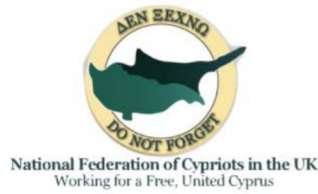


Rt. Hon. Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
Old Admiralty Building, Admiralty Place
London, SW1A 2DY



29th June 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Decision to lift UK embargo on arms exports to the Republic of Turkey

We are writing to you to express our deep concern and dismay at HM Government's recent decision to lift all restrictions on arms exports to the Republic of Turkey in contradiction of multiple provisions of the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. Is it painfully apparent to us as representatives of the British Cypriot, Kurdish, and Armenian communities that this is a decision that will exacerbate suffering for Turkey's neighbours and will destabilise the region. Arming an aggressive and authoritarian actor undermines Britain's reputation as a defender of democracy, human rights and international law, particularly at a time when Britain's stance on Russia is principled and clear.

Republic of Turkey: Internal Situation

As Foreign Secretary, you will no doubt be aware that Turkey has become increasingly autocratic and oppressive. Freedom House designates Turkey as "not free" and Reporters Without Borders rank Turkey 149th out of 180 countries globally for press freedom. Turkey has the highest incarceration rate of any Council of Europe country other than Russia. Many of the arrests target the government's democratic opposition. 13 MPs from the People's Democratic Party (HDP) have been jailed, and 59 of 65 HDP mayors removed from office, while around 40% of rank-and-file party members have faced police investigation or prosecution. Furthermore, individuals have faced legal action and detention for using the Kurdish language in Parliament, saying the word 'Kurdistan', or even wearing Kurdish colours and singing Kurdish songs.

President Erdogan of Turkey and the Turkish Government are responsible for deeply nationalistic policies and frightening rhetoric. They suppress Kurdish language and culture and continue to deny the Armenian Genocide. In addition, Turkey has converted historic Orthodox churches into mosques, including Hagia Sophia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Moreover, only 6 of the 2,500 Armenian churches in Turkey, and not a single monastery, are now operational. Turkish officials, as senior as Foreign Minister Cavusoglu, encourage the activities of the Grey Wolves, a violent Turkish ultranationalist organisation. The organisation and its symbols have been banned by multiple countries, including France. Despite this, Foreign Minister Cavusoglu made the Grey Wolves salute in public in April 2022 to a group of Armenians in Uruguay who were commemorating the Armenian Genocide.

Within the last few years, Turkey has killed and arrested hundreds of its own citizens within its own borders citing 'security operations' targeting the Kurdish minority. There can be no doubt that, contrary to the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, unrestricted British arms exports to Turkey will inevitably be used to continue repressing journalists, activists and ethnic minorities within Turkey's borders.

Turkey's Military Operations: Syria/Iraq

Turkey's invasions of Kurdish regions of Syria and Iraq have killed hundreds and displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians, and resulted in a raft of war crimes identified by the UN and other actors, including rape, pillage, murder, field executions, torture and forced disappearance. Turkish-backed militias are known to contain former ISIS commanders, as acknowledged by the US Treasury, while the US regularly targets top ISIS figures in zones of Turkish control.

The UN has documented the total displacement of Yazidis and near-total displacement of Kurds from regions where these peoples were formerly a majority. Yazidis and Kurds have been replaced by Sunni Arab militiamen and their families as part of a planned process of demographic change. Indeed, there is growing evidence that Turkey is enforcing the "Turkification" of the parts of northern Syria under its control to fundamentally alter the demographics of the region in clear violation of Article 7 of the Rome Statute. Similar actions have taken place in the parts of Cyprus that have been under Turkish military occupation since 1974, with homes and churches desecrated, as highlighted

by the 2019 Bishop of Truro report. Indeed, in Turkey itself, historic Greek, Armenian and Kurdish names of cities and towns have been changed to Turkish to eliminate traces of multicultural heritage.

As such, unrestricted arms sales to Turkey fall well short of the requirements of the Criteria, and we cannot understand how HM Government came to a different conclusion.

Turkey's Military Operations: Nagorno-Karabakh/Republic of Artsakh

Turkey has played a destabilising role in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, disputed between Armenia and Azerbaijan. For decades, the international community has sought a peaceful resolution to the contested Armenian-majority region. However, in 2020 Turkey armed the Republic of Azerbaijan with Bayraktar TB2 drones, mercenaries and military intelligence to assist the purging of Nagorno-Karabakh of its indigenous Armenians and destroying 1000-year-old Armenian cultural heritage in the region. During the war of 2020, 5000 Armenians were killed, cultural heritage was destroyed, and prisoners of war are still held by Azerbaijan in violation of the Geneva Convention. Just over a century after the Armenian Genocide, Turkey maintains a frighteningly aggressive attitude towards Armenians by continuing to deny the Genocide, blockading Armenia, and erasing Armenian cultural heritage.

Turkey and Azerbaijan's collaborative military efforts continue to use their might to force the Republic of Armenia to abandon the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and make further political concessions. They are also pushing for a land corridor between the two countries, across Armenian territory, in a similar manner to Russia's ambitions in Ukraine to connect Crimea to the Russian border.

We fail to understand how HMG can legally or morally justify the resumption of arms sales to Turkey. Turkey has been a destabilising presence in the region, creating major political and humanitarian problems for neighbours.

Turkey's Military Operations: Republic of Cyprus

Since 1974, Turkey has maintained an illegal military occupation of the northern part of the Republic of Cyprus, a key British ally in the region. The invasion continues to divide the island and its people, and caused 200,000 Cypriots to become refugees and missing persons whose fates have till yet to be determined. Turkey shows absolutely no signs of withdrawing and instead seeks to permanently partition or annex the occupied area.

Furthermore, Turkey has sent warships and fighter jets to obstruct the Republic of Cyprus' sovereign right to explore its natural resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone, a clear violation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. For example, in 2018 Italian company ENI was threatened with physical force if it did not abandon its contracted drilling activities. Indeed, there are also regular 'fly-overs' by Turkish jets seeking to intimidate and assert dominance.

Once again, when these realities are set against the Criteria and Britain's values, the decision to lift all restrictions on arms exports to Turkey is incomprehensible, and fails to satisfy the provisions of the Criteria.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined in this letter, we deem it utterly unconscionable that HM Government has decided to lift all arms trade restrictions against Turkey at a time when its domestic and foreign policy could not be more at odds with Global Britain's values.

We urge you to swiftly re-impose export restrictions to ensure that the United Kingdom is not complicit in Turkey's illegal actions. In addition, we would like to invite you and representatives of the Arms Control Joint Committee to meet with representatives of the UK Cypriot, Armenian and Kurdish communities to discuss the steps the UK is taking to hold Turkey to account over the issues outlined in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Anette Moskofian
**President, Armenian National
Committee UK**

Christos Karaolis
**President, National Federation
of Cypriots in the UK**

Miraz Yolcu
**Co-chair, Kurdish Assembly of
Britain**