

Turkey Joins Fight Against Militants

BY LARA JAKES
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — Moving from reluctance to refusal and finally to acceptance, Turkey is joining its NATO allies and fellow Sunni Muslim nations in a coalition to destroy the Islamic State militant group. But the world is still waiting for details of any new, specific aid and is warily watching to make sure Ankara keeps its commitments.

Often described as a difficult partner, Turkey long has resisted being used as a launching pad for foreign troops to attack neighboring nations. Most recently it has been accused of harboring — or at least helping — Islamic State group militants by letting them traffic fighters, weapons and lucrative oil shipments over its borders.

But the rampant insurgency has put Turkey at peril. The mostly peaceful nation that depends heavily on international tourism is now grappling with a two-fronted threat from militants who have overtaken much of bordering Syria and Iraq, as well as from Kurdish separatists whom Ankara has fought for decades. Moreover, an estimated 1.5 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees have fled to Turkey, where the economy is already fading.

Until this week, Turkey was coy about whether it would contribute to a coalition of what the U.S. says is about 50 countries that have united against the Islamic State group. For months, the world largely gave Turkey a pass as it sought to free 49 of its diplomats, family members and employees who were kidnapped by the militants from the Turkish

Consulate in Mosul, Iraq, in June.

The hostages were freed last weekend, prompting the U.S. and other coalition nations to press Turkey on what it would contribute.

President Barack Obama and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke briefly Thursday in what the White House described as a discussion on “steps we can take to advance our already strong cooperation” against the Islamic State. The two leaders agreed to continue consulting.

“We’ll always get more than people think we’re officially getting, and we’re always going to get less than what we would want,” James F. Jeffrey, former U.S. ambassador to Turkey and Iraq, told a forum this week at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “In the end, Turkey will come along.”

Jeffrey was speaking specifically about whether Ankara will let allied forces launch airstrikes from the U.S. air base at Incirlik, located within 100 miles of the Syrian border. Yet his words aptly sum up what U.S. officials describe as Washington’s overall relationship with Turkey: a push-and-pull diplomacy that rarely satisfies either nation.

But Turkey finally may now have the upper hand. As it is heavily courted by the U.S. and allies in the West and Mideast to contribute, Turkey is in a better position than ever to demand international support for its own needs — in the name of fighting the Islamic State group.

Even so, Turkey remains a stubborn partner. On Thursday, Egypt cancelled a meeting between its foreign minister and Turkey’s top diplomat at the United Nations General

Assembly, according to Turkish media. The snub came after Erdogan criticized Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi about last year’s overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood-led government in Cairo. Erdogan’s political party has ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.

And senior State Department officials say Turkey has yet to pledge any specific new assistance to the coalition, despite a number of continuing meetings on the matter. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the negotiations by name, but Erdogan met Thursday with Vice President Joe Biden, who greeted the Turkish leader as his “old friend” and congratulated him on the hostages’ release.

Earlier this week, Secretary of State John Kerry confidently announced that “Turkey will be very engaged on the front lines of this effort.” Erdogan affirmed that “we will do our part” and said Turkey’s planned contributions include “everything — both military and political,” according to Turkey’s DHA news agency. The Turkish parliament next week is expected to consider a year-long extension of cross-border military operations into Iraq and Syria.

At summits this month in Wales and Saudi Arabia, Turkey balked at committing specific assistance, despite its proximity to Iraq and Syria and its unique role as both a NATO partner and overwhelmingly Sunni state. Erdogan has for years espoused a “zero problems with our neighbors” policy that resists military action against its border states.

Syria, however, has tested that policy as Turkey has

worriedly watched the brutal tactics of Islamic extremists and Syrian President Bashar Assad’s forces just over its border.

Erdogan says at least 6,000 fighters have been caught coming through Turkey over the past year to join the Islamic State group. Black-market sales of weapons and oil also are moving from the battle zones and into Turkey. The U.S. believes Turkey’s government is not involved, although officials have said Ankara hasn’t done enough to curb the traffic.

Earlier this month, Erdogan revived the prospect of building a buffer zone on Turkey’s borders with Syria and Iraq to protect against the Islamic State group extremists without providing details. U.S. officials last year rejected the idea as too costly and controversial, saying it would need to be accompanied by a no-fly zone overhead.

Experts believe the buffer zone also could be a plot by Erdogan to keep Kurdish separatists out of Turkey. Turkey has fought for decades against rebels with the Kurdish Workers’ Party, or PKK, which Ankara and Washington both consider a terrorist organization.

Both Ankara and the separatists have denounced the Islamic State group. The two enemies worked in tandem this week to help more than 150,000 refugees from the northern Syrian city of Kobani, just outside Turkey’s border, flee the militants’ onslaught.

But tensions flared, raising the specter of canceled peace talks, after the PKK accusations that Turkey is assisting the extremists. Turkey denied the PKK’s assertions.

Forum

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“(Yankton County) did not turn us down,” Winsand said. “I could go, right now if I wanted, to accept the offer they had offered us back in April. I could go start building anytime now. The problem is there’s \$12-\$15 million of infrastructure they wanted me to pay for, plus they want me to maintain it. You go back to your spreadsheets, you put those numbers in and there’s not a return there. Why would I invest in something there’s no return in? So you go and look for an additional spot, and that’s where we’re at today.”

On the potential for losses at

smaller elevators in the area, Pesek said in discussions with other elevator owners, there isn’t a lot of urgent concern.

“When we got done talking, we all agreed that nowadays, farmers go where the price is,” he said. “In the old days when my dad had a two-ton truck ... you went to the local elevator because you had to. Nowadays, farmers build grain bins, they store the grain, sell at a market price and haul it all over the country. The elevators I’ve talked to, they’ve said, ‘Yeah, they may lose some business,’ but they have dedicated customers and their customers will still come to them.”

Brian McGinnis of Planning and Development District III pointed out that the county wouldn’t be able to raise axes just for Dakota Plains due to state law.

“People need to remember that (because of) Gov. (Bill) Janklow, we have a property tax cap in South Dakota,” McGinnis said. “No matter what happens in Bon Homme County, they can’t raise taxes beyond 3 percent a year unless there’s a vote by the people in an opt-out. To say taxes will double, you can’t do it. State law doesn’t allow a county to double taxes. The most you can increase is 3 percent per year for average growth.”

Thursday’s discussion between officials and residents became heated at several points throughout the forum.

The county is set to hold another forum on the matter Oct. 7.

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Holder

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together in more than 40 years.

“Through it all, he’s shown a deep and abiding fidelity to one of our most cherished ideals as a people, and that is equal justice under the law,” Obama said.

Holder responded by speaking of how he was inspired as a boy by Robert Kennedy’s leadership on civil rights at the Justice Department, his voice choking as he expressed his thanks to Obama and his own family. “You got through it,” Obama could be heard telling Holder as the audience stood and applauded.

In a speech earlier this week, Holder described the dual perspective he brought to the job and how it applied to the Ferguson shooting, in which a young black man was shot and killed by a white policeman. He said he had the utmost respect for police as a former prosecutor and the brother of an officer. But, he added, “As an African-American man who has been stopped and searched by police in situations where such actions were not warranted, I also carry with me an understanding of the mistrust that some citizens harbor.”

Holder told The Associated Press in an interview that he’s not sure whether the Justice Department will finish its investigation into the shooting before he leaves. “I don’t want to rush them,” Holder said. He said once out of office, he will direct attention to “issues that have animated me” during his tenure, including criminal justice and civil rights.

“If you asked me what my biggest regret was, I would

say that it was the failure to pass any responsible and reasonable gun safety legislation after the shootings in Newtown,” Holder said. He said he thought in the aftermath of the school shootings in Connecticut that the nation would embrace change that was “not radical but really reasonable” on gun ownership.

Holder aggressively enforced the Voting Rights Act, addressed drug-sentencing guidelines that led to disparities between white and black convicts, extended legal benefits to same-sex couples and refused to defend a law that allowed states to disregard gay marriages. He oversaw the decision to prosecute terror suspects in U.S. civilian courts instead of at Guantanamo Bay and helped establish a legal rationale for lethal drone strikes on suspects overseas.

He was a lightning rod for conservative critics and faced a succession of controversies over, among other things, an ultimately abandoned plan to try terrorism suspects in New York City, a botched gun-running probe along the Southwest border that prompted Republican calls for his resignation, and what was seen as a failure to hold banks accountable for the financial system’s near-meltdown.

The Republican-controlled House voted two years ago to make Holder the first sitting Cabinet member to be held in contempt of Congress — for refusing to turn over documents in the gun-running operation known as Operation Fast and Furious. The administration is still fighting in court to keep the documents confidential.

Only three other attorneys general in U.S. history have served longer than the

63-year-old Holder: William Wirt in the administrations of James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, Janet Reno in the Bill Clinton administration and Homer Cummings for Franklin Roosevelt.

Holder also is one of the longest-serving of Obama’s original Cabinet members. Two others remain: Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Holder and his wife are close personally to the Obamas, having recently vacationed together on Martha’s Vineyard, and Obama said Holder told him of his timing over the summer. The attorney general had expressed his desire to conclude his long term for some time.

White House officials said Obama had not made a final decision on a replacement for Holder, who was one of the most liberal voices in his Cabinet. White House press secretary Josh Earnest said naming a new attorney general would be a high priority for the president.

Some possible candidates that have been mentioned among administration officials include Solicitor General Don Verrilli; Deputy U.S. Attorney General James Cole; former White House Counsel Kathy Ruemmler; Preet Bharara, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York; Jenny Durkan, a former U.S. attorney in Washington state, and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a former Rhode Island attorney general.

A former deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration, Holder was pulled away from private practice to reshape a Justice Department that had been tarnished by a scandal involving fired U.S. attorneys and that had authorized harsh interrogation methods for terrorism suspects. He

immediately signaled a new direction for the incoming administration by declaring that waterboarding was torture, contrary to the George W. Bush administration’s insistence that it wasn’t.

In the first year of his tenure, Holder was widely criticized by Republicans and some Democrats for his plan to try professed Sept. 11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and other alleged co-conspirators in New York. The plan was doomed by political opposition to granting civilian criminal trials to terrorist suspects, but Holder continued to maintain that civilian courts were the most appropriate venue.

Under his watch, the Justice Department cracked down on news media reporting on national security matters. The department secretly subpoenaed phone records from Associated Press reporters and editors and used a search warrant to obtain some emails of a Fox News journalist as part of a separate leak investigation.

Stung by criticism that the department hadn’t been aggressive enough in targeting financial misconduct, Holder in the past year and a half secured criminal guilty pleas from two foreign banks and multibillion-dollar civil settlements with American banks arising from the sale of toxic mortgage-backed securities. Even then, critics noted that no individuals were held accountable.

On matters of policy, Holder spoke frankly about how his upbringing — his father emigrated from Barbados and his sister-in-law helped integrate the University of Alabama — helped shape his thinking. He referred to America in 2009 as a “nation of cowards” in its discussions of race. He later lamented that “systemic and unwarranted racial disparities remain disturbingly common.”

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