

Turkish FM: Tension between US, Russia serves nothing

Hurriyet Daily News, 31.12.2016



Turkey's foreign minister said Dec. 30 that the recent diplomatic tension between Russia and the United States "will serve nothing but add to the existing problems". FM Çavuşoğlu told reporters that such a tension "between the global actors" will be no good "for both of the countries and for the region."

Diplomatic relations between the two powers have been strained after the U.S. expelled 35 Russian diplomats Thursday, giving them and their families 72 hours to leave the US. "We do not want to go back to the Cold War era," Çavuşoğlu said.

"There are already a pile of problems around the world." He urged that the problems should be solved in diplomatic ways. Turkish minister also spoke about the newly-agreed nationwide cease-fire in Syria -- with Turkey and Russia as guarantor countries -- which took effect at midnight local time (2200 GMT) on Dec. 30.

Çavuşoğlu said maintaining the cease-fire and the planned political process afterwards were both significant. He recalled that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Dec. 29 had a phone talk over an upcoming Astana meeting, which will bring representatives of the Syrian regime and opposition to meet under Turkey and Russia's guidance.

Çavuşoğlu added he and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov are working on the coordination of the meeting in Astana. The Astana meeting in Kazakhstan is part of recent efforts between Turkey and Russia to launch a political process in Syria.

Erdoğan: Turkey was told not to go further than 20 kms into Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 05.01.2017



Turkey was told not to go further than 20 kilometers into Syria in its cross-border operation, President Erdoğan said on Dec. 5. “There is a reason behind the fact that those who accused us of not fighting against ISIL and bore down on us internationally have started to tell us not to go further into.”

The plays of those who support another terrorist group against ISIL were distorted after Turkey has progressed in the field. It has become apparent they do not want to eliminate ISIL and terrorist organizations from the region, but rather to transform the region into an endless sea of blood and fire.

As you can see, those who cannot confront us are planning to make us kneel down and hurt us with the help of terrorist organizations,” he said. Ibrahim Kalin, the president’s spokesperson, said the U.S. had developed a strategy which suggested Turkey not to fly further than 20 km into Syria.

“Descending 30 to 35 kilometers below, 20 kilometers further, it is aimed to establish or maintain a PYD [Democratic Union Party] corridor between Afrin and Manbij,” he said on Dec. 5, adding that Turkey had strongly objected to the establishment of such corridor.

Kalin stressed that the U.S. considered the PYD as an efficient and reliable group to support in the fight against ISIL. “With the help of the Euphrates Shield operation, we have shown that the Free Syrian Army is capable of carrying out the fight against ISIL, if it were to be supported and coordinated in the right way,” he added.

Turkey optimistic for ties with US during Trump era

Anadolu Agency, 05.01.2017



Turkey is optimistic about improved ties with the United States under incoming President Donald Trump, Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmu told the Hürriyet Daily News, saying he hoped the new administration will extradite Fethullah Gülen and will stop allying with Syrian Kurdish groups.

“We have a strained relationship with the United States at the moment but I don’t think it will last long. I think this tension will soon be eased,” Kurtulmu said. “The first is about FETÖ,” deputy prime minister said, in reference to FETÖ and its leader Gülen who has been residing in the United States.

“One cause for optimism is Gülen, who is still trying to lead his organization through open and secret messages. This is a concern for our national security,” Kurtulmu said, noting that Turkey’s extradition demand has not yet been responded to.

“Even though he has not been immediately extradited, I hope that he would be arrested in line with our judicial cooperation agreement,” he said. Islamic preacher Gülen has been living in U.S. since 1999, and was previously a close ally of Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) before they fell out. Turkey now believes followers of Gülen were behind the failed military coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

Kurtulmu also referred to Washington’s ongoing support for the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Ties between Ankara and Washington have been severely affected because of disagreement over the role that the YPG should play in the anti-ISIL fight, as Turkey considers the group an affiliate of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and therefore a terrorist organization.

“Will the U.S. show its existence in the Middle East through cooperation with terror organizations or through its long-standing ally? I believe the U.S. will undergo a clear change in its position and will cooperate with a state like Turkey [under Trump],” Kurtulmu said.

“Russian has gained enormous power in Syria by siding with the regime. It has increased its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and it now has new bases in Syria. Russian has returned to the Middle East and the U.S. has left the initiative to the Russians because it did not know what to do,” he added, also referring to Iran’s expanded presence through the Syrian war. “[The U.S.] believed that [Syrian President Bashar] al-Assad must go, but it had no idea about how to make that happen,” he said. “That’s why we also believe the U.S. will also have to accompany us if the Turkish-Russian partnership reaches a point [in a Syrian peace deal],” Kurtulmu added.

“I am one of those who believe our policy on Syria made big mistakes. I have already spoken bluntly about this,” he said, adding that Turkey will never side with al-Assad or his aides but should still “correct its mistakes.”

“We of course believe that keeping such a murderer or officials of this regime in their job would not be humane. But this decision will be given by those who sit around the table for peace talks. Turkey will be a guarantor of any decision taken in this regard, but it would not be right for us to impose any decision,” Kurtulmu said.

Tech businessman Erol Bilecik to head Turkey’s top business organization

Hurriyet Daily News, 04.01.2017



Erol Bilecik, a leading tech businessman, is set to become the new president of the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜS AD) in an unusual move, according to sources close to the matter. TÜS AD will elect its new president in a general board meeting in the upcoming days.

Bilecik, who is the CEO of Index Group, will stand as the only candidate for the role. His presidency will mark a first for TÜS AD, as he will be the first businessperson of a technology background to lead the organization, which has been run mostly by top bosses or professional executives of other sectors.

The position is seen as a difficult one due to controversies it experienced with the government in recent years. TÜS AD is currently headed by Cansen Ba aran-Symes, who decided she will not continue as president, according to sources.

Two leading businessmen, Koç Holding Vice Chair Ali Koç and İsmail Ünlütürk, from the Aegean province of İzmir, were expected to run for the role. However, sources said they will not, leaving Bilecik as the sole candidate.

Bilecik, who is a computer engineer, currently runs Index, which is the Turkey distributor of more than 200 technology giants. The company has said it planned to focus on the Internet of Things in 2017. “We should always promote democracy. For Turkey to progress, IT technologies are crucial. We need to turn our young population into tech producers rather than tech consumers. We need leadership and speed to achieve this goal. Brave decisions must be taken,” he told daily Hürriyet in a recent interview. TÜS AD has been one of the leading advocates of the Industry 4.0 in Turkey.

Turkey's exports decreased to \$142.6 bln in 2016

Hurriyet Daily News, 03.01.2017



Turkey's exports declined to \$142.6 billion in 2016 with a 0.8 percent decrease compared to 2015, according to officials, who expected a better year for exports thanks to a number of fresh measures. The head of Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TİM), Mehmet Büyükekçi, said Turkey completed 2016 with a 0.8 percent of year-on-year decrease, but this shrinkage was not a big deal considering its difficult year.

He said global trade faced a serious contraction in value last year amid oil plunges. "The value of Turkey's exports in U.S. dollar per kilogram regressed to 1.37 in 2016 from 1.44 in 2015.

This regression costs \$3.5 billion of loss in exports," he added. "In addition to our crisis with Russia, the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Libya constituted another key factor that hit exports. Our exports to these countries decreased \$3.7 billion in 2016 compared to the previous year.

Another key factor that hit our exports was the loss of value of the Turkish Lira and the British pound against the dollar. Our loss due to the parities was \$1.5 billion in 2016. All of these equaled to \$8.7 billion in loss. If these had not happened, our exports would have increased by 5 percent to \$150.8 billion," said Büyükekçi at a press meeting in Ankara.

He also said the exporters' group had declared 2017 as a "leaping point" for exports, adding that the 2017 export volume was estimated to be \$155 billion in 2017, \$1.7 billion above the country's Medium-Term Program's forecast.

"We can proudly say, Turkey's share of world trade hit a record and increased to 0.89 percent last year from 0.87 in 2015. Turkish exports' share in EU imports also reached 1.28 percent, marking another record," he added. Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekçi vowed to take all measures to boost exports in 2017.

"We will take all measures to boost exports," he said, adding that some 3 billion liras of new supports would be offered in the following days. Zeybekçi said the EU again became Turkey's top market with a 48.1 percent of share.

"Our exports to the EU rose 7 percent in 2016 compared to the previous year. We expect the same trend will continue over this year," he added. The automotive sector was the biggest exporter last year with around \$23.9 billion in exports, up from \$21.3 billion in 2015. The second largest exporting sector, which was textiles, also witnessed a slight increase in exports last year compared to the previous year, closing 2016 at almost \$17 billion.

Russia starts scaling down Syria military deployment

AFP, 06.01.2017



Russia's military said it has begun scaling back its deployment to Syria, with Moscow's sole aircraft carrier ordered to leave the conflict zone first.

"In accordance with the decision of the supreme commander of the Russian armed forces Vladimir Putin, the Russian defense ministry is beginning the reduction of the armed deployment to Syria," military chief Valery Gerasimov said. Gerasimov gave the command for the naval group headed by aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov to begin preparations immediately to return to its home port in the Arctic Circle.

"The tasks set for the aircraft carrier group during its military mission have been fulfilled," added Russia's main commander in Syria, Andrei Kartapolov. Aircraft on board the carrier conducted some 420 sorties and hit 1,252 "terrorist" targets during the two months that it was involved in the Syria mission, Kartapolov said.

He insisted that Russia still had sufficient air defense capabilities in Syria thanks to its S-300 and S-400 systems deployed in the war-torn country. The Kuznetsov arrived off Syria in November as Russia boosted its firepower on land and in the Mediterranean to support regime forces targeting the second city of Aleppo.

During its deployment to Syria, the Soviet-built Kuznetsov suffered a series of embarrassing accidents, with military analysts questioning the tactical importance of the ageing vessel. Troops loyal to Russia's ally Bashar al-Assad finally ousted rebels from Aleppo last month in their biggest victory in more than five years of fighting, paving the way for the Kremlin to launch a fresh push for a political solution to the conflict.

Russian President Putin ordered a reduction in his forces in Syria on Dec. 29, as he announced a ceasefire between government and rebel forces that has since dampened down the fighting. Moscow launched its bombing campaign in Syria in September 2015, helping to turn the tide in favor of Assad's ailing forces. Putin had already announced a partial withdrawal of Russian forces in March 2016, but Moscow later ramped up its presence again as fighting increased.

If we make post-Brexit trade deals with China and India, don't expect Britain to come out on top

Independent, 06.01.2017



A key argument of those who see opportunities, rather than costs, in Brexit is that there will be better trading opportunities with the big emerging markets, notably China and India, than is possible as part of a 28-member EU. However, the probability of such beneficial bilateral deals is lower than Brexiteers might like to think.

The Chinese Government was deeply shocked by Brexit and the Chinese do not like shocks. They are embarrassed by having invested so much political and financial capital in the UK only to see it veer off in a totally new direction without, apparently, any preparation or contingency planning.

All their suspicions about the dangers of Western democracy have been confirmed in spades. The UK split with the EU has also cast a very unexpected and dark shadow over President Xi himself. A successful UK-China FTA would help to repair the damage provided China is seen to be securing its key negotiating objectives.

These objectives have to be understood in the context of the Chinese leadership having gone out onto a limb, promoting the UK ahead even of Germany. That prioritisation was dictated not by sentiment but a hard-headed calculation that while Germany has been important for providing capital goods and manufacturing technology, the UK is more useful for the next stage of Chinese development: a shift to a service based economy; the move to currency convertibility via Renminbi trading in the City of London; absorbing and welcoming Chinese investment (while not asking for reciprocity); and acting as a cheer-leader for Chinese ambitions in global governance, as with the Asian Infrastructure Bank.

In the ancient Chinese philosophical tradition, a crisis is synonymous with an opportunity. A pending Brexit provides an opportunity to reset a more grounded relationship with London. So what does that entail? China is very clear what it wants. First, the UK should give strong support for China's 'market economy status' in the WTO, protecting China from tough (US and EU) trade defence measures.

Second, the UK should continue to provide a secure home for investment providing opportunities (preferably with continued access to the EU Single Market) for Chinese companies, without the resistance encountered in continental Europe and the USA. Third, potential confrontation over trade with the USA under President Trump will necessitate alliance building with Western powers more committed to the principles of free trade and multilateralism, like the UK, though not at the expense of relations with the EU.



Both sides have interest in coming to an agreement but Britain needs China to sign a piece of paper with a trade deal more urgently than China needs Britain. China has time on its side and a weaker negotiating partner.

The fact that Theresa May chose India for her first serious foray in trade diplomacy signalled an eagerness to do business with the other Asian giant. India, however, approaches any bilateral negotiation from a position of strength. The sight of the former colonial master coming cap in hand will whet Indian appetites for a deal in India's favour.

Moreover, Britain's current crop of ministers seem not to have taken on board that the attempted EU-India agreement foundered not because of the rest of the EU but, in substantial part, because Britain rejected it. India also exports services, like Britain, and in the form of people. Attempts to open the UK to more Indian IT specialists and other professionals (the so-called Mode 4) foundered on the objections of the British Home Secretary, Theresa May.

The main irritant in UK-India relations is visas. In the absence of creative ideas on freeing up immigration and visiting rights from India, ministers will continue to get a flea in their ear in Delhi.

And nothing is more irritating (and incomprehensible) to the Indians than Britain's self-harming and very silly policy of counting overseas students against the immigration total; the services of our universities are amongst the few British products Indians actually want to buy. For these reasons Theresa May appears to have come away empty handed.

Failing agreement on these sensitive and difficult issues the Indians will ask for something else. Weapons? Something else Britain is good at, but they affect the power balance in South Asia and relations with Pakistan. Taking India's side on Kashmir? Tricky.

The idea of Britain 'taking back control' and rediscovering its former prowess in trade amidst the riches of the Orient is a tempting vision-from a safe distance. Ministers may soon wish however that they were more careful about what they wish for.

Britain's EU ambassador quits before Brexit trigger

AFP, 04.01.2017



The United Kingdom's ambassador to the European Union resigned, adding uncertainty to the Brexit process less than three months before the U.K. is due to trigger its departure negotiations.

Ivan Rogers, a highly-regarded diplomat who had been due to end his four-year stint in October, stepped down as London prepares to invoke Article 50, which starts a two-year countdown to Britain leaving the EU. Rogers came under fire for saying it could take 10 years to conclude a trade deal with the EU. The government insisted that he was only reporting back what was being said in European capitals.

"Sir Ivan Rogers has resigned a few months early as U.K. permanent representative to the European Union," a British government spokeswoman said. "Sir Ivan has taken this decision now to enable a successor to be appointed before the U.K. invokes Article 50 by the end of March. We are grateful for his work and commitment over the last three years."

London is set to appoint a new ambassador and deputy ambassador shortly. Rogers headed UKRep, the office which represents Britain in negotiations that take place in the EU. In a resignation email to UKRep staff, he urged colleagues to provide British ministers with their "unvarnished" understanding through Brexit negotiations - "even where this is uncomfortable."

"I hope you will continue to challenge ill-founded arguments and muddled thinking and that you will never be afraid to speak the truth to those in power," Rogers said. He also criticised the British government for its short supply of "serious multilateral negotiating experience" in London and said the structure of the U.K.'s negotiating team "needs rapid resolution."

"His resignation is not a surprise for those who work with him," a European diplomat told AFP. "He was very competent, but not convinced by the Brexit decision and the British government line, leading the U.K. into an area of dangerous uncertainty." In the June 2016 referendum, 52 percent voted for Britain leave the EU.

Triggering Article 50 will start a two-year countdown after which Britain will leave all the institutions and the single market unless alternative arrangements have been agreed. Hilary Benn, who chairs parliament's Brexit scrutiny committee, told BBC radio the resignation was "not a good thing."

"The hard work is going to start very soon," he said. "And having a handover in the middle of that, depending on when exactly he goes, is not ideal." Rogers had been in his post since November 2013, having previously served as prime minister David Cameron's Europe adviser since 2011.

Aled Williams, the former spokesman for Britain's EU embassy, said Rogers' departure was a "big loss" to the Brexit negotiations. "Sir Ivan never sugar-coated his advice: had the credibility to tell his political bosses how he saw it in Brussels," he said. The mild-mannered Rogers is widely respected in Brussels where he is known as a vastly experienced operator.

On Pearl Harbor visit, Abe pledges Japan will never wage war again

Hurriyet Daily News, 26.12.2016



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a symbolic visit to Pearl Harbor with U.S. President Barack Obama on Dec. 27, commemorating the victims of Japan's World War Two attack and promising that his country would never wage war again.

The visit was meant to highlight the strength of the U.S.-Japan alliance amid concerns that Trump could forge a more complicated relationship with Tokyo. "I offer my sincere and everlasting condolences to the souls of those who lost their lives here, as well as to the spirits of all the brave men and women whose lives were taken by a war that commenced in this very place," Reuters quoted Abe.

"We must never repeat the horrors of war again. This is the solemn vow we, the people of Japan, have taken." Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor with torpedo planes, bombers and fighter planes on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, pounding the U.S. fleet moored there in the hope of destroying U.S. power in the Pacific. Abe did not apologize for the attack, a step that would have irked his conservative supporters, many of whom say U.S. economic sanctions forced Japan to open hostilities. "This visit to Pearl Harbor was to console the souls of the war dead, not to apologize," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference in Tokyo, adding the trip had showed that the allies would contribute to world peace and prosperity.

Obama, who earlier this year became the first incumbent U.S. president to visit Hiroshima, where the United States dropped an atomic bomb in 1945, called Abe's visit a "historic gesture" that was "a reminder that even the deepest wounds of war can give way to friendship and a lasting peace." Abe became the first Japanese prime minister to visit the USS Arizona Memorial, built over the remains of the sunken battleship USS Arizona, although three others including his grandfather had made quiet stops in Pearl Harbor in the 1950s.

The two leaders stood solemnly in front of a wall inscribed with the names of those who died in the 1941 attack and took part in a brief wreath-laying ceremony, followed by a moment of silence. "In Remembrance, Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan" was written on one wreath and "In Remembrance, Barack Obama, President of the United States" on the other. They then threw flower petals into the water. After their remarks, both leaders greeted and Abe embraced U.S. veterans who survived the Pearl Harbor attack.

Trump, with 2 tweets, helps push GOP reversal on ethics

AP, 04.01.2017



In a city bound by tradition, every president taps a legislative affairs director to work with Congress. U.S. President-elect Donald Trump appears ready to use a legislative whip like none other: Twitter.

On the opening day of Congress, Trump demonstrated the power of his 18.5-million Twitter followers and the clout of his populist credentials. With just a couple of tweets, the president-elect helped achieve what GOP leaders could not the night before, successfully pressuring House Republicans to reverse course on a plan to essentially scuttle an independent congressional ethics board.

The move, only hours before Congress was sworn in, likely offered an early preview of how Trump intends to use his tech-savvy bully pulpit to persuade lawmakers who share his party affiliation but not all of his policy priorities. If the Jan. 3 tactic is an example, the days of private back-channel negotiations and behind-the-scenes arm-twisting may now be giving way to a new era of lobbying by social media shaming.

“Virtually everything he does is a different style than Washington is used to,” former House Speaker Newt Gingrich said of Trump’s lobbying style. “He’s going to be very public, very aggressive.” By Trump’s standards, the tweets that piled pressure on lawmakers were relatively mild.

After House Republicans voted in a closed-door session on Monday evening - a federal holiday - to undercut the independent Office of Congressional Ethics, government watchdogs and Democratic lawmakers railed against the move and people began calling their representatives. House Speaker Paul Ryan and Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy had opposed the changes, fearing exactly the kind of backlash that emerged.

Then Trump weighed in with two Twitter messages on the morning of Jan. 3, writing, “With all that Congress has to work on, do they really have to make the weakening of the Independent Ethics Watchdog, as unfair as it may be, their number one act and priority.”

The incoming president urged fellow Republicans to focus on top agenda items like a tax overhaul, health care and “so many other things of far greater importance!” His tweet ended with #DTS - a reference to “drain the swamp,” a popular catch-phrase during his outsider presidential campaign. About two hours later, House Republicans, facing a deluge from angry constituents, dropped their plans to place the ethics board under their own control. Meanwhile, Paul Ryan handily won re-election as Speaker of the House or Representatives as Republicans prepare to control both houses of Congress and America’s highest office.

Ryan won in a 239-189 vote, besting top Democratic lawmaker, Nancy Pelosi. Pelosi was re-elected to her position as minority leader. “Honored to be elected Speaker of the House for the 115th Congress,” Ryan tweeted shortly after the vote.

Can Trump unravel Obama’s rules of war?

Foreign Policy, 04.01.2017



For eight years, the Obama administration has pursued a tough-minded war against al Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups that has eliminated their leaders from Somalia to Afghanistan to Yemen.

Though many critics have argued for more transparency and greater legal constraints, the policy has been anchored in what President Barack Obama considers to be a principled and pragmatic framework for regulating the use of lethal drone strikes outside hot war zones. Many observers think Donald Trump will completely abandon that framework. Perhaps he’ll try — but that will be easier said than done.

In early December, Obama delivered a speech on counterterrorism in which he discussed the principled but pragmatic policies he and his team have developed over the past eight years for some of the most contentious issues of his administration — drone strikes, capture raids, interrogation, Guantánamo. The speech was accompanied by a public document that provided for the first time a comprehensive accounting of the legal and policy framework underlying Obama’s approach to counterterrorism.

Delivered in the twilight hours of the Obama administration and before the transfer of power to a man who has called for, among other things, targeting the civilian family members of terrorists, the speech was a forceful closing argument for Obama’s approach.

The president was, as always, high-minded and sought to appeal to Americans’ reason and morality. But among the circles of people who helped Obama develop these policies, the election of Trump and the publicly stated views of his top campaign advisors have led to a deep sense of unease, a feeling that everything we helped build over the past eight years is up for grabs.

Based on my personal views developed during six years of working on our lethal strike policies at the Pentagon and White House, I wrote an article last summer calling for further reforms to U.S. policies on drone strikes outside of “hot” war zones (i.e., Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan) and to the seminal document — the Presidential Policy Guidance (PPG) — in which they are enshrined.

Wise friends counseled me that the piece should be agnostic on who might win the presidency, and so I removed some of the early jabs at Trump and his more offensive campaign rhetoric. But, truthfully, I wrote assuming a Hillary Clinton presidency and that people I know and trust would take on senior positions overseeing the use of force.



It was hard even to imagine how Trump would approach the PPG, because the document seems to embody so much of what Trump, his team, and his supporters have criticized — specifically, the current president’s supposed attention to high-minded principles and legalistic process over effectiveness. But while the PPG certainly bears the imprint of Obama’s particular views on the use of force (a thread that in many ways goes all the way back to his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech) and attention to process, it also reflects the codification of certain pragmatic considerations for the use of force — factors that the Trump team will have to grapple with just as Obama did. How Trump addresses these points, outlined below, will shape the contours of his counterterrorism policies on the use of force.

Civilian harm. One of the core precepts of the PPG is that lethal action can be taken only if the relevant operational commander can assess with “near certainty” that civilians will not be harmed in the action. This is a remarkably high standard, almost unknown in the history of warfare.

The first instinct is to say that Trump will quickly scrap this standard, consistent with his campaign rhetoric and statements from incoming National Security Advisor Mike Flynn, in the name of providing more leeway to operators to pursue terrorist networks aggressively, even if their actions result in civilian casualties.

But protection of civilians is deeply ingrained in our career military and intelligence professionals, who not only see it as a moral obligation but also understand its strategic benefits. Through 15 years of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations, they have seen firsthand how even a few civilian casualties can undermine a broader military campaign, decrease the willingness of host-nation governments to consent to future strikes, turn local populations against the United States and its partners, and serve as a recruiting cry for terrorist groups.

Consider just a few of the senior officials who have prioritized the prevention of civilian casualties. Retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal (Flynn’s former boss) knows more about targeting terrorists than just about any officer of his generation and yet he made prevention of civilian casualties a central focus of his time in command in Afghanistan.

He warned, “The Taliban cannot militarily defeat us — but we can defeat ourselves.” Secretary of Defense nominee Gen. Jim Mattis is known for his relentless pursuit of insurgents and terrorists (How else do you get the nickname “Mad Dog”?), yet the counterinsurgency field manual that he co-wrote with Gen. David Petraeus places a premium on protecting civilian lives. In discussing the use of air power, the manual pointedly notes, “An air strike can cause collateral damage that turns people against the host-nation (HN) government and provides insurgents with a major propaganda victory.

Even when justified under the law of war, bombings that result in civilian casualties can bring media coverage that works to the insurgents’ benefit.” And former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who served under Presidents George W. Bush and Obama and reportedly advised Trump on his secretary of state selection, wrote in his most recent memoir about efforts to reduce civilian casualties in Afghanistan: “I was also concerned that we were not moving fast enough or decisively enough to deal with the problem of civilian casualties. I don’t believe any military force ever worked harder to avoid innocent victims, but it seemed like every incident was a strategic defeat, and we needed to take dramatic action.”



Threat standard. It is also foreseeable that Trump will discard the PPG's requirement that lethal force be used only when the target poses a "continuing, imminent threat to U.S. persons." It is also foreseeable that Trump will discard the PPG's requirement that lethal force be used only when the target poses a "continuing, imminent threat to U.S. persons."

Trump's campaign rhetoric, and the views of the senior leaders on his team, suggests he will seek a more aggressive approach to combating jihadi groups, which could lead to doing away with a standard that his team may perceive as excessively constraining.

The Trump team will also find — as Flynn and other top intelligence officials have testified — that Edward Snowden's disclosures and the recent proliferation of encrypted communications technologies have made it more difficult to detect and disrupt terrorist attacks before they happen. Given this reality, the risk of waiting to take action until a threat is considered imminent may not be palatable to the next president.

However, the continuing, imminent threat standard is not just about ensuring that we strike only targets that truly threaten the United States — it also helps to moderate the pace of strikes. The reality is that our ability to conduct operations usually depends on host-nation consent, and few of our partners are likely to allow the United States to launch an unconstrained series of drone strikes.

The Trump administration will have to develop some governing principle to ensure that the pace of strikes does not overwhelm partner-nation tolerance. It does not need to be a threat-based standard. It could instead be, for example, a decision to focus only on certain components of the enemy network or to attack perceived vulnerabilities in terrorist networks with a bounded series of targeted strikes. Regardless, there will be diplomatic constraints, and they will require a judicious and strategic use of force.

Process. We might also expect the new president to cut back on the intensive interagency process articulated in the PPG. The White House-centric process feeds into congressional concerns about micromanagement of foreign policy, and it is hard to imagine Mattis and Flynn — both of whom have extensive experience targeting terrorist networks but limited experience serving in the bureaucracy — lobbying to keep the framework in place.

However, much of the bureaucratic process set forth in the PPG is intended to ensure that the full range of foreign-policy, legal, and intelligence equities are considered before lethal action is taken. These considerations will not go away in a Trump administration.

Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson is a seasoned and assertive executive who is unlikely to cede to the military the State Department's role in navigating the foreign policy and diplomatic complexities associated with the use of force. Leading intelligence officials are also likely to seek a role in validating the intelligence underpinning the use of force.

So the new administration will have to build some framework for ensuring that all equities are considered before action is taken. One possible approach could be a much more senior-level strategic discussion before taking action in a particular region followed by lower-level coordination before a specific strike.



Another approach would be for civilian departments and agencies to review and endorse campaign plans comprising a set of potential targets and then delegate execution to the operational entities. There are many possible permutations, of course, but there will need to be some sort of a process, and it might ultimately be closer to the existing PPG than one might expect.

Capture vs. kill. Finally, there is the question of capture vs. kill and the PPG's provision that lethal force be used only when capture is assessed to be infeasible. This one is more complicated. Obama has been criticized from the center-left for allegedly failing to follow his own guidance, with venerable commentators like Steve Coll writing that the administration seems overwhelmingly inclined toward lethal action.

Human rights advocacy groups have investigated cases in which capture seemed feasible but lethal action was taken anyway and have pointedly asked Obama for a more thorough explanation of what "feasibility of capture" truly means. The numbers the administration itself released on lethal strikes last year add fuel to these criticisms: The U.S. government acknowledged conducting 473 strikes outside areas of active hostilities from 2009-15, while it conducted only a handful of capture raids in these same regions during this period.

If Trump is influenced by the operational professionals on his team, we may well see an increased desire to conduct capture missions. Our most experienced intelligence and military officials are often the most aggressive advocates of capture missions, because they can result in the detention of individuals and capture of enemy intelligence that allow for better understanding the enemy and the support of future counterterrorism efforts, including targeting. In May 2015, the U.S. military conducted a mission in Syria to capture Islamic State senior leader Abu Sayyaf.

Although Sayyaf was killed during the raid, his wife was captured and debriefed and a substantial amount of media were seized during the raid. Retired Gen. John Allen, who was leading U.S. diplomatic efforts against the Islamic State at that time, highlighted the intelligence gain. "In the recent raid on Abu Sayyaf, we collected substantial information on Daesh financial operations," Allen told a conference in Qatar (as reported in the New York Times) using the pejorative Arabic acronym for the Islamist group, "and we're gaining a much clearer understanding of Daesh's organization and business enterprise."

Trump himself seems to have gotten the message, stating in his August speech on counterterrorism, "Drone strikes will remain part of our strategy, but we will also seek to capture high-value targets to gain needed information to dismantle their organizations."

But here, too, the Trump administration will have to proceed carefully. When considering a capture operation, relevant commanders and decision-makers pore over intelligence, operational plans, and legal analyses, but at the end of the day most of these decisions hinge on two factors — the likely diplomatic or geopolitical fallout from the operation and the risks to U.S. forces in conducting it. And for all of the criticism of Obama for supposedly being too quick to use lethal force, examining the specific operations he has considered and ultimately authorized paints a different picture. Indeed, Obama's record on capture missions shows a willingness to take on substantial diplomatic risk (ordering two capture operations in Libya) and risk to U.S. forces (authorizing the Abu Sayyaf capture raid deep inside Syria). Whether Trump will show the same or greater willingness to incur such risks when considering specific operational proposals remains to be seen.



Transparency. Beyond the PPG itself, there is the question of transparency. How this will break is unclear, as Trump and his senior national security team have said little about how much should be disclosed regarding justification for specific strikes or the assessed results of those operations.

Trump and his senior national security team have said little about how much should be disclosed regarding justification for specific strikes or the assessed results of those operations.

Trump could embrace secrecy, consistent with his statements that we should not reveal our plans to our enemies, or the publicity-minded president-elect could be more transparent in an effort to broadcast our wins and discredit allegations of civilian casualties.

What we do know is that the actual work of increasing transparency is a hard bureaucratic slog requiring senior officials to work through the specific factors driving classification, consider the risks to factors such as diplomatic relations and ongoing litigation, and push back on the culture of counterterrorism professionals that errs — often for good reason — on the side of secrecy.

The transparency initiatives of the Obama administration were hard-fought and usually driven at the most senior levels of the government. If Trump and his top advisors don't similarly value transparency and the way it helps with legitimacy and accountability, it is hard to imagine the continuation of the transparency agenda.

Absent any action from Trump, however, his administration will be bound by the executive order that Obama issued last year that requires, among other things, an annual accounting of the number of lethal strikes conducted outside areas of active hostilities and the assessed combatant and non-combatant casualties resulting from those actions. It is certainly within Trump's power to rescind this order, perhaps as part of a larger sweep of Obama's executive actions, but only if he is willing to ignore significant public blowback from human rights groups, journalists, and others who have praised the steady increase in transparency in Obama's second term.

None of this is to say that I am not worried about Trump's lethal strike policy. I fully expect to see significant changes implemented early on. But the Trump team will find a set of constraints and considerations that they will have to wrestle with just as much as the Obama team did.

Although Trump himself has chosen his senior national security leadership, those officials will inherit a cadre of career operators, intelligence officials, lawyers, and policy analysts who hold themselves to very high standards not only because Obama directed them to do so, but because they are professionals who have struggled with the ethical and strategic implications of American policies for 15 years. It will take more than an election and tough campaign talk to change all that.



Announcements & Reports

European Insurance Union and How to Get There

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/12/european-insurance-union-and-how-to-get-there/>

Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank

Source : Rand
Weblink : http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html

Are advanced economies at risk of falling into debt traps?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/11/are-advanced-economies-at-risk-of-falling-into-debt-traps/>

Upcoming Events

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 08 January 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives

Date : 10 January 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 15 January 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 17 January 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>



What future for Europe's Social Models?

Date : 18 January 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

Challenges for Growth in Europe

Date : 19 January 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives

Date : 23 January 2016
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

The Future of the Welfare State

Date : 24 January 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 25 January 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>