

Turkish President: CIA Plans to Rescue Pastor Andrew Brunson

Turkey's president claims the CIA and Mossad, Israel's national intelligence agency, are planning a rescue mission of American pastor Andrew Brunson.

Turkey's president Recep Erdogan reportedly told A-Haber TV, a channel owned by Erdogan's son-in-law, that members of the CIA and Mossad are staying in houses and apartments near Mr. Brunson's home.

Brunson, a 50-year-old native of Black Mountain, North Carolina, was arrested in December 2016 by Turkish authorities who claimed that he was a spy and had connections to a terrorist group—a charge Mr. Brunson has vehemently denied.

He was recently moved to house arrest after spending nearly two years in a Turkish jail. A-Haber TV's website claims Turkish authorities have identified the Western agents and are keeping a close watch on their activities. Brunson has to wear an electronic monitoring device 24 hours a day.

Brunson led an evangelical church in İzmir for over 20 years without incident. All that changed in 2016, when he, along with tens of thousands of Turks, were rounded up by authorities during an alleged coup attempt. Brunson was accused of obtaining state secrets with the intention of overthrowing Turkey's government. He could spend the rest of his life in prison if convicted.

Pastor Brunson's case has severely soured relations between the two countries. A delegation of Turkish officials is expected in Washington this week to discuss how to resolve the political impasse. The pending visit comes after the White

House slapped sanctions on President Erdogan's justice minister and interior minister, accusing them of playing a role in Brunson's arrest. {eoa}

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