

Turkey Invades Syria to “Remove Bashar al-Assad”

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President Erdogan of Turkey has issued a statement saying his troops have entered Syria with the intention of ousting President Assad.

Turkey has been illegally running soldiers, artillery and infantry in and out of Syria for much of the duration of the present conflict. Now, however, the proxy and shadow war, which Turkey has been waging against the Syrian Arab Republic, has just become official.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has just announced that Turkish troops have entered Syria with the intention of removing President Assad from power. It is a formal declaration of war.

If this threat is genuine, the person who could lose power might not be Assad but Erdogan himself. This summer's poorly organised coup attempt in Turkey was brought about by deep divisions in Turkish society, divisions sowed by Erdogan's extreme and often manic policies. Although Erdogan has retaliated severely against many of the coup leaders and supporters, his position is far from being as stable as he might dream that it is.

Erdogan's announcement comes shortly after Russia and Turkey reconciled following a period of highly strained diplomatic relations as a result of Turkey downing a Russian jet over Syria in 2015.

Part of the reconciliation agreement made between Presidents Putin and Erdogan, stated that the two countries will cooperate over Syria. If Turkey aims to use her military to oust Assad, this agreement is as good as dead, and what's more, by declaring war on the legitimate government of Syria, Turkey is by extrapolation, declaring war on Russia.

The flippancy with which Erdogan conducts foreign policy may well be his undoing. He is clearly fearful that when Donald Trump takes office, all of the major international players will be stacked against the mutual ambition of Turkey and the terrorists operating in Syria to remove Assad.

Erdogan is likely considering this as well as the fact that his attempt to gain a major foothold in northern Iraq isn't going as planned. The western led coalition against ISIS in Mosul isn't making the progress its leaders anticipated. Moreover, the Kurdish forces who Turkey has entered Iraq to eliminate, seem to be fighting rather better than Turkey and her US-European allies.

Equally crucial is the continued floundering of the so-called Free Syrian Army, a name generally assigned to the anti-government terrorists in Syria who are working most closely

with Turkey. Since they seem incapable of doing Turkey's bidding, Turkey may be looking to do the job themselves.

Not since America threatened to impose a no-fly zone over Syria, something which would have grounded Russian and Syrian planes, has the situation in Syria come so close a major fight between large powers.

There are, however, two areas from which hope can be derived. First of all, Erdogan is known for blustery, bellicose and threatening rhetoric, aimed more at his domestic supporters than an international audience. This could be one of those instances.

Secondly, members of the Russian government, perhaps even President Putin himself, must speak directly with Erdogan and explain the full consequences of his actions. It could bring Turkish troops into direct conflict with not only Russian and Syria armed forces but also with those of Iran and Hezbollah.

With the US all but conceding ground in the conflict, as the Syrian and Russian forces make staggering breakthroughs in Aleppo, Turkish forces could rapidly find themselves outnumbered by opponents as worthy as they are angry.

If things go badly for Turkey in Syria, it could lead to a far more organised coup against Erdogan, one that he might not see off. Erdogan has time and again proved to be something of a madman. His next move will determine whether or not he is also a stupid man.

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