**Who wins if Turkey loses?**

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With friends like these, who needs enemies? The economic-diplomatic spat between the US and Turkey is a textbook case of how not to conduct diplomacy.

The alarming pace at which things have unravelled between the traditional friends and Nato allies of more than six decades is both sobering and instructive. By the way, Turkey contributes the largest contingent to the largely white Nato alliance. And if the situation has gone from bad to worse and deteriorated in no time, perhaps both sides are to blame.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey could have perhaps dealt with this differently and more perceptively. By responding predictably to US President Donald Trump’s characteristic shenanigans and provocations, he has only precipitated the crisis.

The mercurial and fickle nature of the US leader is hardly a secret. The alacrity with which Trump has managed to antagonise America’s closest friends and allies and undermined strategic partnerships carefully built over the years is simply unprecedented.

By openly courting Putin’s Russia, Washington’s arch foe, and wrecking relationships with close allies like Canada, Germany, Australia and even the UK, accusing them of piggybacking on the US financially, Trump has turned the whole Nato alliance on its head. He has threatened to impose punitive trade tariffs on close partners like Canada and the EU.

At home, he has outraged Republicans and Democrats by embracing Putin and giving him a clean chit on Russia’s apparent meddling in the 2016 US elections. On the other hand, he has rattled the global economy with his trade war with China and imposition of tariffs on India, two of the world’s fastest growing economies.

Of course, who could forget the now sensational and staggering turnaround on what had been billed as the ‘mother of a deal’ on Iran, the single biggest achievement of Barack Obama. Which was precisely why, methinks, Trump fought it tooth and nail from the day one, just as he has mindlessly destroyed what had been known as the Obamacare, another signature achievement of his charismatic predecessor.

Here is someone who can go to absurd lengths to avenge the slightest slights, real or imagined. The endless pageant of high-profile departures from the Trump White House over the past year and half – from FBI Director James Comey to chief strategist Steve Bannon and White House press secretary Sean Spicer to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson – and their sensational disclosures paint a disturbing picture of a deeply divided and chaotic house.

In many ways, the Turkey-US showdown had been waiting to happen. The friction between Ankara and Washington has been growing for some time on multiple fronts. The continuing US support to the Kurds in Syria has been a source of tension for some time. Turkey has already deployed its troops in Syria to deal with the challenge from Kurdish separatists.

Erdogan has been voluble and increasingly trenchant in his criticism of Israel and in expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians at a time when the US, led by Trump, has dropped all pretences of being a neutral mediator or of striving for peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict. The US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and moving the US embassy to a city sacred to three Abrahamic faiths has been the proverbial last straw in breaking the so-called peace process.

Meanwhile, Turkey’s unequivocal support for Qatar in its dispute with its Gulf neighbours has not gone down well in the region. Erdogan also ruffled many feathers by cheering for the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011. Erdogan, not just known for his strong and uncompromising stances but also for articulating them frequently without worrying too much about consequences, has also voiced support for Iran over the nuclear issue.

Turkey’s relations with the Europeans have also been strained for some time as Erdogan has frequently taken the EU and the West to task for their “double standards”.

So it is hardly surprising that one spies near jubilation in many Western and regional capitals over Turkey’s current predicament. The country, that has made impressive strides under Erdogan’s leadership to emerge as a formidable regional and global economic player, is right now teetering on the brink of a grave economic crisis.

The Turkish lira has lost nearly half of its value in the past few months, much of it after Trump announced his punitive tariffs. Erdogan has accused “economic terrorists” of fomenting the crisis. Given the many enemies he has earned himself over the years at home and abroad and the worldview he represents, his accusations aren’t entirely imaginary.

Indeed, it is not just Turkey that is at the receiving end. Two other prominent Muslim countries, Pakistan and Iran, are also facing the same predicament. Isolated and under siege, the two Muslim countries have been in the crosshairs of this US administration for some time. While Pakistan happens to be the only Muslim nation with nuclear weapons, Iran is perceived as aspiring to be one.

While Iran has been hit yet again with US sanctions, dealing a devastating blow to a country battling severe economic hardships on account of decades of sanctions, Pakistan appears headed in that direction. Indeed, all three countries are staring at unprecedented economic crises, many of them manufactured by their enemies as well as their own leaders.

Yet, tempting as it is, the embattled Muslim nations would do well to avoid needless confrontation with Trump’s America and the West in general. If anything, Trump revels in provocation. Adversity seems to bring out the worst in the man who like George W Bush sees the world in the stark, ‘with-us-or-against-us’ binary terms. Indeed, compared to the current incumbent, W comes across as the very epitome of sweet reason.

By responding to Trump’s threats and provocations in kind, Turkey would only end up hurting itself in a global economy that is hopelessly dominated and dictated by the US.

Erdogan’s Turkey inspires much love and admiration across the Muslim world for its courage to speak for the voiceless and dispossessed of this world when everyone seems to have abandoned them – the Palestinians, Syrians and Rohingya Muslims of Burma. It would be an epic tragedy if the Ottoman country goes down fighting for what it believes in and stands for.

It is in Turkey’s interest as well as that of the larger region that Erdogan resolves this row sooner than later, and as amicably as possible. As Bernard Shaw argued, when you wrestle with a pig, you end up only dirtying yourself.

Similarly, Iran cannot go on forever blaming its woes on the West and ‘Big Satan.’ It needs to open itself to the world and focus on its own challenges and problems, rather than expend its energies and limited resources in poking its nose into the affairs of its neighbours. Iran, Turkey and Pakistan need to put their house in order to take on the unprecedented challenges of a fast changing and globalising world.

Home to some of the world’s youngest populations with immense potential and promise, the Islamic world is unfortunately the least prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future. Leaders like Erdogan and Imran Khan must prove that they represent the Muslim world’s future, not its past.

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