

A Perfect Storm on the Horizon. Turkey's Hegemonic Ambitions

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Russia is pushing back the Turkish Army in Idlib. As the Turks broke through the Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) defence the latter called for air assistance from Russia. The fighters came and victory was the SAA's. With that all uncertainty is gone. Russia will keep its promise of maintaining the integrity of the Syrian state, even when an "ally" is attempting to force her to break that promise. Relations with difficult Turkey is no reason for Russia to betray a decades-old major ally in West Asia.

After all, to all intents and purposes, Ankara is proving to be an unworthy ally irrespective of the benefits given and promised. Appeased many times — including the intentional downing of a SU-24 Russian fighter in 2015 near the Syria-Turkey border; and the assassination of the Russian envoy to Turkey. But Turkey appeared to straddle both East and West. Trump was defied and the purchase of the Russian S-400 air defence system went through. However, many saw that sale as Putin's foolishness knowing that President Erdogan was not a man of his word. And, it has been reported that apparently, Ankara is threatening to deploy the S-400 against Syria in the current conflagration. Thus proving the skeptics correct.

But if others are suspicious of Erdogan, surely it is safe to assume that President Putin must have taken this into consideration before selling the S-400 to Turkey, especially given the rocky history between these two countries. Surely Putin is not so naive as to think that appeasement and Erdogan's debt for the rumoured early warning of the American backed coup against Erdogan bought him the latter's undying loyalty?

Are regional hegemonic ambitions worth the high stakes gamble? If not hegemony, what is the likely cause of Erdogan pushing Moscow to bare its fangs? Are the Kurds such a threat that controlling their territory in Syria is not something that Ankara can compromise on?

The fight is progressively becoming more dangerous — note that Turkey remains a NATO member — and now Ankara has persuaded Washington to back it. As of a week ago the fighting has reached a new intensity as a result. The Turks are fighting the SAA on the ground and the Russians in the air. This could further escalate if Ankara can persuade other NATO members that it is being attacked by Russia thus taking the war to a whole new level. History shows that NATO has long looked for war with Russia. In recent years the impression is that NATO is satisfied that Russia has been effectively encircled and can be defeated.

These possibilities of escalation, all parties involved are well aware of. Hence the intense

diplomacy between Ankara and Moscow. Fact on the ground shows nothing less than the victorious SAA winning back most territories around Idlib held by the terrorists. Nevertheless peace is being denied the Syrians by the unending interference of the US and its allies and Turkey appears nothing less than a staunch US ally in preventing Syria a total victory around Idlib, while the US determinedly occupies the oil rich Syrian territories in Deir Ezzor in far eastern Syria.

It seems ludicrous, therefore, to view Turkey as a Russian ally any longer. Not only has Turkey not delivered her part of the Sochi de-escalation agreement, Ankara has openly threatened Damascus. The Ankara position is one where the invader is wanting the invaded to embrace being invaded. Syria is, at pain of invasion, not allowed to kill the invading soldiers.

Russia was not amused. Not something Ankara expected thinking instead that "neither Russia nor Syria would seek to escalate the fighting in Idlib to include force on force engagements with a NATO member," writes Scott Ritter.

Erdogan has also been reported as saying "Turkey will not allow the Syrian government to take control of the province (Idlib). Which is then what the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov described as the "worst case scenario".

Diplomatically, all this boils down to the "need to implement everything that our leaders (Putin and Erdogan) have agreed upon," said Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister. Is this possible, when one party has decided to renege on its responsibilities? Ankara has not been coy about its unwillingness to meet its obligations. Rather, Ankara has done a Trump, renege on its obligations.

It is true to say that even a whiff of Syrian victory at reclaiming her territories has brought on tactics to impede a resolution. The US would airlift out terrorist groups friendly to her only to return them to battle. In certain instances the US allies have acted as air cover for the terrorists as in the 2016 Deir Ezzor air raid which killed 50 Syrian Army and allied troops, which the US claimed was accidental. This particular airstrike facilitated the terrorists' advance on the Syrian position.

Is peace, then, possible for Syria given the powers ranged against her, powers with no compunction to resort to any move, legal or otherwise to thwart Damascus? Even the battle hardened SAA with years of experience are kept fighting against any number of groups of terrorists acting as proxies. When the SAA wins they are threatened with retaliation.

It would appear that a Russian intervention of the sort that puts paid to any terrorist victory is the only way. But then the armies of other nations will step in to try a push back of the victorious SAA from their own Syrian territories as if they had no right to them. A total and final victory cannot but come from a determined strike against invading forces. But as Idlib has proven Syria cannot be restored intact without Russian support. The question then is, are the powers, NATO et al, edging towards a World War? One does get the impression that at this time the US and its NATO allies are erring towards the belief that they can win such a war.

And, Russia has overtly taken a no-nonsense posture. Is the world walking straight into the perfect storm given adverse global economic conditions compounded by the impact of the Covid-19 virus now already menacing the world?

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