

# Humza Yousaf must fight for all oppressed people and reject Erdoğan

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**Humza Yousaf and President Erdoğan of Turkey (Image Turkish Govt)**

WHEN Humza Yousaf met Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at COP28 and invited him to Scotland, the Turkish president was presiding over a country where internal oppression was matched only by external aggression.

Erdoğan's Turkey is a country where thousands of opposition politicians and activists are in prison; where elected mayors have been removed from their posts and replaced with government-appointed trustees; where criticism of the president can result in a prison sentence; where protest is violently put down; and where the language and culture of the Kurdish fifth of the population is unrecognised and repressed.

It is a country that has turned its back on repeated offers of peace negotiations, preferring – it is reported – to gas Kurdish guerrillas with banned chemicals; and a country that has facilitated Isis recruitment of foreign fighters, and supported other violent “Islamist” groups.

It is a country that is committed to the destruction of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava) – a region where Kurds and their neighbours have organised an oasis of democracy, women’s rights and multi-ethnic coexistence, and which has led the fight against Isis .

It is a country that has invaded and occupied parts of North and East Syria, handing control to militias that have made pillage, kidnap and extreme violence the pattern of everyday life; a country that regularly carries out targeted assassinations of key figures in North and East Syria’s administration, and that inflicts almost daily bombardment on the region’s villages; a country that, only two months before the COP meeting, had carried out major unprovoked air attacks that purposely targeted North and East Syria’s civilian infrastructure, knocking out power stations and oil fields (the mainstay of the region’s economy) as well as destroying two hospitals, and killing 44 people.

Since that COP meeting, Erdoğan has presided over two further mass bombardments, and he promises more. As a result of Turkey’s attacks, millions of people in North and East Syria are currently without electricity, water and cooking gas; economic and social life is at a standstill; and people are in fear of their lives. The insecurity provides fertile soil for the revival of Isis.

Because Erdoğan’s actions have received little international censure, he feels free to act with impunity.

Everything Erdoğan (correctly) accuses Israel of, he has done himself against the Kurds. When he claimed outrage at Israel’s targeting of electricity and water supplies, places of worship, hospitals and schools, and asked “what about human rights?”, he knew what he was talking about because his military had been doing the same things in North and East Syria.

When Turkey’s foreign minister highlighted how Israel has driven Palestinians from their land, he could have been describing Turkey’s ethnic cleansing of the areas they have occupied in Syria.

When Erdoğan shared an image of himself holding up maps that show Israel's increasing encroachment over Palestinian land, it provided a distorted echo of his display of the map of Syria at the UN General Assembly in 2019. That Syrian map showed the 30km-wide strip of predominantly Kurdish Syrian land over which he demands control, part of which his forces subsequently invaded. At another display of his Syrian map, he claimed that "Kurdish lifestyle is not suitable for these places".

While Erdoğan appeals to Palestinians and their supporters by condemning the brutality of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu attempts to appeal to Kurds by denouncing Erdoğan. They are two sides of the same coin and have no problems working together when it suits them. Their hypocritical relationship was summed up by Netanyahu at a Likud rally in 2020, when he joked: "Once he used to call me Hitler every three hours, now it's every six hours, but thank God the trade [between Israel and Turkey] is up!"

Erdoğan uses the Palestinian cause to burnish his own credentials, but his country has continued to provide passage for 40% of Israel's oil imports, piped from Azerbaijan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan.

Yousaf won approval when he bucked the political trend and showed solidarity with the Palestinian people, but a First Minister needs to stand with the oppressed of all nations, not just those with whom he has a personal connection. If he fails to do so, that approval will quickly and rightly evaporate.

Westminster has upbraided Yousaf for meeting Erdoğan without the presence of a Foreign Office chaperone, but what really matters is that he appears to have met Erdoğan without doing his homework and in the absence of his critical faculties.

For most of its supporters, Scottish independence means more than the same old politics under a different flag. It is an opportunity for Scotland to follow a more progressive path. Those who place themselves at the head of the independence struggle should attempt to set out on that path and – in the words of the much-quoted epigram – "Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation".

A progressive Scottish foreign policy has no place for Erdoğan.