to continue to block the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey. You are uniquely positioned in this regard, given the powers invested in you as Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. We strongly request that your rightful policy position on this matter be maintained.

Moreover, we strongly contend all arms sales to Turkey must be blocked until Turkey stops its campaign of regional aggression and ends its support of U.S.-designated terrorist groups, including Hamas. AHI recommends that Congress pursue imposing additional sanctions, where appropriate, on Turkey for its bad behavior. A wide variety of tools are already at the disposal of Congress and the Administration which could be used to sanction Turkey, including the Global Magnitsky Sanctions Program and the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), among others.

Both my team and I would be more than happy to meet with you and/or your staff to discuss the issues highlighted in this letter. Thank you for your consideration and engagement with these important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nick Larigakis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "L".

Nick Larigakis
President & CEO

CC: House Committee on Foreign Affairs