

EU minister slams Austrian chancellor over membership bid remarks

Hurriyet Daily News, 04.08.2016



Ankara has slammed the Austrian chancellor's remarks suggesting the European Union end talks with Turkey over the latter's bid to become a full member of the bloc.

Turkey's EU minister, Ömer Çelik, said comments by Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern, suggesting talks with Turkey on joining the EU be ended, came disturbingly close to the rhetoric of the far right. "It's disturbing his statements are similar to those of the far right. Criticism is surely a democratic right but there has to be a difference between criticizing and being against Turkey," Çelik was quoted.

"We have to face reality: the membership negotiations are currently no more than fiction," Kern told Austrian media, according to AFP. "We are all well advised to now say we're pressing the reset button," he said. "We know that Turkey's democratic standards are far from sufficient to justify its accession," he added.

Turkey's longstanding, and recently revived, bid to join the EU has already been hit by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's suggestion that he may reintroduce the death penalty in the wake of the failed coup attempt on July 15 – a move which would instantly disqualify it from joining the bloc. Kern told public broadcaster ORF that he wants to initiate a debate at a European Council summit on Sept. 16.

Relations have deteriorated between Turkey and Europe since a major crackdown by the Turkish state following the failed coup, with tensions particularly high with Germany and Austria, both of which have large ethnic Turkish communities.

Around 40,000 Erdoğan supporters rallied in the German city of Cologne but a court rejected an application to allow live speeches to be beamed in from Turkey, including one by the president, angering Ankara.

In Austria, the mayor of the small city of Wiener Neustadt said that he wanted the sizeable Turkish community there to remove Turkish flags from balconies, but there is no ban in place there or anywhere else in the country. Kern said Turkey's economy also remained far below the EU average and well short of membership requirements.

Making Ankara a part of the EU's single market would spark "massive economic upheaval" in a bloc already struggling to cope with its enlargement toward eastern and central Europe, he warned. Instead, the EU should seek "new alternatives" to help bring Turkey's economy closer to European standards. "[The country] remains an important partner in security and integration matters," Kern said, highlighting Turkey's key role in the ongoing migrant crisis.

In March, Turkey and the EU signed a controversial deal in which Ankara agreed to take back Syrian migrants landing on Greek islands in exchange for political and financial incentives. In addition to visa-free travel, the pact includes billions of euros in aid and accelerated EU membership talks. Kern said he did not believe that a halt to accession talks would torpedo the refugee pact. “Economically, we have the upper hand. Turkey depends on us,” he added. Earlier this week, Kern said he would not bow to “intimidation” from Turkey after receiving online death threats from “radical” elements of Austria’s sizeable Turkish community.

Turkish lawmakers visit US, Europe to relate coup attempt, Gülen

Hurriyet Daily News, 02.08.2016



A group of Turkish lawmakers from both the ruling and opposition parties began an eight-day visit to the United States to deliver briefings regarding the failed coup, as two other groups visit London and Brussels as part of Turkey’s diplomatic bid to convince allies that U.S.-based Fethullah Gülen masterminded the attempt.

The U.S. team is scheduled to meet with senior officials, with Turkey’s request for Gülen’s extradition set to be high on the agenda. The group visited the Turkish Embassy in on its first day, during which they were briefed on the latest developments between the two countries.

They also met Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division, Leslie Caldwell. A joint group from the Justice and State departments is currently analyzing the extradition request. They were scheduled to meet Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and representatives of the Atlantic Council and Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tanks. During the U.S. visit, the group will also make a trip to New York.

The visiting team consists of the head of the Turkish Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee, Justice and Development Party (AKP) Malatya lawmaker Taha Özhan, Kahramanmara lawmaker Mahir Ünal, Republican People’s Party (CHP) Istanbul lawmaker Oguz Kaan Salıcı and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Erzurum lawmaker Kamil Aydın.

Another group from the Foreign Affairs Committee arrived in Brussels on Aug. 1. AKP deputy Sena Nur Çelik said at an event at the Turkish Embassy in Brussels that the visit aimed at both informing political counterparts about the attempt and coming together with members of the Turkish community there.

MHP Deputy Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu said the attempt was the bloodiest one in Turkish history. However, something good came out of it. The people, the parliament and politicians came together,” he said. CHP deputy Özkan Yalım said Turkey would never let such structures emerge again.

The delegation to London, led by the AKP's Talip Küçükcan, is scheduled to meet today with politicians, journalists and representatives from the National Security Council of the U.K., the Interior Ministry and the Turkish community there. On Aug 4, the group will meet with Chatham House executives and the Security Committee of the U.K.

Turkey to abandon EU migrant deal if no visa-free travel

Hurriyet Daily News, 01.08.2016



Turkey has said that it would have to abandon a deal with the European Union reached to stem the flow of migrants into the bloc if the EU did not grant visa-free travel to its citizens.

Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu told German FAZ that if the EU did not grant visa-free travel to Turkish citizens, then it would abandon the March 18 Turkey-EU migrant deal. Çavuşoğlu said the agreement on stemming the refugee flow had worked because of “very serious measures” taken by Ankara. “But all that is dependent on the suspension of the visa requirement for our citizens, which is also an item in the agreement of March 18,” he was quoted.

“If visa liberalization does not follow, we will be forced to back away from the deal on taking back [refugees] and the agreement of March 18,” he said, adding that the Turkish government was waiting for a precise date for visa liberalization. “It could be the beginning or middle of October - but we are waiting for a firm date.”

European Commissioner Guenther Oettinger said recently he did not see the EU granting Turks visa-free travel this year due to Ankara's crackdown after the failed military coup in mid-July. In response to Çavuşoğlu's remarks, German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel said Germany and the EU should not be blackmailed by Turkey in talks on visa liberalization for Turkish nationals.

“It is up to Turkey if there is or there isn't visa liberalization,” Gabriel said during a trip to northern Germany, according to Reuters. “Germany and Europe should under no circumstances be blackmailed.”

Turkey had agreed to take back all irregular migrants reaching Greece via Turkey as of March 20, according to the EU-Turkey migrant deal reach on March 18. In exchange, the EU would take in the same amount of Syrian refugees from Turkey. As of Aug. 1, only less than 500 migrants were sent back to Turkey from Greece, while even a smaller amount of Syrian refugees were sent to the EU from Turkey. The EU said Turkey must respect all the conditions of its migrant deal with the bloc before it can secure visa-free travel to Europe for its citizens. EU Commission spokeswoman Mina Andreeva said that “if Turkey wants visa liberalization the benchmarks must be met,” according to the Associated Press.

Within the scope of the deal, the EU vowed to grant a total of 6 billion euros to Turkey to be used for Syrian refugees in the country, while also granting Turkish citizens visa-free travel inside the Schengen zone, on grounds that Turkey met the necessary requirements.

Last week, Greek data showed that migrant arrivals in Greece inched up in the past two weeks after the failed coup attempt in Turkey. The average rate has increased to 90 people a day, compared to 30 before the attempted coup, according to the data, AFP has reported.

At the height of the migrant crisis last year, thousands of people would land every day on Greek Aegean islands close to the coast of Turkey. Most were allowed by Greece to continue their journey northwards, prompting an outcry among several European states that hastened to shut their borders earlier this year.

Juncker: Closing EU door to Turkey ‘serious mistake’

AFP, 05.08.2016



European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker rejected Austria’s call for the EU to end membership talks with Turkey, warning that it would be a grave error.

Turkey’s longstanding, and recently revived, bid to join the EU has already been hit by President Erdoğan’s suggestion that he may reintroduce the death penalty after the July 15 coup attempt. But after Austria raised the prospect of slamming the brakes on membership talks, Juncker called for calm. “If one gives the impression to Turkey now that the EU is not ready to take in Turkey, then I would say that is a serious foreign policy mistake,” Juncker told.

“I don’t think it would be helpful if we were to unilaterally end negotiations with Turkey,” he said, adding that such decisions can only be made with unanimity from all member states. “I don’t see this willingness among all member states at this point in time” to break off talks, he said.

At the same time, Juncker acknowledged that Turkey has work to do in order to meet membership conditions set by the bloc. “Turkey cannot be a member of the European Union in its current state, and especially not if it decided, as some have warned, to reinstate the death penalty. That would lead to the immediate breaking off of negotiations,” he warned.

Erdoğan’s suggestion that he may reinstate capital punishment, as well as other human rights concerns over the broad crackdown following the failed coup attempt, have frayed ties between Turkey and the EU. Ankara had signalled that it could ditch a controversial deal with the EU to halt migrant flows to Europe, if the bloc failed to meet its promises including granting visa-free travel to Turks as well as accelerating membership talks.

Juncker himself had warned last week that the pact was at risk of breaking down. Austria ratcheted up tensions when Chancellor Christian Kern called for the EU to discuss ending accession talks with Turkey. “We have to face reality: the membership negotiations are currently no more than fiction,” he told the Die Presse newspaper.

“We know that Turkey’s democratic standards are far from sufficient to justify its accession.” Asked by public broadcaster ORF whether he wanted to halt the talks, Kern said he would initiate a debate on the matter at a summit of leaders on Sept. 16. Austrian Defence Minister Hans-Peter Doskozil meanwhile compared Turkey to a “dictatorship”, adding that “such a state has no place in the EU”.

“The time has come to... clearly say that the EU’s negotiations with Turkey have to be suspended or ended,” Doskozil told the Austria Press Agency in an interview published Thursday. Turkey’s EU Affairs Minister Ömer Çelik called Kern’s comments “extremely disturbing”. “Criticism is a democratic right but there must be a distance between criticising Turkey and anti-Turkey attitude,” he said.

“Such statements do no harm to Turkey, but they harm Europe’s values and future,” Çelik later tweeted. “Suggesting to halt Turkey’s negotiations is not defending EU values. It only pleases far-right in Europe and the coup plotter terrorists.” Turkey’s EU membership bid dates back to 1963, with its formal application made in 1987 and negotiations starting in 2005.

Commerce Chamber: Turkish economy ‘strong’ post-coup bid

Anadolu Agency, 04.08.2016



The negative impact of the failed coup attempt on Turkey’s economy has been minimal, according to the head of the TO. “The foreign exchange rates have been going back to pre-July 15 levels, while the country’s main stock exchange index has been climbing confidently towards a level that is higher [than] prior to the coup attempt,” TO head brahim Ça lar told.

Ça lar said the Turkish economy maintained its credibility in the eyes of the investors. “I believe that international credit agencies should avoid acting on political prejudices to protect their own credibility,” he added.

The TO head went on to say that if the coup attempt had been successful, it could have caused a great economic depression in the country. “If they [coup plotters] had succeeded, the coup would have affected a wide range of countries, in addition to our 79 million citizens, and have led to a deep depression,” Ça lar said. “So the defeat of the July 15 coup attempt was a crucial milestone not only for Turkey but also for the world at large.

The country passed a very harsh test that night in order to establish peace. Thankfully, today, the winners are democracy and world peace," he added. As for the state of emergency declared in the country, Ça lar said the decision was taken to fight terrorism. "The extraordinary measures might be considered as a warranty for economic stability. The necessary steps are taken quickly to prevent such incidents from happening again.

"There are no obstacles for foreign investors to continue their economic activities in safety," he said. Turkey temporarily suspended the European Convention on Human Rights and imposed a three-month state of emergency following the foiled coup attempt carried out by a renegade faction within Turkey's military.

Eximbank Chief: No need to cut Turkey's rating thanks to fiscal measures

Anadolu Agency, 02.08.2016



Moody's will not need to downgrade Turkey's credit rating in its upcoming rating appraisal thanks to measures taken by the Turkish economic administration after the coup bid on July 15, the general manager of Türk Eximbank said.

Moody's rating agency announced that it would review Turkey's rating for a possible downgrade following the attempted coup. Soon after the coup plot, Standard & Poor's (S&P) decided to cut Turkey's rating, even though Turkey has not requested a rating by S&P since 2012. "The Turkish economy administration and the Central Bank took a number of measures.

When the reflections of these measures begin to be seen, there will be no reason to downgrade Turkey's credit rating because the Turkish economy is in a better situation compared to April 2014," Hayrettin Kaplan, general manager of Türk Eximbank, told Anadolu Agency.

The country's top economic officials have been trying to reassure investors that the failed coup attempt on July 15 will not cause permanent damage to the economy. Consequently, the Central Bank acted on July 17 to cut commissions on daily liquidity options for banks to zero and provide unlimited liquidity to maintain financial markets following the coup bid.

Additionally, the Central Bank said it would raise if necessary the daily foreign exchange auction threshold currently set at \$50 million. Other measures include the Turkish government forming a sovereign wealth fund to create a safer investor environment. Furthermore, top officials of the economy administration have started to gather both in meetings and teleconference interviews with foreign investors to explain Turkey's actual position. In April 2014, Moody's rated Turkey "Baa3" with a negative outlook - a rating which has remained unchanged so far.

Kaplan described S &P's decision for Turkey as "hasty" while he said that Moody's acted calmly by announcing that it would observe the situation in Turkey rather than directly cutting the rate. He noted that Turkey's current account deficit has reduced and the country has become one of the fastest growing economies in the region. "It will be understood that neither the coup attempt nor the state of emergency decision will have an impact on the markets and Turkey's economy," Kaplan emphasized.

The Turkish government announced a three-month state of emergency after the coup plot. Kaplan also stated that there would be good news on Turkish exports in the following days. "Steadily rising exports to the European Union and the normalizing of relations with Russia will contribute to Turkish exports in the near future. We at Türk Eximbank support our exporters and work coordinately with the Economy Ministry to resolve any problems that our exporters may face after the July 15 coup bid," he explained.

Netanyahu criticizes European countries

AFP, 31.07.2016



Israeli PM Netanyahu said his government was looking into support from European nations for groups engaged in what he described as anti-Israel activities, specifically mentioning France.

Netanyahu said an inquiry had "found support from European countries, including France, for several organizations that engage in incitement, call for a boycott of Israel and do not recognize the state of Israel's right to exist." "We will complete the inquiry and submit the findings to the French government," Netanyahu said.

Israeli officials have regularly condemned support by foreign governments for left-wing NGOs critical of the country's policies towards the Palestinians. In mid-July, Israel's parliament adopted a law seen as targeting left-wing groups critical of the government by forcing NGOs that receive most of their funding from foreign states to declare it.

Netanyahu also appeared to make reference to France's announcement on July 29 that it would consider a temporary ban on foreign financing of mosques following a series of jihadist attacks. "We are also disturbed by such donations to organizations that deny the state of Israel's right to exist," he said.

Israel has been faced with a boycott movement over its nearly 50-year occupation of the West Bank. Some, however, accuse the movement of anti-Semitism. Violence since October has killed at least 218 Palestinians and 34 Israelis. Most of the Palestinians killed were carrying out knife, gun or car-ramming attacks, Israeli authorities say.

Desperate and depressed, Syrian refugees in Greece regret leaving home

Hurriyet Daily News, 03.08.2016



If some of the refugees had known what it would be like living in a refugee camp in the Greek capital, they would never have left Syria, while hundreds of thousands of Syrian parents in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan face the stark choice of whether to feed their children or send them to school as nearly 1 million Syrian refugee children are out of school in these countries.

Regretting having left Syria applies for Mustafa. Four months of living in a broken tent by Athens' Piraeus harbor, waiting for his asylum claim to be processed has caused Mustafa to bitterly regret his decision to leave Aleppo.

"Anywhere. Anything is better than this," he said as a tear trickled down his cheek. Only 38, Mustafa, who like many asylum seekers declined to give his full name, looks much older - as does his wife Nadia, 37, who sits beside him, sweaty and squashed in their small tent. Outside the temperature rises to more than 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit).

The couple left most of their family behind in Syria, except for Mustafa's parents who made it to a refugee camp in Turkey. "We didn't think we'd be here long but we've yet to have our first [asylum] interview," Mustafa told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"They've delayed it over and over again. At this rate we'll be here for years. Sometimes, I just want to take my wife's hand and jump into the sea." Since 2015, Greece has been the main entry point into Europe for refugees and migrants fleeing conflict and poverty in the Middle East and beyond.

To receive asylum in Europe, migrants in Greece must go through a rigorous process through EASO, the European Asylum Support Office. This entails a minimum of two interviews in Greece, spread over several weeks or months, and then at least two additional interviews in their country of relocation.

"The time it takes for a relocation request to go through in Greece really depends on the member state in question. Some are relatively fast and some are not," said Iota Peristeri, who works at the Greek asylum service.

When migrants arriving on Greek islands like Samos or Lesbos get the call for their first asylum interview, they must pay for a ferry to Athens. The journey is often very expensive for families who have spent their life savings getting to Europe. These asylum seekers are meant to be provided with accommodation in Athens but this did not happen for Damascus-born Nama Abdullah, 28, and her three children who live in Kara Tepe, a refugee camp on Lesbos.



In May, Abdullah was told she and her family had an interview in Athens but unable to afford the 178 euro (\$200) journey to get there, she sought financial help from other refugees. She said she received no help with accommodation. "I couldn't afford to rent a hotel for the night and all the camps in Athens sent us away," Abdullah said. "Nobody helped us, no volunteers, nobody."

Altogether, Abdullah and her children spent two nights in Athens, the time it took her to raise the money to sail back to Lesbos. Again, other refugees funded her journey. She will go back to Athens for a follow-up interview on Sept. 9. 1 mln Syrian refugee children out of school in neighboring countries

For the refugees that have opted to stay closer to their home country either in Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan, the choices are no easier. With just 60 days to go before the start of the new school year, hundreds of thousands of Syrian parents are faced with the stark choice of whether to feed their children or send them to school, experts said.

Nearly 1 million Syrian refugee children are out of school in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan which host the vast majority of the nearly 5 million refugees created by Syria's civil war. Many Syrian children are forced to work to help make ends meet, or unable to pay for transport to school, according to a report written by the head of the London-based think tank, Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

"If you're a parent faced with a choice of giving your children a square meal at the end of the day, or paying for the transport ... to send them to school ... you're likely to make a choice in favor of adequate nutrition," ODI Executive Director Kevin Watkins said in an interview.

Watkins said there is now an "epidemic" of refugee child labor in the region. He estimates that between 400,000 and 500,000 Syrian children are working in Turkey alone. Turkey allows refugees to work and be paid a minimum wage. Even so, many of them are working informally for less pay, and there is some evidence that parents are marrying off their daughters young, the report said.

"I would love to go to school, I miss reading and writing. But if I go to school, nobody is going to bring food to my home," the report quotes a 13-year-old refugee in Turkey as saying. Sarah Brown, president of international children's charity Theirworld which published the report, said the lack of access to education was widely cited by refugee parents as one of the main reasons for risking the hazardous journey to Europe.

"The vast loss of potential caused by the crisis in education threatens to deprive Syria of the skills it will need to rebuild a war-torn society," said Brown, wife of U.N. envoy for education and former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, in a statement. Watkins said young teenagers with no hope of an education grow up at greater risk of being recruited by extremists.

Greece denies call for 'Plan B' in EU-Turkey migrant deal

AFP, 04.08.2016



Greece's immigration minister denied having called on the European Union to draw up a back-up plan in case Turkey reneges on a controversial deal aimed at limiting the influx of migrants.

Yannis Mouzalas's denial came hours after Germany's Bild daily had quoted him as saying: "We are very worried. We need a Plan B in any case." "The minister denies Bild's translation of his comments," the immigration ministry said in a statement, publishing what it said were Mouzalas's answers in Greek to Bild's questions. According to the statement, Mouzalas had actually said:

"Greece is committed to the EU-Turkey deal, which depends on both the EU's support and on Turkey's duty to respect it." "Clearly we are concerned, but for now the number of people arriving on the Greek islands (since the deal was enforced in March) does not indicate that the deal is not being respected," he said.

Bild did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. Due to its geographic proximity to Turkey, Greece has become a key gateway country for migrants seeking to reach Europe. At the height of Europe's migrant crisis last year, thousands of asylum seekers landed every day on Greek Aegean islands close to the coast of Turkey. Arrival numbers have since plunged following the EU-Turkey deal, in which Ankara agreed to take back Syrian migrants arriving in Greece in exchange for billions of euros in aid and visa-free European travel for Turkish citizens.

Around 13,500 people requested asylum in Greece in the first five months of 2016, of whom 677 were granted refugee status, the country's asylum agency said. The number of those granted asylum in Greece is set to rise because many applications have yet to be examined, according to the country's asylum agency.

Of those applying between January and May, 7,032 are Syrian nationals, 1,2458 Syrian and 1,030 from Pakistan. In 2015, a year that saw a surge in people fleeing conflict and poverty in the Middle East, with most passing through the Greek islands, Athens granted asylum to 3,647 people, three times the 2014 number and 16 times the figure for 2013.

In all, some 57,000 migrants have been blocked in Greece since the closure in March of the neighbouring European borders. Some 9,600 of them are stranded on the Aegean islands. Relations between Ankara and the West have deteriorated over criticism against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's massive crackdown following a failed coup. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said in an interview that Ankara could withdraw from the accord if Europe fails to allow visa-free travel for Turks by October.

But his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier rejected any talk of “blackmail,” telling Rheinische Post newspaper: “That is absurd.” “The fact is there are conditions for the visa-free policy and they are known to everyone,” he said. “Turkey pledged to undertake the necessary steps to hold up its end of the agreement. That is not yet the case and Turkey still has work to do,” added the German foreign minister.

Latest North Korea missile launch lands near Japan waters, alarms Tokyo

Reuters, 03.08.2016



North Korea launched a ballistic missile that landed in or near Japanese-controlled waters for the first time, the latest in a series of launches by the isolated country in defiance of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The main body of the missile landed in Japan’s economic exclusion zone, a Japanese defense official said, escalating regional tensions that were already high after a series of missile launches this year and the decision by the United States to place a sophisticated anti-missile system in South Korea. Japanese PM Shinzo Abe described the launch as a “grave threat” to Japan and said Tokyo “strongly protested.”

Japan also said its self-defense force would remain on alert in case of further launches. A U.S. State Department spokesman condemned the launch, and said it would “only increase the international community’s resolve to counter” North Korea’s actions. The U.S. Strategic Command said it had detected two missiles, one of which it said exploded immediately after launch.

The missile that landed in the Sea of Japan was launched at about 7:50 a.m. Seoul time (10:50 p.m. GMT Aug. 2) from a region in South Hwanghae province to the southwest of North Korea’s capital, Pyongyang, South Korea’s Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

The launch showed North Korea’s ambition to “directly and broadly attack neighboring countries and target several places in the Republic of Korea such as ports and airfields,” the South Korean office said, referring to South Korea by its official title. The missile appeared to be a Rodong-type medium-range missile that flew about 1,000 km (620 miles), it said.

The United States will begin large-scale annual drills with its ally South Korea later this month that it bills as defensive in nature and not provocative. North Korea typically protests against the drills, which it says are a rehearsal for invasion. “The North Koreans seem to have been timing their recent short-range and medium-range missile tests to the weeks ahead of U.S.-South Korean joint exercises,” said Joshua Pollack, editor of the U.S.-based Nonproliferation Review. “If the allies can exercise their armed forces, so can the North,” he said.

Trump is 'unfit,' Obama says, challenging GOP to end support

AP, 03.08.2016



U.S. President Obama castigated Donald Trump as “unfit” to serve in the White House. He challenged Republicans to withdraw their support for their party’s nominee, declaring “There has to come a point at which you say enough.”

While Obama has long been critical of Trump, his blistering condemnation was a notable escalation of his involvement in the presidential race. Obama questioned whether Trump would “observe basic decency” as president, argued he lacks elementary knowledge about domestic and international affairs and condemned his disparagement of Muslim couple whose son was killed while serving the U.S. Army.

A chorus of Republicans has disavowed Trump’s criticism of Khizr and Ghazala Khan and the Republican nominee’s calls to temporarily ban Muslims from coming to the U.S. But Obama argued that it is not enough.

“If you are repeatedly having to say, in very strong terms, that what he has said is unacceptable, why are you still endorsing him?” Obama asked during a White House news conference. “What does this say about your party that this is your standard-bearer?”

“The alternative is that the entire party, the Republican Party, effectively endorses and validates the positions that are being articulated by Mr. Trump,” Obama was quoted as saying by AFP. No prominent Republican lawmaker responded to Obama’s challenge. But Trump gave a response to Obama on Twitter. “President Obama will go down as perhaps one of the worst president in the history of the United States,” Trump tweeted.

Obama’s harsh comments were an attempt to raise the stakes for Republicans, suggesting their support for Trump will taint their party for years to come. His statements also dovetail with Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton’s efforts to reach out to Republican voters - particularly women - who may be so upset by Trump that they are willing to look past policy differences and questions about Clinton’s character.

Congressman Richard Hanna went one step further, becoming the first Republican lawmaker to say he will vote for Trump’s opponent, Clinton, in November. “I find Trump deeply flawed in endless ways,” Hanna wrote in a newspaper editorial announcing his decision, according to AFP. Obama turned up the heat on Republicans who appear increasingly ill at ease with Trump but have not withdrawn their endorsement. “This isn’t a situation where you have an episodic gaffe,” Obama said. “This is daily and weekly where they are distancing themselves from statements he’s making.”

Republicans blast Obama for \$400 million payment to Iran

Foreign Policy, 03.08.2016



Republican lawmakers are fuming Wednesday over a report that the U.S. government secretly sent the equivalent of \$400 million to Iran last January as four Americans were released by Tehran.

Details of the payout were first reported by the Wall Street Journal. It represents the first installment of \$1.7 billion the White House agreed to pay Iran to resolve a scuppered 1979 arms deal signed just before the fall of Iran's last monarch, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The existence of the payment has been known since January, when four detained Americans were released by Iran.

But new details about the actual exchange of cash, delineated in euros, Swiss francs and other currencies, have stoked outrage among Republicans, who accuse President Barack Obama of putting more Americans at risk of being taken prisoner by hostile regimes.

"Paying ransom to kidnappers puts Americans even more at risk," Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) said in a statement. "While Americans were relieved by Iran's overdue release of illegally imprisoned American hostages, the White House's policy of appeasement has led Iran to illegally seize more American hostages."

In response, State Department spokesman John Kirby said their release and the \$400 million payment had nothing to do with one another. Any suggestion otherwise is, according to Kirby, "utterly false." "We just don't pay ransom. ... This was not ransom," he said, adding there was "no secret" about the payment.

"It was their money," Kirby said on Fox News Wednesday, noting the funds were frozen and it "made no sense for us to continue to drag out their claim." The payment settles a claim against the United States made by Iran before an international tribunal in The Hague. The timing of the settlement came the same weekend as the landmark nuclear deal between Iran, the United States and other global powers was implemented.

"With the nuclear deal done, prisoners released, the time was right to resolve this dispute as well," President Barack Obama said at the White House on Jan. 17. He did not disclose the \$400 million payout at the time. Kirby insists the the arms deal settlement and the nuclear deal had nothing to do with one another.

"As we've made clear, the negotiations over the settlement of an outstanding claim...were completely separate from the discussions about returning our American citizens home," State Department spokesman John Kirby told the Journal.

“Not only were the two negotiations separate, they were conducted by different teams on each side, including, in the case of The Hague claims, by technical experts involved in these negotiations for many years.”

That hasn't stopped Republicans from linking the two. On Wednesday, Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus tweeted, “Obama-Clinton foreign policy not only means cutting dangerous deal w/ # 1 state sponsor of terrorism it also means paying them secret ransom.”

“The logistics of this payment — literally delivering a plane full of cash to evade U.S. law — shows yet again the extraordinary lengths the Obama administration will go to accommodate Iran, all while hiding the facts from Congress and the American people,” House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce, R-Calif., added in a statement. “Hundreds of millions in the pockets of a terrorist regime means a more dangerous region, period. And paying ransom only puts more American lives in jeopardy.”

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump used the report to attack his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, who served as Obama's secretary of state from 2009 to 2013. On Wednesday morning, he tweeted, “Our incompetent Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was the one who started talks to give 400 million dollars, in cash, to Iran. Scandal!”

Rep. Mike Pompeo (R-Kansas) went as far as to link the payment with the Iran-Contra affair, in which Reagan administration officials secretly facilitated the sale of arms to Iran. “Reports of the U.S. paying Iran \$400 million in pallets of cash, using other currencies in order to circumvent American law, is something of Hollywood films — and is reminiscent of the Iran Contra scandal. Have we not learned we cannot trust the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism?”

US top soldier strongly condemns coup attempt in Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 01.08.2016



The United States' top soldier strongly condemned the failed July 15 coup attempt in Turkey during a visit to the country on Aug. 1, according to a statement issued by the U.S. Joint Staff.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joseph F. Dunford visited the Turkish parliament building, which was hit by the plotters before his meetings with Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and Turkish Chief of General Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar in Ankara. Dunford “will deliver messages condemning in the strongest terms the recent coup attempt,” statement from his office stated ahead of the meeting.



The U.S. commander was also scheduled to visit Incirlik Air Base in the southern province of Adana to speak to U.S. personnel stationed at the base who are fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). “[The visit] reaffirms the importance of our enduring partnership for regional security as symbolized by coalition operations out of Incirlik in the counter-ISIL fight and the importance of Turkey’s contributions to both the counter-ISIL coalition and NATO alliances,” read the statement.

Akar and Dunford have held two phone conversations since the coup attempt to set things right, particularly on Incirlik, which was closed for a couple of days after the attempt, as well regarding U.S. flights over Syria. Dunford’s visit comes days after Erdogan slammed a high-ranking U.S. military authority over remarks expressing concern about the ongoing fight against ISIL after a massive reshuffle and suspensions in the Turkish army.

“We’ve certainly had relationships with a lot of Turkish leaders and military leaders in particular, so I’m concerned about what the impact is on those relationships. Some of them are in jail now,” Gen. Joseph Votel, head of the U.S. Central Command, which is leading the ISIL fight, said in a conference in Aspen.

Late on July 15, a group of military personnel tried to topple the Turkish government in a coup. The attempt failed after security forces took hold of the situation while citizens took to the streets to defend “democracy,” after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on the people to do so. More than 250 people died during the failed coup attempt, including on Istanbul’s main bridges over the Bosphorus and at special forces headquarters in Ankara.



Announcements & Reports

Chinese Military Organization and Reform

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinese-military-organization-and-reform>

The Missile Defense Agency and the Color of Money

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/missile-defense-agency-and-color-money>

Transatlantic Rifts: Averting a Turkey/Russia Conflict

Source : Chatham House
Weblink : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/transatlantic-rifts-averting-turkey-russia-conflict>

Upcoming Events

Congo's Political Crisis: What is The Way Forward?

Date : 15 August 2016
Place : Washington DC, USA
Website : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/congos-political-crisis-what-is-the-way-forward/>

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 15 September 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 : 16 September 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 21 – 22 September 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>



Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 23 September 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 : 25 September 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 : 26 September 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 : 28 September 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 : 30 September 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 : 21 – 22 November 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>