



US-Turkey Relations in the Light of Turkey's Freedom of Press

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Abstract

This paper probes effects of deterioration of media freedom in Turkey on bilateral relations between Ankara and Washington. The U.S.-Turkey ties are going through turbulent times and tested by a number of thorny issues. This study claims that the lack of press freedom in Turkey and absence of alternative voices in media prevents maintenance of a healthy dialogue, mutual understanding between two allies and limits effective cooperation in diplomacy, trade, international and regional relations. The rise of anti-Americanism, Turkey's hostage policy and its coup-related accusations against Washington get only worse with lack of media freedom.

Keywords: Media freedom; US-Turkey relations; Democracy; Diplomacy; Hostage policy

Introduction

The issue of the press freedom and the freedom of expression in Turkey has for many years attracted a great deal of attention and provoked extensive debate both in Turkey and in many other Western countries. According to the U.S.-based Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization that promotes press freedom worldwide, Turkey has been mentioned as one of the countries which have got no free press in the world [1]. According to the annual freedom of press report by Freedom House in 2017, the Turkish government, through the use of enhanced powers under the state of emergency, carried out a massive crackdown on media outlets on the justification of an attempted military coup. The government authorities took control of some media broadcasts and detained a large number of journalists. Journalists, particularly those who work in the Kurdish Southeast, went through serious obstacles in their reporting, including threats, violence and criminal investigations. Under the rule of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, the country has suffered a substantial drop in the freedom of the press over the past ten years [2]. The government has used the penal code of criminal defamation and counter-terrorism laws to

detain a large number of journalists. Turkey has since witnessed a sharp decline in media freedom for the last five years, affecting its relationship with many Western countries, including the United States, which had many of her citizens jailed on dubious charges. What is more important, absence of a free media limits existence of healthy debates in public domain about Turkey's disengagement with the U.S. and the Western world in a way of realignment with more authoritarian-minded countries, such as Russia and Iran. The government's mastery of the press also enables it to steer public opinion amid lack of transparency, leaving little space for diverse opinions that would endorse more engagement with the EU countries. Instead, the daily anti-Western rhetoric in media helps government to cloak the foreign policy shift from the attention of the public.

Overview of Freedom of Press and Censorship in Turkey

The press freedom in Turkey has been a problematic issue given the long history of political control of media and turbulent relationship between media and political authorities. But it went particularly worse over the past few years with the imprisonment of journalists. Censorship was introduced into the country in 2004 constitution amendments and is regulated by both domestic and the international laws [3]. Although the legal provision in Article 90 of the constitution of Turkey advocates for the rights of journalists, media freedom has deteriorated steadily since the coup attempt in 2016. The president has ordered for the arrest of hundreds of journalists and dozens of media outlets have been closed. According to report by the U.S.-based Freedom House, Turkey accounts for one third of the world's jailed journalists. Since 2013, Turkey has been ranked by Freedom House as not free, with observers placing the country among the leading countries violating media freedom.

The highly diagnostic standard that can be used to measure lack of press freedom is the number of journalists jailed. The office of the representative on media freedom provided a detailed list of some journalists arrested in Turkey, and the number stood at 78 by August 2012. The number from the CPJ showed 76 detained journalists with whom 61 were directly imprisoned for their direct publications or journalistic works.

By December 2012, the number dropped slightly to 49 due to the release of many detainees by courts. According to the recent reports by CPJ, Turkey leads in the highest number of imprisoned journalists, followed by Iran and China [4]. Despite recent reforms that allowed for the release of some detainees, the situation has for the last five years deteriorated to the worst. A closer look at the cases showed that imprisonments are not mostly related to the factors emanating from Turkey's political situation, but rather take place reflection of authorities' approach to the Kurdish conflict and the broad interpretation of the country's notorious counter-terrorism laws. A recent report by the European Commission stressed on the progress report requiring legal provisions and the openness as well as judicial abuse as the major concerns with regards to press freedom in Turkey. Same concerns were echoed by the European Commission for Human Rights as well as the United Nations Human Rights Committee [5]. Majority of the journalists' prosecution take place on charges of disseminating propaganda on behalf of a terrorist organization or being a member to an armed terrorist organization or working in its press office.

Despite wide condemnation from the international community, the Turkish government has always repudiated criticism, claiming that journalists are placed in jail not due to their journalism activities, but because of their efforts to help terror activities. The issue of disagreement between the Turkish government and external critics is what is considered as a journalistic activity and the scope within which it falls. Turkish authorities prefer to interpret Turkey's vague and ambiguous counter-terrorism laws in the broadest sense, to the detriment of liberties, be it in individual domain or media sphere. The major criticism has always centered on lack of transparency in the court proceedings and the failure to observe the rights of the defendants to fair trial as asserted by Esen and Gumuscu [6]. The counter-terrorism laws tend to blur the existing line between the intention to cite, legitimize and relativize terror violence. The openness of the provisions in the constitution and its interpretation and practice are not in line with international norms regulating human rights.

Silencing Turkish Media and Violation of Human Rights

Since the early days, Turkish journalists have been threatened, censored, fired from their jobs, and even imprisoned for making a criticism against the government. Between 2003 and 2009, there were various legal reforms that were introduced with an aim of increasing the protection of political, social and cultural rights of the citizens, including media freedom and freedom of expression irrespective of one's ethnic or religious affiliation. However, a worrying rollback has been witnessed in the country since 2011, with the government increasing incidences of human rights violation and interference in media freedom. An evidence of the increased government interference with the freedom of the media was in 2013 when one mainstream broadcaster aired a documentary instead of airing the ongoing protests, a

move which attracted criticism from all corners of the society [6].

In 2016, there was an expression of serious concerns by the European Parliament over the rollback on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, taking an emphasis on the rapid decline in the freedom of expression and press freedom. Last five European Union progress reports on Turkey showed a continued pressure on media by the government officials; prosecution of journalists and opposition leaders on charges of defamation, criminal activities and terrorism; as well as intimidation and closure of private media outlets owned by individuals. According to human rights reports by the U.S. Department of State, the state interference with the freedom of media is the most pressing and highest level of human rights violations that have ever occurred in Turkey [5].

Government Action against Gulen Movement

Most of the actions of the Turkish government against journalists in the last three years have been revolving around its efforts aiming to eliminate movement of cleric Gulen. Gulen had been initially a close ally of AKP but was later accused by President Erdogan of plotting against his government. Gulen was charged by the Turkish government as the key suspect in the failed coup of July 2016. But the government's crackdown on Movement began earlier. After the outbreak of the corruption scandal in December 2013, the government started a clampdown on Gulen Movement resulting in the arrest and detention of many people [3]. The government accused Gulen of having established a parallel structure within the state and exercising control over the judiciary, police, and bureaucracy. President Erdogan viewed the arrests and investigations of suspects in connection with the corruption allegations as a plot by Gulen to overthrow him. In response to the corruption allegations, the government reassigned thousands of judges, police officers and prosecutors who he blamed to be supporters of Gulen while at the same time tightening control over the judiciary. Since the uncovering of the scandal, the government began taking legal steps against journalists and media workers who were alleged to be in the ties with Gulen Movement based on counter-terrorism legislation.

The actions against Gulen movement intensified after the attempted coup in 2016 [7]. More than 241 people were killed in the violence that the government blamed on the Gulen movement. After the failed coup, thousands of soldiers, judges, police officers, teachers and civil servants have been summarily dismissed from their posts on real or perceived ties with Gulen movement, without due process and right for legal remedy. A state of emergency was declared for three months in the whole country and the President began to rule the country by decree. The state of emergency has been extended numerous times since then, and still remains in place. In a more authoritarian mode, the government ordered the closure of all private institutions, schools and hospitals associated with Gulen. In the second decree No. 668, an order was issued for the closure of 131 newspapers, news agencies, publishers,

televisions and radio stations. The same state of emergency was used to shut down 23 TV and radio stations that were popular amongst the Kurds and the supporters of the opposition [1].

After the July coup, the Turkish authorities issued the detention of 116 journalists and media workers for perceived ties to Gulen's Movement in a period of one week. According to Esen and Gumuscu [2], hundreds of government-issued press cards were also revoked, a card without which journalism cannot be conducted in Turkey. More than 30 news websites were also shut down. By December 2016, 149 journalists were in jail. Out of them, 131 were still in pretrial detention after being arrested on charges of taking part in terror activities. Other major charges are spreading terror propaganda, helping terror organizations as well as involvement in the coup attempt. An unknown number of journalists were reported to have left the country for fear of being arrested. In July, police raided the offices of the pro-Gulen daily Meyden and sealed the building. Later, Orhan Kemal, a prominent human rights lawyer and a long time columnist was also detained at the airport on accusations of terror organization membership [6]. David Kaye, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, voiced his concerns over gross violations of human rights. He was reported as saying: "Media freedom in the country was already in crisis prior to the attempted coup, including the closure of critical media, media associated with Gulenists, and broad use of anti-terror legislation against journalists. In response to the failed coup, the breadth and scope of the crackdown on media freedom have intensified dramatically, with measures of an unprecedented scale being justified on grounds of ensuring stability" [7].

Prosecution of Journalists

Over the years, journalists have been prosecuted through the use of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code which makes the denigration of the Turkish nation an offense. This article has been used to prosecute hundreds of journalists for peacefully voicing their critical opinions. Journalists, such as Hrant Dink, were murdered in 2007 after repeated trials under the article [6]. Following legal changes made to the article, it's core theme for prosecution moved from insulting Turkishness to denigrating the Turkish nation. Despite the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) finding the article contradictory to the human rights and freedom, so many journalists have been prosecuted over the same article. The use of Article 301 criminalizes free speech and inhibits media freedom. The article has been criticized for using counter-terrorism law to prosecute journalists who only cover events to facilitate the flow of information.

One of the major basis that was used to try journalists involved espionage and revealing the secrets of the state. Former Cumhuriyet Editor-in-Chief Can Dundar and Ankara Bureau Chief Erdem Gul are two journalists who were prosecuted for revealing state secrets and were sentenced to five years in prison over espionage and revealing the secrets of

the state [4]. They were also charged for aiding terror activities and having ties to Gulen movement.

Some of the journalists were also prosecuted for terrorist propaganda and being members of terror group. The crime for spreading propaganda had been used against journalists for many years in Turkey. Journalists were additionally charged with being members of armed organizations as asserted by Esen and Gumuscu [6]. Under the counter-terrorism law, spreading propaganda on behalf of a terror group is punishable by at least five years in prison [4]. However, these laws have been criticized by civil rights groups and activists as well as the international community who consider such regulations to be against the right of free press and the right to access to information. The United States, in particular, have criticized the anti-terror law in the Turkey's legal system which is blamed for the violation of human rights.

US-Turkey Relations

After the failed coup in Turkey, the government deepened a crackdown on all forms of opposition. Turkey went ahead to dismiss 1,700 military personnel and purged public workers in different sectors of civil service and bureaucracy. The post-coup purge drove a wedge between Ankara and its Western allies, especially with the U.S. The US and Turkey imposed travel restrictions on each other's citizens in a diplomatic tug of war that has highlighted worsening relations between the two nations. Turkey's arrest of consular staff working in the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul and Adana sparked a furious reaction from Washington, which temporarily suspended processing of non-immigrant visas in Turkey. The Turkish president was irritated by the move and ordered the closure of the Turkish online visa system for the U.S. citizens [8].

The move by Turkey to cut off processing visas for the United States citizens have led to the effective closure of its borders to American visitors living in the U.S. unless they can obtain visas from diplomatic missions. The ties between Turkey and U.S. have grown tense in the aftermath of the failed coup in Turkey. In visa row, the U.S. side dismissed accusations by the Turkish authorities against U.S. consular staff as baseless and politically motivated [9]. Later, the Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned the American Chargé d'Affaires in Ankara to register Turkey's protest over U.S. remarks about the ongoing judicial process.

Turkey was angered by slowness of the United States in condemning the attempted coup and its "unwillingness" to extradite Gulen. The United States considered Turkey as a key ally in the battle against Islamic State (ISIS) terrorists and many other terror groups in Syria and Iraq. The United States has not displayed endorsement for the Turkish government during its post-coup crackdown. This was evident after mass arrests of journalists as well as the closure of media outlets over bogus charges of terrorism [6]. The United States has not been happy with how Turkey violates the freedom of the press, particularly for arbitrary arrests and lengthy pre-trial detention of inmates without any indictment and charges.

It is of great importance to note that press freedom has been a fundamental pillar of the U.S. democracy. According to U.S. First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof: or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press: or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Though geopolitical dynamics have mostly kept Turkey-U.S. relations surviving against all sorts of odds and challenges, the poor state of media remains an irritant theme in bilateral dialogue.

Conviction of NASA Scientist Serkan Golge

But what plunged Turkey's relations with its ally is prosecution and imprisonment of a number U.S. citizens. The detention and conviction of NASA scientist Serkan Golge has only further exacerbated a worsening relationship between United States and Turkey [9]. A Turkish court sentenced Golge to 7.5 years in prison for the charges of membership in a terrorist organization. Golge who is a dual U.S.-Turkish citizen and a senior researcher of NASA had been held for 18 months for allegedly being a follower of the Gulen movement. In a statement, the U.S. State Department spokesperson said that the U.S. was deeply concerned with the conviction of the NASA researcher. "We would like to say that United States is deeply concerned by the February conviction of the U.S. citizen Serkan Golge for being a member of a terror organization without credible evidence. We will continue to follow this case closely along with other U.S. citizens whose ongoing prosecution under the state of emergency raises serious concerns about the respect for the judicial independence and respect for the rights of individuals. The safety of the U.S. citizens traveling or residing in Turkey remains a concern. We would like to call on the Turkish government to end the protracted state of emergency and release those detained and safeguard the rule of law," said U.S. State Department Spokeswoman Heather Nauert [10].

After the detention, U.S. Senator James Lankford called on the U.S. to consider imposing sanctions on the Turkish authorities responsible for the conviction of Serkan Golge and as well as the detention of other American citizens without trial. "I have just learned that American researcher Dr. Serkan Golge have been convicted in Turkey without any credible evidence [6]. "It is time for the United States to sanction Turkish authorities who were responsible for the unfair imprisonment of American citizens," said Senator Lankford on his Twitter account. He added that the U.S. companies must be wary of doing business in Turkey due to the fear of facing similar unfair conviction. In response to the United States Department statement, Turkey's Foreign Ministry said that Golge was jailed in a fair judicial process and he has been found guilty. In a press statement, the Turkish foreign minister said: "It is not possible to take the biased words of the U.S. State Department spokeswoman, who does not know the content and evidence of the case file, seriously. The Turkish judiciary does not decide according to the desire of someone or of external instructions but decides according to Turkey's

Constitution, laws, and evidence. We expect our U.S. interlocutors to respect the decisions of independent Turkish courts" [6].

The arrest and conviction of Serkan resulted in a heated debate over whether the United States ought to consider reviewing its relationship with Turkey for what they termed as failing to respect the rule of law and constant violations of human rights. The war of words between the U.S. State Department spokeswoman and Turkish foreign minister sparked a diplomatic row. Amidst the increasing tension in the American-Turkish relations, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made an announcement of the new U.S. strategy in Syria that involved the continued presence of the U.S. troops in the country and a continuation of the partnership with Syrian Kurdish militants [9]. The Turkish government considers the Syrian Kurdish militia as a terrorist group due to its affiliation with an outlawed domestic insurgent group, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Turkey also regard the Syrian group as a threat to its national security along the border. The U.S. announcement to build a border security force, comprising mostly of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Turkey launched a military operation targeting the U.S. ally in Syria.

Additionally, the U.S. reticence to extradite Gulen constitutes the root cause of friction in Ankara. The Turkish president has suggested that the U.S. citizens jailed in Turkey will not be released unless Gulen is handed over to the Turkish officials. This announcement is read as tacit admission of the hostage policy pursued by Ankara against its Western allies.

The Imprisonment of Pastor Andrew Brunson

After the detention of the U.S. pastor in the post-coup crackdown, the United States have called for the release of the pastor without no success. In response, however, Turkish president has said that Turkey will only release the pastor if the U.S. extradites the cleric living in the U.S. President Erdogan has repeatedly voiced his frustrations over the issue. "We have the pastor too, you give us that one and we will work with the judiciary to give you back yours," said the president [3]. Andrew Brunson, a 48-years-old evangelical Presbyterian from North Carolina who lived in Turkey for over two decades was arrested in Izmir. He was accused of being a member of an armed terrorist group and charged with espionage and attempt to overthrow President Erdogan's government. Despite all attempts, the Turkish government has refused to heed the calls to release the pastor. It conditioned his release over extradition of the Turkish cleric. This unflinching stance by the Turkish government put the strained ties on a collision course given the deterioration of the pastor's health in prison.

Moreover, even the timing of the trial of U.S. pastor and the life sentence sought against him lends credence to claims that the Turkish policy makers entirely view the matter through the prism of bilateral ties. The adoption of hostage policy is no longer a secret or a fringe idea, but rather a conviction widely

shared by many scholars [11]. The ongoing case of Reza Zarrab, a gold trader with close connection to President Erdogan, rattled the Turkish authorities. Last summer, the government enacted a new decree allowing the Turkish president to engage in prisoner swap with foreign countries to bring back Turkish citizens who face trial abroad to the country [12]. It sparked debates that Ankara was mulling to carry out a prisoner swap that would involve Pastor Brunson and Zarrab who became a key witness in sanctions-busting trial in a Manhattan court [13].

Democracy in Turkey

After the attempted coup in Turkey, the society remained deeply traumatized by the events that occurred on July 15, in 2016. Given the tense relations both with the European Union and the U.S., there was little Western leverage left that could influence the course of politics in Turkey. Gulen movement and separatist Kurds are viewed as a great threat by the Turkish government. Amid the declaration of a state of emergency, there appeared to be little objection given fears of crackdown and gutted alternative media, and a fractured opposition that looked feeble and inefficient. Initially, many Turks supported the government move in response to the attempted coup. As a result of the slowness in Western condemnation for the attempted coup to remove the president, the relations between Turkey and United States remained strained. The man who was accused of orchestrating the coup, Muslim cleric Gulen is living in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania [3]. Despite having provided the United States government with trove of documents, sufficient evidence to convince a judge of a probable cause that is worth warranting extradition is yet to be provided.

However, the Turkish government actions have started to weaken democracy that it has all along purported to protect. In an initial attempt to arrest the plotters of the coup, the efforts have now been directed towards the political opponents of all creed. A recent study by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights shows that thousands of people were sacked from government jobs without any due process. Tens of thousands of people were placed behind bars on coup-related and terrorism charges, while over 150 journalists were locked up in jail. After the botched putsch, there was a climate of anxiety, which involved a vulnerable state apparatus and a society that is paranoid [14]. A declared state of emergency had an adverse effect on the public opposition as it allowed for individuals to be held without trial for up to 30 days. The Turkish government interpretation of terrorism was different from the bounds of what is politically permissible as it had limited the space for dissent, shrunk the press freedom and led to a decline in confidence levels among public institutions [5]. Americans and Europeans also got caught up in this descent into authoritarianism due to the imprisonment of Pastor Andrew Brunson and other Western citizens on terrorism charges.

The democratic situation in Turkey is unlikely to see any positive change in the foreseeable future. Last year, the Turkish people went to the polls to determine the powers that

are given to the president. Despite the claim that more than 51% of voters supported the constitutional amendment, issues of restrictive campaign and allegations of fraud seemed to create a controversy [5]. While Turks prepare to go into elections in 2019, a group of political analysts from Stanford University say it will be one of the difficult elections due to post-coup purges, economic difficulty, and concerns over fair elections. In the events of all this, the government has never ceased its clampdown on opposition, even locked up opposition lawmakers on dubious charges. This has led to a deep division in the country amid protest by the civil society over the violation of civil rights. The economy of the country has been weakening since the erosion of rule of law and increasingly one-man rule. Many European and Western countries such as Sweden and Canada feel the need to re-evaluate the nature of their relationship with Turkey over repeated violations of human rights and democratic breakdown.

Over the past few years, criminal defamation has been used to prosecute individuals with critical political views. While existence of real democracy envisages acceptance of divergent opinions in public and political domain, it seems to be not the case in Turkey. Over the past few months, authorities clamp down on anyone who dares to criticize Erdogan's presidency through the use of criminal offence for defamation of the president. Since becoming president in 2014, Erdogan's lawyers have filed more than 2,000 criminal complaints to various offices of Public Prosecutors around the country over claims of insulting the president. In majority of the cases, journalists have found themselves in crosshairs of the president who repeatedly sued them over insulting charges. Under Article 125 of the Turkish Constitution Penal Code, defamation has a maximum of 2-year prison sentence [5]. This legislation has been considered by critics as a violation of people's rights to freedom of expression and hinders one's right to access to information. According to Haynes [14], an increase in the punitive and compensation lawsuits for defamation had increased in 2015 compared to previous years.

Importance of Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression

An independent press is one of the essential pillars of democracy in any country. All over the world from developing to developed countries, less free societies struggle to gain full access to the information and freedom of expression for a wide range of reasons, including poverty and cultural pressures. Media freedom and freedom of expressions are fundamental rights and violating such rights amounts to the infringement of other rights. Media freedom in Turkey is important as it can help the country to regain its lost democracy, which is the fundamental ground for development. Research by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has shown that since the weakening of democracy and violation of freedom of the press in Turkey, the economy of the country has been weakening [14].

Free and independent media facilitate good governance, accountability and enhance human development, which is important to the Turkish people. The transition from autocracy to democracy opens up media for private ownership and broadens access to information by the public and limits the control of information by the government. As a result, media contributes directly to democratization and good governance by acting as a watchdog through promotion of accountability and transparency in governance. Media also creates a civic forum where many voices are heard while at the same time highlighting social problems of the nation that needs to be addressed. Through the promotion of accountability and transparency in the leadership, vices such as corruption and misuse of public resources will be minimized, thus yielding a development-oriented nation. Amid signs of economic trouble ahead, permitting and promoting press freedom will be useful in making a comeback into strong economic development and enhanced democracy [6].

Reports by the U.S.-based Freedom House have shown that due to the deteriorating relationship between Turkey and its Western allies, such as the United States, international trade between Turkey and other nations have been affected resulting to negative impacts on the economy. The travel ban that both United States and Turkey imposed on the citizens of each other's country has had negative impacts on the economic growth of Turkey [5]. Establishment of free press is essential in establishing a stronger relationship between Turkey and other countries, a prerequisite for good trade relations. When democracy prevails and the freedom of media is respected, international trade is boosted where both United States and Turkey can mutually benefit.

The existence of political freedom and a free press can indirectly contribute to human development. This can be achieved by enhancing government responsiveness to the concerns of the public. Media liberalization is an important indicator of democracy. Nations that have greater access to information have been found to have political stability, adherence to the rule of law, government efficiency, and regulatory quality [5]. Turkey has shown a greater violation of human rights, and making reforms in the constitution to promote an undemocratic rule that does not uphold the rule of law can only worsen the economy of the nation. Allowing and respecting the freedom of the media will promote democracy, facilitate adherence to the rule of law, and promote economic development. A free and independent media is an integral part and process of the democratization and promotion of good governance, which ultimately improves human development. Supporting policies and rules that eradicate barriers to the free exchange of information and freedom of expression is important to promoting democracy and economic development [14]. Such barriers to a free press, which should be discouraged, include censorship intimidation of journalists, and domination of media outlets by the government.

A free press can enhance democratization and facilitate economic development. It is the crucial instrument for socio-economic development for Turkey. According to German

philosopher Immanuel Kant, a developed and an enlightened society of free and independent individuals cannot be realized unless there is freedom of expression [2]. A free press has been found to have positive effects on governance and economic development. The free press can increase accountability in the Turkish government that has been accused of a series of corruptions, and expand the public participation in the political decision-making beyond just a small circle of advisors. A recent study by the International Human Rights Organization has shown that no nation in the world has a free press and a simultaneously large number of its citizens living below poverty line. It facilitates the provision of social services to the country [10].

Turkey has been a strong defender of democracy in the past but has been accused of rolling backwards from the past days by curbing media freedom [15]. Information is the most valuable commodity and keeping citizens informed is key to human development. Journalists play a big role in informing the public of any fraud or violation of law by the state officers. In Turkey where political corruption is believed to be rampant free media is essential to inform the public of such incidents and enhance accountability. Journalists represent the interest of the people regarding business and political elites. The government is put under scrutiny for the actions through media [14]. When the government is put under strict scrutiny, the public resources will be used responsibly towards economic development.

Allowing media freedom in Turkey can be useful in building a strong relationship between the United States and Turkey. The former has a long history of engagement in a multidimensional trade based on the mutual respect and interests. As members of NATO, Turkey and the United States continue to maintain bilateral relationship based on universal values such as democracy, respect for human rights, freedom, and obedience to the rule of law as well as free market economy [1]. The two nations have been cooperating on a broad geographical area, including Syria, Iraq, and the Middle East where they are involved in critically important issues, such as counter-terrorism, security on energy, and nuclear non-proliferation as well as regional economic affairs. The lack of free press curbs discussions about Turkey's most recent foreign policy pivot away from the Western world. Turkey's realignment with Russia and Iran only becomes possible in this context with no serious questioning of the government policies is allowed to happen.

The relationship between Turkey and the United States of America has all along been founded on common values and interests. However, since the emergence of authoritarian rule in Turkey, this relationship has deteriorated. It went worse in the aftermath of the failed putsch in 2016. Erdogan's government was disappointed over the slow response by the U.S. to the failed coup. This factor bred uncertainty over the future course of relations. [14]. The United States had criticized mass arrests and detention of the journalists, citing it as a violation of human rights. The rapid deterioration of Turkey's democratic outlook has left an enduring source of friction for the ties.

Allowing freedom of the press to flourish without any restriction, therefore, will help both countries resolve remaining points of discord and will enhance ties in the positive direction. Both the United States and Turkey have a lot at stake in preserving the bilateral relationship driven by the interests of both countries [10]. Thus, a free press in Turkey would also help eliminating misunderstanding, toxic anti-Americanism, reckless political rhetoric, false statements and untrue reports that cast doubt on the durability of the ties.

Conclusion

Press freedom is the insurance of a properly functioning democracy. Government accountability and transparency is only possible with a free media. Recently, dictatorial mode of governance for some countries may appear more attractive in pursuing national interests in the realm of international politics. But, when considering in the context of Turkey-U.S. relationship, this mindset provides no benefits or advantages in the long term. Turkey, under a leader who is believed to have a secret agenda of leading Islamic world like a "caliphate" and who has no qualms over having relations with controversial figures and groups in the region, would be a source of instability for the Middle East.

The relationship between the United States and Turkey have deteriorated since the 2016 attempted coup, which saw violation of media freedoms and mass detention of journalists as well as American citizens over what were considered dubious charges. The U.S. faces the risk of losing Turkey and there is no little leverage left to influence the decision-making in Ankara. Turkey, angry over the U.S. refusal to extradite U.S.-based cleric Gulen, also jailed many American citizens on charges of alleged involvement in terrorist activities. While many international observers have criticized the way in which Turkey's government dealt with the attempted coup, the government continues to jail more journalists and arrest more people for coup-related charges or supporting Gulen Movement. The jailing of NASA researcher Golge and Pastor Brunson have significantly strained the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Their continued imprisonment is even bound to worsen a relationship that has existed for decades since the beginning of the Cold War.

Since democracy and transparency do not allow a drift to authoritarianism, Turkey, with its recent embrace non-

democratic form of governance, may tilt toward Iran and Russia. Consequently and naturally, the U.S. would lose a key ally, which occupies a very vital geopolitical position in the Middle East. It also would lose its diplomatic leverages and soft power influence both over Turkey and the region.

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