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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Turkey condemns slam by U.S. candidate Perry (Reuters)

WASHINGTON, Jan 17 (Reuters) - Turkey condemned as "unfounded and inappropriate" on Tuesday comments by U.S. Republican presidential hopeful Rick Perry that the country is ruled by Islamic terrorists and questioning whether it should remain in the NATO alliance.

Perry, the governor of Texas, also said during a Republican debate in South Carolina on Monday that the United States should eliminate all aid to its long-time ally.

"Obviously when you have a country that is being ruled by what many would perceive to be Islamic terrorists, when you start seeing that sort of activity against their own citizens, then yes - not only is it time for us to have a conversation about whether or not they belong in NATO, but it's time for the United States, when we look at their foreign aid, to go to zero with it," Perry said.

Perry's campaign said the candidate was responding to the Fox News questioner asking about issues such as violence against civilian women. A spokesman said there was a need to "send a message" to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government.

"Turkey can be a valuable ally, but the actions of the current government undermine that country's role in an organization like NATO," Ray Sullivan, Perry's communications director, said in an emailed statement.

"We need to send the message to Turkey that internal violence, association with terrorist groups and radical Islamist influence are inconsistent with being a NATO ally and positive player in world affairs," he said.

Turkey noted that it had joined NATO when Perry was just 2 years old, and cited its long history of fighting terrorism, including co-chairing the Global Counterterrorism Forum with the United States.

"We strongly condemn the unfounded and inappropriate allegations expressed yesterday evening about our country during a debate held in South Carolina by Texas Governor Rick Perry, who is running for Republican Nomination for the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election," Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Selcuk Unal said in Ankara.

He noted that Perry trailed in the race for the Republican nomination to oppose President Barack Obama's re-election next year and said, "This reflects the commonsense of the U.S. electorate."

In Washington, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said the Obama administration fundamentally disagreed with the assertion that Turkey was run by Islamic terrorists.

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