

Turkey on the Ropes

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

This has been an amazing week which saw the first clear sign of the collapse of the EU and Turkish President Erdogan presenting his excuses to Russia for the downing of a Russian SU-24 over Syria 7 month ago. While the latter event was largely eclipsed by the former, it might be the sign of something even more dramatic taking place: the collapse of Turkey.

Does that seem like hyperbole?

Let's look again.



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The Presidency of Erdogan has been nothing short of cataclysmic for Turkey which resulted in a perfect storm of crises, each of the very serious:

1) Crisis in Syria: the Turkish policy of support for Daesh to overthrow Assad has failed. Abjectly so. Not only is Assad still in power, but the latest bombing in Turkey seem to indicated that Daesh is turning against Turkey now (assuming the official explanations is true, which it might not be as we will discuss below). The entire Syria policy of Erdogan is now in shambles.

2) Crisis with the EU: the last thing the Brits did before Brexiting was to [tell Turkey that it could join the EU in 3000 years](#). Other EU member states were not as direct, but everybody knows that this is true. Furthermore, the grand Erdogan-Merkel friendship and alliance has completely fizzled out.

3) Crisis with the Armenians: when the German Parliament recognized the genocide of the Armenians and, soon thereafter, [so did the Pope](#), it was pretty darn clear that the western powers that be were sending Turkey a simple message: a raised middle finger. Love story over, screw you!

4) Crisis with the USA: US special forces have now been spotted in Iraq wearing Kurdish badges. While minor, this incident is telling and has greatly angered the Turks. Bottom line: the Empire needs the Kurds in Iraq and Syria and Turkey takes second place right now.

5) Crisis with Iran: by supporting Daesh, by trying to sabotage the "Islamic pipeline" and by trying to overthrow Assad, Turkey has completely alienated Tehran.

6) Crisis with the Kurds: by engaging in an even more brutal level of anti-Kurdish

violence the Turks have basically re-ignited a full scale civil war and the Kurds are showing no signs of getting weaker. In fact, they are currently more powerful than ever, courtesy of the US invasion of Iraq.

7) Crisis with NATO: following the downing of the Russian SU-24 NATO clearly indicated to Erdogan that he was on his own and that NATO would not get involved in a Turkey-triggered war.

8) Crisis with Russia: the downing of the SU-24 did not result in the expected Russian military response, but resulted in 7 months of crippling economic sanctions by Russia and an enormous loss of prestige by Turkey. More about this later.

So, this can be all summed up by saying that Turkey under Erdogan has shown a truly Ukrainian-level of incompetence, arrogance and delusion.

It is in this, truly dramatic, context that Erdogan had to write his letter of apology.

The first thing which should be said about this is that Erdogan took a major political risk: after spending months chest-thumping and declaring *uri et orbi* that Turkey will never, ever, apologize if only because Turkey was in the right, this sudden “zag!” puts Erdogan in a very difficult position. Hence the initial rumors that the letter said that he was “sorry” but not “apologizing” or, second variant, that the apology was only to the family of the murdered Russian pilot, but not to Russia. This did not last too long and pretty soon the bewildered Turks gave up trying to give this apology a face-lift. It was exactly what everybody understood it to be: a real full and humiliating apology.

Next there was a statement of the Turkish foreign minister categorically denying that any compensation would be paid. That too lasted a couple of hours until it was admitted that not only would Turkey pay, but Turkey would pay whatever was demanded.

Finally, there is a very real possibility that the bombing of the airport in Ankara Istanbul might be a very direct message sent to Erdogan: “*if you try to appease the Russians we will unleash hell on you*”. And while Daesh is a prime candidate for sending that kind of message, there are other possible candidates: the US, of course, and the Turkish deep-state. To make matters even more complicated, we should not discard any scenario as impossible, including the possibility that Erdogan himself, and his supporters, engaged in a false-flag event to justify 1) cooperation with Russia against terrorism and 2) turning against Daesh.

Right now, the official version (Daesh did it) makes sense to me, but I would not discount any other possibility.

What is certain is that the stakes in Turkey are now sky-high and that Erdogan is fighting for his future and, possibly, the future of Turkey as a state. His opening towards Russia [and, at the same time, Israel](#) is a clear sign of despair. If only because Russia is unlikely to offer much in terms of rewards for the following reasons:

First, the Russians are now deeply suspicious of Erdogan and consider him a loose cannon, possibly a lunatic, who cannot be trusted and who can make a zag after every zig.

Second, the letter was a first, necessary, step to reopen negotiations, but the negotiations themselves will be a long process. Foreign Ministers Lavrov and Cavusoglu will begin these

negotiations this week, but the number of issues to be discussed is very long. Most importantly, the Russians will demand tangible and important steps from Turkey, especially in Syria and in regards to Turkey sponsored terrorism in Russia and the Ukraine. It is by no means clear to me that Erdogan will be willing to make such major concessions. Officially, I expect a lot of smiles and hopeful declarations, but behind closed door the Russians will be making many tough demands. It is not clear to me that Erdogan could yield to the Russian demands even if he wanted to.

Erdogan really appears to have deluded himself that he is some kind of major player and he is now discovering that he is not. What is even worse, he now probably realizes that he has many dangerous enemies and no friends at all.

Potentially, Russia could offer Turkey a lot, way more than just a return to better relations, tourists and a market for Turkish vegetables. But my feeling is that Erdogan is turning to Russia in despair and to improve his bargaining position towards all the others enemies he has made. The problem is that the Russians probably see that too and that they will be very cautious, even if they hide this caution behind all manners of nice diplomatic language.

I might be wrong here, but I think that the Russians want Erdogan out. In their minds they have already “Saakashvilized” him if only because Turkey is an extremely important country, strategically located and Russia cannot afford to have a delusional lunatic ruling it. Furthermore, the Turkish people have a major problem on their hands: a severe case of multiple personality disorder. They have to decide if they want to be secular Europeans, “Young Turk” neo-Fascist nationalists, Islamic radicals, Kemalist secularists? Do they want an impossible mono-ethnic Turkey or can they accept that others not only live there too, but also that these “others” lived in these lands long before the Turkic nomads invaded them? Right now, Turkey is anti-European, anti-Russian, anti-Armenian, anti-Kurdish, anti-Armenian, anti-Christian, anti-Arabic, anti-Persian, anti-Greek, etc. That makes Turkey a big powder keg which any spark could detonate. And the problem for Russia is that this powder keg is uncomfortably close and deeply involved in the Ukraine, Crimea, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

What this all means is that it is in Russia’s strategic interest to have a responsible and trustworthy partner to deal with. Sadly, I don’t see that as very likely because, *just as in the case of the Ukraine and Israel, the problem with Turkey is that this is an artificial, illegitimate and fundamentally unsustainable country.*

Israel, the Ukraine and Turkey are all built on a rabidly nationalist/racist worldview which offers no hope to anybody that does not agree with this worldview. This is why, for the Turks, the Kurds are either “[mountain Turks](#)” or “terrorists” who deserve to be shot. It would be naïve to the extreme to think that the mindset which made the genocide of Armenians, along with many other minorities (Christian Assyrians, Syrians, Chaldeans and Greeks), has somehow disappeared especially if we keep in mind that a) the Turks still deny the reality of this genocide and b) that *this genocide has never stopped*, but only slowed down:

Genocide, besides the actual physical destruction of the members of the target group, aims also to erase all traces of the target group’s identity, through forced assimilation. In the Armenian case, it was mainly women and children who were forced to convert to Islam, adopting Turkish or Kurdish names and thus lost their Armenian identity over time. Another measure of the genocidal process is deleting all traces of the population who have been massacred or

driven away by such deportations. This includes destruction of all buildings and monuments while renaming all the names of villages, towns, rivers, and other things that can attest to the presence of Armenians in the area. In 1914, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople presented a list of Armenian sacred places that were under his supervision. The list contained 2,549 religious sites of which 200 were monasteries while 1,600 were churches. A survey in 1974 showed that only 916 Armenian churches could be identified within Turkey's borders, half of which were almost completely destroyed and among the rest only ruins of 252 items remained. The authorities have also renamed almost all villages, towns, mountains, and rivers in Armenia and changed their historical Armenian name to Turkish ones. This policy continues even in our days when, for example, the Turkish Interior Ministry announced in 2005 that it would rename certain animal Latin names since they had "separatist tendencies". *Armeniana Ovis* (sheep) would be renamed *Ovis orientalis Anatolicus*, while *Capreolus Capreolus Armenus* (deer) would be called *Capreolus Capreolus capreolus*. Even *Vulpes Vulpes Kurdistanica* (red fox) was to be renamed *Vulpes Vulpes*. The proposal was rejected by UNESCO, the UN agency in charge of these data, referring to the unfounded the Turkish reasons for the changes ([source](#))

And then there is Cyprus, which the Turks still illegally occupy. Again, such levels of violence in and around artificial and illegitimate countries is something normal and not a temporary fluke (see: the Ukraine and Israel).

What this all means for Russia is that while the Kremlin will warmly welcome Erdogan's latest "zag" and while efforts will be made to return to a more or less situation, the only possible long term goal for Russia is to support either the break-up or the federalization of Turkey into some kind of more or less civilized country. The good news for Russia is that she really need not make any special efforts towards that goal as the Turks, just like the Israelis and the Ukrainians, are doing a splendid job making sure that their political project never becomes viable. The best thing Russia can do at this point in time is to brace for the likely flare-up of violence in Turkey and try to protect herself, and her allies, from the inevitable fallout.

As for Turkey – the future looks very grim. The latest move to court Russia and Israel will not meaningfully improve the strategic situation for Turkey. At best, it will give the appearance of a pseudo-regional détente. But nothing else will change unless the Turkish state itself changes and that is something that the Turkish people do not seem to be willing to accept, at least not in the foreseeable future.

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