



**Liberal Democracy Institute**

## Situation Report

# Erdogan's Turkey and the Politics of Getting Lost

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## **Introduction:**

“Geography is destiny,” and Turkey has been trying, for a while, to make use of its strategic geographic location to realize maximum political and economic benefits, by playing the role of the Trans-regional hub for Europe, Africa, and Asia. However, the confusing policy of President Erdogan’s regime, which resembles a dangerous mixture of ultranationalist and political Islamism, enhanced by the militarization of foreign policy has turned Turkey into being “the stone in the bread” for most of its geographic neighbors in the three continents. That includes Turkey’s European allies, neighbors in the Mediterranean Sea, Russia, Iran, and the broader Middle East.

In this situation report, the Liberal Democracy Institute (LDI) is trying to decode the confusing politics of Erdogan’s ultranationalist Islamist regime, through five main chapters dealing with:

- 1) the domestic sufferings of the Turkish people resulting from human rights violations and collapsing economy;
- 2) the conflict in the Mediterranean Sea and how it fired back on Turkey’s diplomatic endeavors;
- 3) Turkey’s dilemma in North Africa where the previous policies the Erdogan regime adopted in the Middle East does not work;
- 4) how Turkey became a threat to its closest allies in Europe, Asia, and NATO which threatens more isolation and lack of security; and
- 5) finally, we ask if the Turkish military, due to its historical powerful position and political role, could intervene in some legal way to save Turkey from this inevitable fate of failing locally, regionally, and internationally.



## **1) Human rights injustices and the collapsing economy**

### **• Time for a Turkish revolution against Erdogan?**

The human rights abuses committed by the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his regime against the Turkish people, the Kurds in northern Syria, and the innocent civilians of Libya, has been all over the news for a while. Most of the inhabitants of Planet Earth are aware of the well-documented support by Erdogan and his party to the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorists and other terrorist organizations that have been wreaking havoc in the Middle East since the early days of the Arab Spring. Erdogan and his party represent the Turkish branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the parent organization of an infinite number of local terrorist organizations operating all over the region; e.g. Hamas, Hasm, and Gayyish Elnosra. Because of Erdogan, Turkey abandoned its long-embraced secular principles and turned into an ally to the notorious sponsors of terrorism in the Middle East; i.e. Qatar and Iran.

However, the international community has done so little to control Erdogan's irrational and illegal actions that wasted thousands of innocent lives, so far. Ironically, the card Erdogan is playing to deter the international community from holding him accountable is the exact same practice for which he should be punished. That is his sponsorship of ISIS terrorists. The United States and Russia consider Turkey an important ally, mainly because of his strong economic relations with ISIS terrorists; regardless the fact that this economic partnership is based on steeling the oil of Syria and selling it to Erdogan's regime via a company owned by Erdogan's son and known for its illegal practice of money laundering on an international scale. Europe, which



treats Turkey as the bastard child most of the time, is deliberately turning a deaf ear to Erdogan's violations, out of fear of Erdogan releasing ISIS terrorists into European countries.

Human rights defenders, worldwide, are the only groups that are strongly standing up for Erdogan. Their persistent documentation of Erdogan's violations of human rights and oppression of the Turkish citizens is the only window of hope for the large masses of angry, but defeated, Turkish youth. While Erdogan is using Turkey's wealth to support terrorism and the compulsory militarized youth to fight illegitimate wars in the Middle East, with the sole purpose of manifesting his Muslim Brotherhood's goal to establish Caliphate system in the region, the Turkish economy fell to a miserable state of poverty and lack of resources and the unemployment rate reached 13.7% at the end of 2019.

The practice of democracy in Muslim majority countries is, unfortunately, known for its shocking and unpleasant consequences. That is particularly true when the state in question is going through some economic difficulties and the people are fed up with corrupt secular regimes. Turkey is one major example on this. Erdogan came to power through abusing democracy to convince the Turkish people that his Islamic agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood is the answer to their political and economic troubles. Once Erdogan came to power, he destroyed democracy by announcing the State of Emergency, editing the constitution to give himself broad powers, and issuing the so-called "Terrorism Law" to use against his political opponents, journalists, and the civilian citizens who dare to criticize his policies.

In January, the United Nations' Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) session on Turkey turned into almost an interrogation.



The session, which lasted for more than three hours, was concluded by announcing 455 recommendations to improve human rights situation in Turkey. That is, allegedly, the highest number of recommendations a country has ever received on a UPR review. The most prominent recommendations were to condemn the repressive practices, arbitrary arrests, systematic torture and extra-judicial killing by the regime against citizens, especially media workers, political opposition, and young influencers on social media.

In March, the US Department of state issued its annual report on the human rights situation in the world and devoted a long chapter for recounting the large number of abuses practiced by Erdogan's regime, throughout 2019. The American report focused on the cruelty of the Turkish regime in exploiting laws to justify the oppression of citizens and the violation of fundamental rights and freedoms, primarily what is known as the "terrorism law" which Erdogan issued in parallel with the declaration of the state of emergency after the alleged coup attempt, only to use it to pursue political opponents and opinion-holders who reject his foreign and domestic policies. What a cruel scene that allowed Erdogan, the notorious sponsor of terrorism, manipulate the rule of law to silence journalists and public opinion influencers by accusing them of practicing terrorism against his regime!

If Erdogan managed to immune himself against the accountability measures of the international community, he cannot secure himself against the angry citizens. The unprecedented crackdown by Erdogan sadistic regime on the Turkish citizens is expected to backfire against him, soon. It is time for the political opposition in Turkey to seize the moment to encourage the people to break the barrier of fear that Erdogan has built over the past few years, and then to participate positively and express its position through non-violent



means of resistance that have proven their effectiveness and strong impact around the world.

## **2. Setting the Mediterranean on Fire**

- **The Fall of Turkey on the Rock of Erdogan's Prejudices**

*"Prejudice is the biggest human flaw. Prejudice makes people blind and deaf. When you look at an issue with prejudice, you cannot see the truth, or hear the facts."* These are the wise words of the Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar, commenting on Greece position in the Mediterranean conflict, during an interview with Anadolu Agency, on August 27. One can hardly argue against the acumen in Hulusi Akar's words. Yet, the decision maker, who really needs to hear this, is not the Greeks, but Akar's own boss; the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

It is Erdogan's imperialist, Islamist, ultranationalist prejudices that initiated the most recent episode of the conflict in the Mediterranean. They were also the fuel for the conflicts that have been corroding the Middle East, for over a decade. The sufferings of the Kurds on the southern borders of Turkey; the tragedy of the Palestinian people in Gaza on the hands of Hamas; the never-ending civil war and the empowerment of ISIS in Syria; and the recent escalation of the conflict in Libya between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the Government of National Accord (GNA), are caused by Erdogan's Islamist imperialist pursuits.

The damaging effect of Erdogan's prejudices did not stop at Turkey's borders. They have backfired on him and his own people. Erdogan's prejudices



turned Turkey into an unwanted headache, rather than a reliable partner, to the West and the East. Today, Turkey's closest allies are countries notorious for supporting and sponsoring terrorism, like Qatar and Iran. Erdogan's prejudices have turned former Arab allies of Turkey, like Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), into non-resilient opponents, determined to deter Erdogan's threat to their national and regional security, at any cost.

On August 28, UAE sent its F-16 fighter jets to participate in the pre-scheduled aeronautical exercise with Greece's navy in eastern Mediterranean, a few kilometers away from Turkish ships and borders. This move by UAE came after one month of an offensive statement by Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar on Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV; wherein he vowed to "punish Abu Dhabi." Apparently, Bakan Akar was trying to cheer up his hosts at the Qatari TV station, due to the current tensions between UAE and Qatar. Unfortunately, he failed to pick the right words for the occasion, and thus opened another warfront on his already over-stretched army.

Meanwhile, Egypt signed an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) agreement with Greece, in July, and it got ratified by the Egyptian and Hellenic parliaments, in August. Despite the compromises on agreement terms, Egypt had no option but to sign it. The undeclared goal of being involved in this agreement, at least for Egypt, is to counter the national security threat arising from Turkey's unjustified military intervention in Libya. This EEZ agreement have been bouncing back and forth between Greece and Egypt, since 2005. In the past, the Egyptians declined lots of Greek requests to demarcation in the Mediterranean, out of respect for Turkey, and the long history of cultural and religious commonalities between the two nations.



But, in 2013, after the Egyptian people and military united to remove the Muslim Brotherhood regime from power, Erdogan decided to take revenge for his Islamist fellows by severing ties with Egypt. Blinded by his Islamist prejudices, Erdogan opened Istanbul for the fleeing Egyptian members of the Muslim Brotherhood and gave them access to media to attack the Egyptian state. Erdogan masks his hatred to the new secular regime in Egypt by calling it a “regime of putschists.” In the main time, Erdogan does not hesitate to ally with the Islamic extremists in the Iranian regime, for example.

If Turkey really wants to get out of this deep hole it dug for itself, Erdogan must give up on his Islamist and ultranationalist prejudices. Then, the wise people in the Turkish regime, like Minister Hulusi Akar, should work on a plan to restore broken diplomatic relations with neighbors, former friends, and allies. Only then, Turkey will be able to fight diplomatically, on a strong ground, for realizing the Mavi Vatan.

- **Pax Mediterranea or a Spark of Hell?**

Despite diplomatic pressures by the European Union and calls for dialogue by NATO, the conflict in eastern Mediterranean does not seem to settle down, in the foreseeable future. The infuriation ignited by Turkey’s President Erdogan in the quiet basin is now attracting military intervention by heavy-weighted players in the international community. In less than seven days, France, the United States, Russia, and China jumped into the east Mediterranean battlefield through the faux window of forcing peace or “Pax Mediterranea” as the French President Macron labeled it. Slowly but surely, the conflict in eastern Mediterranean is growing bigger than Greece and



Turkey; turning the region into a scene similar to the open-end proxy wars of the Middle East.

First, France deployed its flagship, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier "Charles de Gaulle" to eastern Mediterranean, under the claim that Erdogan did not commit to the "red lines" imposed by Macron. It is unclear when and how Macron got the right or the capacity to impose "red lines" on any of the conflicting parties in the Mediterranean. Turkish Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar, after he completed a flight on an F-16 fighter jet over northern Aegean, on September 3rd, said: "those who came from thousands of kilometers to act as guardian angels are not accepted. They should leave as they came. France is not a guarantor country, it holds no agreement, it is not the representative of the European Union. What brought [France] here?" Meanwhile, the Greeks are applauding France for intervening!

Two days after France's "redline" military intervention, the United States decided to partially lift the arms embargo imposed on Cyprus since 1987, and US Secretary of State vowed to deepen security cooperation with Nicosia to counter the Turkish threat. One week before that, the United States Navy joined Turkey and Greece on two separate naval exercises in eastern Mediterranean.

The next day, Turkey issued two navigational telex alerts (Navtex) in eastern Mediterranean for Russian navy to conduct live-fire exercises on the second and third weeks of September. The eastern Mediterranean basin is already packed with Turkish research and navy ships, as well as Hellenic Navy frigates and fighter jets and frigates of Greece allies, such as Emirates, France, and Italy. If the Russian Navtex is applied, a clash or an accident is inevitable and it could be the spark that kindles hell.



One day after this, On September 4th, the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, finally, decided to intervene. In a press briefing, he mentioned that “following discussions with Greek and Turkish leaders, the two [NATO] allies have agreed to enter into technical talks at NATO to establish mechanisms for military de-confliction to reduce the risk of incidents and accidents in the Eastern Mediterranean.” The reaction of Greece and Turkey to Stoltenberg’s statement was surprising and counter-intuitive.

Immediately, the Greeks declined Stoltenberg statement and refused to be part of any talks until all Turkish ships are removed. There is a strong resentment and mistrust among the Greeks towards the NATO, as many Greeks believe that NATO favors Turkey to Greece. In 2019, France’s Macron called NATO “brain dead.” On the other hand, the Turks confirmed, more than once, their willingness to use the NATO initiative for dialogue and ending the conflict. On September 7th, Turkey’s Defense Minister Hulusi Akar met, in Ankara, with his British old friend Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, who acts as the Chairman of NATO's Military Committee. In the meeting Akar re-asserted Turkey’s willingness for dialogue with the Greeks, and mentioned that technical talks between soldiers of both sides should be held.

Meanwhile, the unthinkable, or perhaps the most expected thing, has happened. China came all the way to the hot region, trying to find a space for itself in the east Mediterranean conflict, through re-activating talks with Greece’s President and Prime Minister on the Belt and Road initiative.

Military mobilization in eastern Mediterranean, especially by unrelated players in the international community is extremely dangerous and should not be tolerated or encouraged by any of the concerned parties; i.e. Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, and all eastern Mediterranean countries. There is not a single



instance, at least in recent history, that makes us optimistic about the intense involvement of international community in regional or local conflicts. The “red lines” of France were the label under which Syria fell into the hell of a decade-long of proxy wars on its soil. France, US, Russia, and China interference will not deter Turkey or end the historical conflict on exclusive economic zones in the Mediterranean. Only wise diplomacy, dialogue, and face-to-face negotiations between Greece and Turkey, alone, can achieve peace.

### **3. Misguided Policy in North Africa:**

- **Erdogan’s Dilemma in Libya**

You are being deluded, if the recent political and military developments in Libya made you think that Erdogan and his Muslim Brotherhood fellows at the Government of National Accord (GNA) are winning the civil war against the Libyan National Army (LNA). Look again; Erdogan is in real trouble in Libya and he does not know how to get out of the hole he dug for himself, without further hurting the economic interests and foreign affairs of Turkey.

Last year, Erdogan solely decided to move his proxy war from Syria to Libya. He flew more than 15000 of his mercenaries from Syria to Libya via Turkish airlines, and then deployed 1600 Turkish military officers to command the mercenaries' operations, under the claim of protecting GNA's legitimacy. But, that is not the real reason for Erdogan’s involvement in Libya. His only purpose is protecting and supporting the Islamic political agenda of his brothers at the GNA.



The ongoing civil war, disagreements between tribes, and the safe presence of terrorist organizations in Libya emboldened Erdogan, the Turkish president with the chief-thief mentality, to take advantage of the situation to satisfy Turkey's constant hunger for Mediterranean gas and energy resources. Turkey is the biggest energy consumer in the Mediterranean basin, with annual energy bill that exceeds US\$41 billion.

The Turkish strategy "Mavi Vatan" or "Blue Homeland," launched 14 years ago, encompasses an ambitious plan for Turkey to win a geopolitical supremacy over the eastern Mediterranean, and, thus, partaking oil and gas drilling rights with east Mediterranean countries; including Egypt, Greece, and Israel.

In December 2019, Turkey and the GNA signed a first-of-kind "Maritime Boundary Treaty" to establish an exclusive economic zone in the Mediterranean that allows both Turkey and Libya to claim rights to ocean bed resources. In addition, the so-called treaty allows Turkey to control vessel movement and the gas pipes in the area. The legitimacy of the agreement has been disputed by affected countries in the eastern basin. The European Union, Russia, the United States, and the United Nations took the side of eastern Mediterranean countries against Erdogan and GNA's treaty. South European countries and Russia are indirect stakeholders of interest in the oil and gas production at this region.

However, the illegal game Erdogan has been playing in Libya is now firing back at him. The international community, which tolerated Erdogan's war crimes in Syria over the past six years, cannot turn a blind eye to his harassment to east Mediterranean countries. Turkey's support to the political Islamist agenda of the GNA and implanting mercenaries in Libya poses a



serious national security threat, not only to North African countries like Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia, but also to Israel, France, Italy, and Greece. The terrorists Erdogan claims he has been blocking from reaching Europe are now in Libya, much closer to south Europe.

The Turkish assault on Syria has been, shamefully, tolerated by super powers, like the United States and Russia, because they used Erdogan their flying monkey in the Middle East. That is not only because Turkey is sharing borders with northeastern Syria where all the mess is happening, but also because Erdogan and his party built strong economic and political relations, though illegitimate, with the Islamic State terrorists (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq.

Nonetheless, the Turkish assault on Libya is a different story. On June 6th, the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, LNA Commander General Khalifa Hifter, and Speaker of Libyan parliament Aqila Saleh, released the Cairo Declaration, as an initiative to end the civil war and find a political solution to reconstruct the collapsing national state in Libya. The surprising international support to the Cairo Declaration proves that Libya cannot be the new Syria for Erdogan. Erdogan's military and mercenary support to GNA is already posing a threat to the economic interests and national security of North African countries, South European countries, as well as Russia and the United States.

In Libya, Erdogan is fighting the international community, not the LNA. He is now fighting alone against the whole world for a territory that he has no right to claim, with foreign mercenaries and a depleting Turkish economy. In all this, Erdogan fails to understand that he is the real obstacle in the way for Turkey's prosperity and his removal from power is the actual solution for all Turkey's economic, political, and international troubles. Just try to imagine:



how the Middle East would have had a chance to breathe and recover, if Erdogan and the Muslim Brotherhood had never existed.

- **Turkey's Next Mission on the Cyprus/Egypt Front**

With the increasing pressure from the European Union (EU), and the growing instability in Libya, Turkey decided to shift its pursuits in the Mediterranean from western waters to south basin. Turkey is temporarily resigning from the complicated Greece/Libya front, and is seeking a new simpler battle at the Cyprus/Egypt front.

On September 13th, Turkey withdrew its seismic research ship "Oruç Reis," which its navigation in the disputed exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between Turkey and Greece caused a lot of troubles, recently. The military tensions aroused in the Mediterranean attracted several foreign powers (e.g. France, Russia, China, and the United States), who came to take advantage of the ongoing tragedy. Pushed by France, the European Council will hold a special meeting, on September 24-25, to discuss, among other issues, imposing economic sanctions on Turkey to force it to de-escalate the tension.

Meanwhile, Turkey's position in Libya is weakening, due to the instability and the complicated internal politics of the Government of National Accord (GNA). Turkey is the only country backing GNA against the Libyan National Army (LNA). Technically speaking, Turkey shall inevitably lose in Libya. It is standing alone, leaning on the fragile GNA, in face of a powerful regional coalition of Russia, UAE, and Egypt, which backs LNA. With the alleged coup attempt against GNA president, Fayez Al-Serraj, followed by his resignation, in mid-September, Turkey realized it has already wasted a lot of money, time,



and energy on a battleground that may fruit no tangible benefits, in the near or far future.

GNA's resigning president, Al-Serraj, is the one who signed the invalid maritime agreement with Turkey in November, last year. The so-called agreement was easily annulled by an internationally recognized EEZ agreement between Greece and Egypt, ratified in August. As a result, Turkey cannot use its defective agreement to acquire gas-drilling rights in the Mediterranean, anymore. It is not a secret that gas-drilling in the sea is the main undeclared purpose of Turkey's intervention in Libya, from the start.

Hence, Turkey is putting the Greece/Libya front on hold, while pursuing more activities in the basin south its borders, where Cyprus and Egypt are key players. However, the flawed strategy of militarizing foreign policy, which Turkey adopted as the only strategy to handle its affairs in the Aegean Sea, would not work at the Cyprus/Egypt front. Only concentrated diplomacy could accomplish the mission. Turkey already occupies Northern Cyprus, since 1974, which gives it a limited space to conduct research or navy exercises around the divided island, without much resistance from Nicosia. On the other hand, the seven years of political rift between Turkey and Egypt needs to be addressed through wise diplomatic efforts.

Over the first two weeks of September, many statements were made by Turkish writers and politicians about the importance of restoring relationships with Egypt. Earlier this month, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu of the Republican People's Party in Turkey said, in a televised interview, that "Turkey made a mistake by cutting ties with Egypt. Egypt is the door to winning in eastern Mediterranean." Similar statements were echoed by the creator of Mavi Vatan doctrine, Retired Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, in an interview with Agence France Press. Even,



Erdogan's Advisor Dr. Yasin Aktay made a video interview in Arabic, wherein he asserted the need to restore political affairs between Turkey and Egypt. Despite that, it is highly unlikely that El-Sisi's Egypt would desire to reconcile with Erdogan's Turkey, so easily. The rift, which Erdogan imprudently created by his support to the Muslim Brotherhood against the current regime in Egypt, is terribly wide.

Unfortunately, I strongly doubt that Turkey may succeed in its new mission in the Mediterranean. The mission requires sharp diplomatic skills and Turkey suffers from a chronic feebleness in its diplomatic bureau. Ironically, Hulusi Akar, the Defense Minister, is way more skilled in using and applying diplomatic tactics and strategies, than Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Foreign Minister. Needless to mention the injudicious statements that Erdogan makes, every now and then, and their extremely negative influence on Turkey's foreign affairs.

Perhaps, if Erdogan shuts his mouth up for a couple of months, and let wise leaders like Hulusi Akar take the lead, Turkey may have a chance to finally attain some of its lost rights in the Mediterranean. But, we know this would not happen. Erdogan loves to talk and the more he talks the more he hurts his own nation.



## 4. Threatening old friends and allies:

- Erdogan and the Islamic Conquest of Europe

The Turkish President Erdogan knows that he will not be able to turn Libya into another Syria, due to several geopolitical considerations. He, also, knows that the Turkish people, who are suffering the economic consequences of his regime failures, gave up on the rhetoric of fixing turkey's economic problems by reviving the Ottoman era and reoccupying Middle East and North Africa countries. Therefore, Erdogan resorted to wearing his favorite gown of the Islamic conqueror of Europe. He ordered the conversion of the historical cathedral "Hagia Sophia" into a mosque. Then, his Muslim Brotherhood party members went on cheering and chanting "Allahukbar" and "Alhamdullilah" on social media; in a naive attempt to portray his cultural transgression on a Christian worship house as a victory for Islam and Muslims.

If you are one of the many, who wonder about the benefits that Erdogan may accrue from transforming a cathedral into a mosque, here is the answer. He is trying to fortify himself against Europe's anger over Libya, by igniting the religious emotions of Muslims around the world. He is playing the Islamic conqueror of Europe, who does not fear to defy all forms of western civilization in the old continent, including harassing Christians, and challenging secularism. For Europe, secularism is more than just a human principle that dictates the separation between state affairs and religion. It is an integral part of the internal laws and collective consciousness in every European country.



Unfortunately, many Muslim scholars around the world, including the moderate ones, agree with Erdogan and the Muslim Brotherhood on prohibiting secularism and framing it as a major sin, equal to atheism or infidelity.

For Erdogan, by challenging secularism and Christian holy places inside Europe, he is acting as the supreme leader of the Islamic conquest of Europe. This way, he is punching Europe's unity in the core, while magnifying his image as a supreme leader for Muslims in Europe and beyond. Over the past decade, Turkey has already invaded the hearts and minds of the growing number of Muslims in its neighbor European countries. Controlling Muslim communities inside other countries under the flag of religious education poses a great political risk for the hosting countries. Those Muslim communities, gradually, turn into political advocacy groups, who lobby for the interest of their religious leaders in Turkey.

France, the NATO ally of Turkey, is one of the most alert countries in face of Turkey's, and Muslim Brotherhood's, intellectual invasion to Muslim communities in Europe. Islam, in France, occupies the second place after Catholicism in terms of the percentage of citizens who embrace it. I remember one of my French friends used to joke about being the most popular male name in France, after "François" is "Mohamed." Muslims in France exceed six million people; most of them are immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. For decades, the migrating Muslims, especially from North Africa, blended easily into the French society, because their original countries are highly influenced by the Francophone culture. However, in the past ten years, France witnessed several terrorist attacks by Muslims living on its land. This indicates a radical change that must have happened in the behavior of the Muslim community, and, thus, requires re-assessment and correction.



In February, France's President Macron announced a government-led campaign to fight "Islamist separatism," due to its contradiction with the national values of France, including women's rights, secularism, freedom, and equality. According to Macron, Islamist separatism has encouraged Muslims in distant suburbs to adopt their own legal systems and give a priority to their own laws, and refuse to abide by the laws of the republic, on the pretext that they are secular laws. To confront Islamist separatism, Macron set a plan to gradually set legal limits to curb foreign influence on the Muslim community inside France. The first step in this plan is to stop allowing foreign countries, including Turkey, from sending and funding Sheikhs and Imams to educate or preach Muslims in their own schools and mosques inside France. Most of those Imams, are paid by their native countries, loaded by their countries' political agendas, and the French government, rarely, supervises the content they present to Muslims.

Consequently, "La République En Marche!" the ruling party, in France, focused its work in Parliament on finding an appropriate solution to the Islamist separatism phenomenon. On July 12, two days before the National Day celebrations in France, the Senate announced the findings of a months-long investigation, by the Republican Party, into the growth of Islamic extremism in France. The investigations found out that, in France, there are "fifty thousand members of the Muslim Brotherhood and forty thousand members of the Salafists," who are active in promoting and strengthening Islamist separatism. A few months before that, a report on Islamic extremism in France, published by "Institut Montaigne," a French liberal think tank, found that there were attempts by some foreign countries, such as Turkey, to generate and recruit Islamic extremists from the Muslim communities in France.



France's concern over the growing Islamic extremism on its soil is a recurring matter in most European countries, these days. The one common factor behind the rise of Islamic extremism in European countries is the rising influence of Erdogan and his Muslim Brotherhood among Muslim communities. Is it time for Europe to act decisively in the face of the new Islamist conqueror of Europe?

- **Frenemies in the Caucasus: Turkey vs. Russia and Iran**

After long three months of over-heated summer in the eastern Mediterranean, the conflict between Turkey and Greece came to a point of cautious calm. The Hellenic Navy Forces retreated to Salamis Base, a few days after Turkey withdrew its Oruç Reis research ship and escorting frigates back to Antalya, in mid-September. Yet, the Turkish military, hardly, had a chance to breathe before it finds itself involved in the renewed war on the Caucasus Mountains.

On September 27th, the world woke up to the disturbing news of the re-eruption of the decades-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, over the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region. In August, Armenia launched an attack on the Azerbaijani border city of Tovuz, which led to the killing of 12 Azerbaijani soldiers and one civilian. Because of the intense mobilization of Syrian mercenaries, by both parties, the current episode of war between Armenia and Azerbaijan is expected to be the deadliest; even worse than the 1990s conflicts, which left behind tens of thousands of dead, from both sides.

Turkey is backing Azerbaijan, due to several historical, cultural and political reasons. Azerbaijani people are Turkic by ethnicity. The Turkish



military is the de facto parent organization of the Azerbaijani military. In 1990s, the two countries signed bilateral agreements on defense cooperation and strategic partnership. According to these agreements, the two countries should provide “military support” to each other “upon demanding the right to self-defense under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.” In that capacity, the Turkish military works closely with Azerbaijani military, through providing technical military consultations and personnel training in Turkish military institutions. In addition, Turkey and Azerbaijan armed forces are constantly executing joint military drills in Azerbaijan.

On the most recent meeting between Azerbaijani President, Ilham Aliyev, and Turkish Minister of Defense, Hulusi Akar, in August; Aliyev said that his country aims to use the “powerful military-industrial potential” of Turkey, and thus, “Turkey will become Azerbaijan’s number one partner in the field of military-technical cooperation.” Russia, which is currently Azerbaijan’s top military exporter, felt threatened. The Russian officials and media, in August, warned against Turkey’s plans to establish a military base in Azerbaijan. If true, the proposed Turkish Military Base shall counterbalance the intensive and extensive Russian military presence in Armenia.

Armenia is politically, economically, and militarily controlled by Russia. In Armenia, Russia plays the traditional role of the protector state of Orthodox Christians. Russia controls Armenian economy, culture, and politics. There is a strong long-term military presence of Russia, including militia deployment and training, inside Armenia. Russia has a military base in Armenia, which serves Russia and its ally Iran, more than it serves Armenia. In that sense, the hardline Islamist regime in Iran, is supporting the Orthodox Christian Armenia against the Muslim Azerbaijan. Although it might sound



counterintuitive, but it is just another proof on how Armenia is merely seen as a province of Russia, rather than an independent state.

Long story short, this new episode of war in south Caucasus is much bigger in size and influence than Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is a war between old frenemies: Turkey on one side versus its closest allies/competitors, Iran and Russia, on the other side. For the international community, Turkey is doing the world a favor by confronting America's top enemy (Iran) and Europe's and NATO's top enemy (Russia). For the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean, this war shall give the region a chance to breathe and work quietly on finding political solutions to chronic crises, particularly in Syria and Libya, free from the pressure of Turkish political and military intervention.

- **NATO Could and Should Hold Turkey Accountable**

Over the month of July, Erdogan set the Mediterranean basin on fire, with the goal to bully East Mediterranean countries into sharing their seabed drilling rights with Turkey. It started with the standoff with Egypt and France, respectively, on the background of deploying mercenaries, led by Turkish military officers, to Libya. Then, with cold blood, Erdogan challenged hundreds of millions of Christians, worldwide, by transforming the historical cathedral "Hagia Sophia" into a mosque and holding Friday prayers there.

As if this was not enough, Erdogan did not hesitate to violate good neighboring principle, and put the region on the brink of war, by spending a week at Greece's borders threatening its national security and economic rights in the Mediterranean. The political, diplomatic, and military violations



committed by Erdogan's Turkey against north African and south European countries have reached unprecedented boundaries.

Fingers are pointing at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of which Turkey is a member state, for being responsible for ending Turkey's transgressions, especially after Turkey has already harassed and threatened to attack another NATO member: Greece. On the far left of the spectrum, some angry analysts, in both Arab and western media, accuse NATO of backing Erdogan and applauding his recent assaults in the East Mediterranean. On the far right of the spectrum, some lenient analysts claim that NATO is handcuffed by law and, thus, has no power over its defiant members, because there is no provision in NATO's founding treaty stipulating the suspension or expulsion of member states.

However, neither of the two arguments is accurate. Here is why:

**Legal-wise:** It is true that in the NATO's founding treaty, there is not a provision detailing the procedures for the suspension or expulsion of member states. But, also, there is not a provision preventing NATO from suspending or expelling a non-compliant member-state, like Turkey, which has been acting, for years, as a serious threat to NATO members and allies. As the English say: "everything which is not forbidden is allowed." NATO members can legitimately make a unanimous decision, whenever they desire, to suspend Turkey's membership. There are many valid justifications for such a decision to consider, including but are not limited to: (1) Erdogan's support to terrorist organizations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region; (2) Erdogan's public threat to a NATO member (Greece); (3) Turkey's continued occupation of a European sovereign state: Cyprus; (4) Erdogan's violation to NATO principles and values, including respect to human rights, freedom, and



democracy; (5) Turkey's bloody alliance with NATO's enemies (Russia and Iran); and the list goes on.

***Diplomatic-wise:*** It is true that expelling Turkey out of NATO poses the threat of Turkey strengthening its alliance with NATO's enemies, like Russia and Iran. But, think again: Isn't Turkey, already, a strong ally with Russia and Iran more than it is with NATO members? In November 2019, Turkey tested the Russian S-400 air defense system on the United States' F-16 fighter jets, and then reported the results of the exercise to Russia. In other words, Turkey has been hurting the interests of its own fellow members of NATO to serve the interests of NATO's historical enemy.

***Geopolitical-wise:*** It is true that Turkey enjoys a unique strategic geographic location between Europe and the Middle East that no other European country has. However, Europe rarely benefited from Turkey's geopolitical advantageous position. On the contrary, Turkey is using this strategic location to blackmail Europe. The repetitive threats by Erdogan of flooding Europe with Syrian refugees and Islamic State (ISIS) terrorists have been keeping Europe silent towards Erdogan's atrocities in the Middle East, for so long. One shameful example, is the utter silence practiced by the international community towards the ethnic cleansing of Kurds and other war crimes committed by Erdogan in northeastern Syria. Yet, this did not keep Europe completely safe from the threat of terrorism. Last December, Erdogan flew Turkish-trained Syrian and ISIS militia to Libya, who are now acting as a major threat to NATO members in south Europe and to NATO allies in the Mediterranean.

***Military-wise:*** NATO has all the right to be concerned about losing Turkey's huge military force, through expulsion or suspension. The Turkish



Armed Forces is the second largest standing military force in NATO, after the United States. It measures up to nearly (20%) of the total NATO force of (3.5 million) personnel. Numbers do not lie; but numbers should not be the only variable to weigh in the importance of Turkey's military power for NATO. The current Turkish military is not the secular Kemalist pro-democracy Turkish military that we know. It is Erdogan's military, which is fully dedicated to serving his Muslim Brotherhood agenda in both Europe and the Middle East. Erdogan's military does not hesitate to test Russian missiles on American fighter jets, or publicly harass neighbor Greece. Erdogan's army supports terrorist organizations and trains terrorist militia to threaten the security and stability of national states, not only in the Middle East, but also in Europe. Because of the illegitimate operations conducted by Erdogan's military in Libya and the Mediterranean, NATO allies are going through an endless chain of disagreements, rather than solidarity.

In short, NATO could and should hold Erdogan's Turkey accountable, before it is too late. We are not, particularly, asking for expelling Turkey out of NATO. We are asking for a decisive stance by NATO -- the organization or its leading members --to force bring Erdogan to his senses. The policy of waiting out Erdogan's current show of insanity shall create a cluster of disasters that is getting harder to control, day after day. Turkey is like a foreign object inside the body of the NATO. Regardless of its size, it should be removed or at least cured, for the body to recover and regain its coherence and strength.



## 5. Can the Turkish Military do something about it:

- Why the Turkish military obeys Erdogan?

For more than six years, Erdogan has been wreaking havoc in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In this, Turkey has been using Islamist terrorist organizations and non-state actors, which Turkey and Qatar co-sponsor, to threaten the well-being of the national states in the region, with the purpose to build an Islamic Caliphate system and recapture the legacies of the historical Ottoman occupation of MENA. The mercenaries positioned by Erdogan on the ground in Syria, Iraq, and Libya are commanded by the Turkish military.

Why the international community is turning a deaf ear to Erdogan's atrocities in the Middle East and North Africa is not the interesting question, any more. The real question is why the secular Turkish military is obeying the Islamist Erdogan in his quest for establishing an Islamic Caliphate over the ruins of secular national states in the region. One of the ideologies, dearly embraced by the Turkish military, is being "guardians of secularism" and "defenders of Kemalism." The former Turkish President, Süleyman Demirel, once said: "in Turkey, God first created the military. Then he realized his mistake, and created the Turkish people as an afterthought." Why did the Turkish military lose its status and pride to a president from the Muslim Brotherhood?

The Turkish military is sacrificing its best soldiers and equipment to accomplish Erdogan's Islamist agenda, not only abroad, but also inside Turkey. In early July, the Turkish Minister of Defense visited Al-Watiya city in Libya and



ordered the building of an airbase there. A few days later, airstrikes by the Libyan National Army (and, allegedly, its regional allies) targeted the Turkish airbase, leaving three radars completely destroyed and six Turkish military personnel killed, including a reputable field commander. Other two Turkish officers were also killed, in February, during a previous assault on Libya.

Some observers argue that the failed coup attempt against Erdogan, in 2016, and the consequent purging of top military leaders has weakened the military joints and disintegrated its structure, and thus the mighty Turkish military crumbled under Erdogan's wings. This argument was enhanced by a report, released in 2017, by European Union's Intelligence and Situation Center (INTCEN). The report finds that Erdogan had planned the purge of Kemalist and secular military officers, long before the 2016 coup attempt. The report argues that the coup attempt was meant to pre-empt the pre-planned purge. In other words, the purge was not a vengeful act by Erdogan against the plotters of the failed coup, but the purge was the real reason why the military leaders attempted a coup, at that time.

Yet, the glorious history and the comprehensive belief system of the Turkish military tells us that the current submission and obedience the military is showing towards the Islamist regime of Erdogan is voluntary and will not last for long. The ongoing bleeding of military personnel and equipment in quest for Erdogan's illegal ambitions in MENA has already exhausted the military and stirred resentment among officers and commanders of all ranks. In January 2020, RAND Corporation, an American think tank, published a report titled "Turkey's National Course: Implications for the US-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the US Army." The report notes that there is a strong discontent against Erdogan inside the Turkish military that may lead to another coup attempt in the future.



Nevertheless, the strong grip imposed by Erdogan over state institutions, including the military, after the failed coup in 2016, is not the only reason why the Turkish military is not willing to challenge Erdogan or launch a coup d'état. In fact, this can hardly be considered as a logical reason to justify military's obedience to Erdogan's Islamist agenda. If the military commanders are willing to challenge or plan a coup against Erdogan, now is the perfect time to do so. The military would not have tolerated Erdogan's dominance over decision-making in their powerful institution, unless for a strategic goal. The Turkish military is not forced to obey Erdogan; the military commanders are voluntarily following Erdogan's orders to maintain their own legitimacy inside Turkey and preserve their image in the eyes of the international community.

On the domestic level, the Turkish people have strong negative feelings towards military coups, because of their constant occurrence in the past. That is why the secular political opposition may not endorse the military to launch another coup against Erdogan, to get rid of his authoritarian regime. It is not possible; due to the way, the collective conscious of the citizens perceive the role of the military within the state. Should the military launch a coup that succeeds in overthrowing Erdogan, the political and economic aftermath will be too overwhelming for the military to handle. In addition, such a move will expose Turkey to unbearable security threats, given its lengthy incubation of Islamic State (ISIS) terrorists inside Turkey and in northern Syria. By willingly obeying Erdogan, the Turkish military leaders are strategically doing what they believe is in the best interest of the Turkish people; that is preserving the well-being of the state and deterring terrorist threats.

Another dimension has to do with the international position and the foreign relationships enjoyed by the Turkish military. The current Minister of



Defense, Hulusi Akar, despite being an Erdogan loyalist, is highly respected and widely admired by both military and political leaders in the United States and Europe. He is often contacted by world leaders to discuss issues related to Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East; even more than they contact Erdogan. The Turkish military is the second largest standing military force in NATO, after the United States. The civilian control of armed forces is a doctrine highly respected and strictly applied by NATO member states. Out of commitment to this principle, the secular Turkish military is voluntarily obeying the Muslim Brotherhood's Erdogan in pursuing his Islamist agenda, even if they disagree with it.

It is pretty unlikely that the Turkish military is going to orchestrate another coup attempt against Erdogan or stop commanding his mercenaries while committing illegal destructive assaults on MENA countries. However, the collapsing economy and the long record of political failures of Erdogan and his AKP, over the past few years, portends that his end in power is approaching. If a popular revolution against Erdogan does not erupt in the next months, the Turkish people will vote him out in 2023 elections. Erdogan's end is much closer than we think and it does not need a coup d'état to happen.

- **Can Hulusi Akar Save Turkey and the Middle East from Erdogan's Foolishness?**

On August 6th, Egypt and Greece signed an agreement designating an area in the eastern Mediterranean as an exclusive economic zone between the two countries. In the press conference that followed the signing of the agreement, the Greek Foreign Minister, Nikolaos Dendias, said that the



agreement is designed in compliance with the international law. Then, he added: "Now, the normal place for Turkey's illegal agreement with Libya is the trash can!"

Five days before that, on August 1st, France and Cyprus announced that their "Defense Cooperation Agreement," signed in April 2017, entered into force. The agreement ensures cooperation on "energy resources, crisis management, counter-terrorism and maritime security." The activation of the agreement came as an indirect response to Turkey's expansion endeavors in the Mediterranean, highlighted by harassing Greece and then directing its force towards Cyprus.

While the announcement of the Egypt-Greece and France-Cyprus agreements received international applaud, the joke went out that Turkey's president Erdogan was breaking some of the glassware in his house to release anger. The two agreements blow away Turkey's attempts to manifest the "Mavi Vatan [The Blue Homeland]" dream, and undermines Erdogan's recent illegitimate moves in the Mediterranean. For over two months, Erdogan turned the quiet basin of the Mediterranean into a war zone, as he went on threatening Turkey's neighbor states in Europe and deploying Syrian mercenaries and terrorist militia from Syria to North Africa.

Meanwhile, the Turkish economy is collapsing and the people are suffering. On August 6th, the Turkish Lira fell to its lowest rate ever compared to US Dollar. The angry public opinion puts the blame on Erdogan's flawed policies, at home and abroad, as much as the ineffective monetary policies instigated by Erdogan's son-in-law, Berat Albayrak, who acts as Minister of Treasury and Finance.



Nevertheless, the militarization of Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East and East Mediterranean is putting the Turkish military under a huge amount of pressure and hurting its international reputation. Turkey is under the threat of being sanctioned by the United States Congress on the background of purchasing S-400 air defense system from Russia, while working with the United States on the F-35 fighter jet program. If applied, the sanctions would worsen the reputation of the Turkish military and accelerate the economic collapse.

On July 27th, Turkey's Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar pleaded the U.S. Congress to reconsider its decision about sanctioning Turkey, and offered to "address any US concerns about the S-400 / F-35 compatibility issue, on a technical basis." Ironically, Minister Hulusi Akar was previously sanctioned, in his professional capacity, by the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in October 2019, on the background of Turkish military's involvement in "escalating violence in Syria, endangering innocent civilians, and destabilizing the region."

Honestly, it is heart breaking to see the mighty Turkish military, and its one-of-kind commander Hulusi Akar turning into a toy in the hands of an Islamist president like Erdogan. The Turkish military should refrain from pursuing Erdogan's illogical and illegitimate ambitions abroad, as they hurt Turkey and the Turkish people more than anyone else. Erdogan's policies have already turned Turkey into a "hostile" country to most of its former friends in Europe and the United States, and its neighbors in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Turkish military is the only institution capable of saving Turkey from the "plow down the road," which Erdogan is driving the country towards, with



utmost speed and foolishness. That does not, necessarily, mean overthrowing Erdogan and his Islamist party from power through a coup d'état. Such an action will incur an aftermath that Turkey can hardly survive. But, at least, for the time being, the Turkish military leadership, namely the highly popular and widely adored Hulusi Akar, should intervene and put some brakes on Erdogan's blinded-with-hate atrocities in the Mediterranean and MENA.

Minister Hulusi Akar must be the sound of reason in this equation, not a helpless obedient follower to Erdogan's irrationality. That is his responsibility, as a leader, towards the Turkish people and the Middle Eastern countries currently suffering on the hands of Erdogan. Bakan Hulusi Akar may save an entire region, as big as the Middle East and North Africa, if he wants to.