

TURKEY: UNREPENTANT THREAT TO PEACE

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In recent weeks, Turkey has gone overboard with naked threats of war in the Aegean. Frustrated because of slow progress in its highjack incursion into Syria and impending research drilling for hydrocarbons by the Republic of Cyprus, aspiring Islamic president-for-life Erdogan is lashing out with fervor unusual even by Turkish thuggish standards. His maniacal rants are seconded by members of his government rushing to warn the world of how Turkish “power” can destroy all enemies and teach lessons to those doubting the potential of an “Ottoman slap.”

The postwar Western narrative on Turkey hinged on the foolhardy view of Turkish “democracy” being a purported powerful civilizing influence upon other Moslem authoritarian countries. The West’s Cold War warriors, acting as Ankara’s willing cheerleaders, **deliberately ignored the core basic facts about post-1923 “modern” Turkey:** a nationalist political system built upon the rivers of blood of the genocide of its Christian populations—Armenians, Greeks, Syrians; a “republic” commanded by the army as the guarantor of a newfound secularism demanded by Kemal, “modern” Turkey’s founder; and Turkey’s suppressed, and thus dangerous, dormant Islamic fundamentalist heart.

Today, under Erdogan's prodding, Turkey has emerged as a clear and continuous threat to Eastern Mediterranean, and, possibly global, peace. Erdogan's inimical role in the Syrian disaster, firmly on the side of Islamist fundamentalist terror groups, is well-documented. The latest manifestation of Ankara's treacherous game is the military incursion across the Turkish-Syrian border to battle Kurdish fighters based in the town of Afrin. For the longest time, Ankara has insisted the Kurds are "terrorists" threatening Turkish security.

As Ankara finds itself increasingly isolated from its Western "allies," Turkey's saber rattling in the Aegean against "NATO ally" Greece has reached a new crescendo. Worries about Turkish behavior must be increasing in European capitals because Greek protests, usually ignored by Greece's "partners," have elicited a suspiring [German expression of support](#) underlining Berlin's deem view of Erdogan's antics. When the Turkish autocrat sent his warships to block natural gas exploration in Cypriot waters, in a blatant act of "pre-war" against the Republic of Cyprus, the Brussels EU directorate issued a [rare warning](#) stressing Europe's "solidarity" with Greece and Cyprus -- and thus putting in doubt an invitation for Erdogan to attend a European powwow scheduled for March 26 in Varna, Bulgaria. This expanding Turkish belligerence, and Erdogan's in-your-face provocations, have also led to calls for tossing Turkey out of NATO ([see this](#), for example).

The question now demanding an answer is whether Erdogan's vicious brinkmanship could trigger military action to restore Turkey's Ottoman "greatness."

The **rational** answer to this question should be in the negative. Turkey, for better or for worse, is too deeply integrated into the Western economic and international trading system to

commit suicide by aggressive war. But, given the level of “sanity” presently driving Ankara’s hostile maneuvering, all bets are off.

Erdogan’s opportunistic flirting with Moscow and Tehran has produced little past offering Turkey an unimportant rear bus seat in the Syrian crisis and no tangible economic incentives. Turkey’s Sunnis aren’t exactly on amiable terms with the Iranian Shia mullahs. And Erdogan’s deep-seated anti-Americanism and constant virulent attacks on US policies in the region do not bode well for the future of US-Turkish relations.

Neither Washington nor Moscow should have an appetite for Turkey igniting a war in the Aegean when the entire Middle East is at boiling point. But, both the US and Russia should not underestimate Erdogan’s impulsive character, fundamentalist beliefs, and neo-Ottoman manias, all of them fuses attached to the Turkish powder keg. Now involved in a fierce domestic struggle to stifle all opposition to his rule, the aspiring sultan is dangerously impulsive and unpredictable. The message he sends to his armed forces is anything but on the side of caution and the maintenance of peace as he [establishes himself](#) as Turkey’s first civilian military supremo. By decimating the ranks of the military following the [purported coup of July 2016](#), Erdogan has undermined the military’s cohesion and continues to push his soldiers to adopt Islamic supranationalism as the guiding principle of today and tomorrow.

In the Aegean, the recent deliberate [collision](#) of a Turkish fast craft with a Greek coast guard patrol vessel near the Greek islets of Imia demonstrated how Erdogan’s “great power” rants can spark a dangerous crisis. A [visit](#) by the US Secretary of State to Ankara to repair US-Turkish relations, in the shadow of the Turkish incursion into Syria, had inconclusive results.

Washington has repeatedly indicated US forces won't be withdrawing any time soon from Syria and has no immediate intention to abandon its Kurdish allies. On his part, Erdogan has threatened to attack US forces if they side "with terrorists." It remains to be seen how the United States will react to Turkey killing US soldiers.

Syria could easily turn into the tomb of Turkish aspirations. The four-way tussle of the US, Russia, Iran, and the Assad regime, augmented by the mind-boggling conflicts of various warring parties inside Syria itself, leave little room for Turkish "great power" maneuvering.

To secure even a minimum of Turkish targets, Erdogan needs US cooperation past diplomatic niceties. At this present time, however, such cooperation isn't forthcoming given Erdogan's maximalist demands and, especially, his aspirations of driving a Turkish wedge east of the Euphrates river, an area the US considers vital to its own strategic interests and plans to maintain under its own control.

To add to Erdogan's woes, Russia won't be abandoning the Assad regime any time soon. The Syrian strongman's sudden, and until recently inconceivable, convergence with the Kurds fighting the Turkish cross-border incursion, awkwardly named "Operation Olive Branch," is proof of the quick-sand conditions Erdogan must continually face in the Syrian cauldron with little, if any, ability to turn the tables to his advantage.

At the end of the day, Turkey, **the unrepentant threat to regional and, possibly, world peace,** thanks to a grandiose, conceited, hostile, and aggressive world view, may need a brutal lesson in order to scale back its expectations of restoring the Ottoman empire. Cutting Turkey

down to size won't be easy, but, thankfully, Ankara's neo-sultan is working full-time to trigger exactly such a restorative event.