



Erdoğan's Trident

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Executive Summary

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has embarked on an ambitious program to expedite the United States' transforming the Black Sea into an American lake and evicting Russia from the entire Greater Black Sea Basin – a program Erdoğan is convinced will earn him US and NATO sponsorship for the ascent of Turkey as a pan-Turkic neo-Ottoman global power. In order to attain this objective, Erdoğan is utilizing and capitalizing on Turkey's close relations and cooperation with the Jihadist Trend. Thus, irrespective of whether the US ultimately makes the Black Sea an American lake – something Russia will not permit under any circumstance – the outcome of Erdoğan's enabling program and its US sponsorship is widespread Jihadist presence and infrastructure throughout the Greater Black Sea Basin and into the heart of both Europe and Russia.

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Analysis

Since the end of the Cold War a quarter of century ago, the Greater Black Sea Basin (GBSB) – the region between the middle of the Adriatic Sea in the west and the middle of the Caspian Sea in the east, between the Russian landmass in the north and the Turkish-Persian landmass in the south – has become the primary instrument by which all US administrations sought to coerce a reluctant and doubting Europe into embracing the viability of a NATO expanding eastward despite guarantees to the contrary to Russia, as well as prevent Russia from consolidating a common Eurasian home stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Washington's endeavors include the US-led NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990's, the US sponsorship of Color Revolutions in the 2000's, tacit and by proxy support for the Chechen Jihad against Russia, the encouragement and facilitation of Georgia's war against Russia in 2008, and, most recently, the toppling of Ukraine's democratically elected government and the ensuing provoking and sustenance of the fratricidal civil war in the Ukraine.

In mid-2013, US policy and posture in the greater Middle East was collapsing. Europe was increasingly inclined to look eastward for security, stability and economic recovery. After the Russian intervention in Syria and Iraq and the prevention of a US-led Libya-style bombing campaign, the Europeans were looking up to Russia to help stabilizing the Middle East and contain the upsurge of Jihadist terrorism emanating from the US-encouraged and sponsored "Arab Spring". Similarly, the "One Belt, One Road" initiative – the new Silk Road – unveiled by China in September-October 2013 was immediately understood by Europe to be the key to the revolution in the economy and commerce throughout the entire Eastern Hemisphere and thus the key to Europe's long-term reindustrialization and economic recovery.

The Obama White House sought a major provocation to reverse this mega-trend by terrorizing the Europeans rather than providing better or viable alternatives to their eastward-focused policies. In conjunction with Poland, ever petrified by the specter of improvement of relations between Russia and Germany, the US would establish an anti-common Eurasian home corridor stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and then on to Turkey. The key to the corridor would be the subverting of Ukraine by awakening and empowering the virulently anti-Russia Unitarian parts of western Ukraine.

And so it was. Warsaw sponsored the rise of chauvinistic militias that launched the "Ukrainian revolution" in Kiev's Maidan Nezalezhnosti, and subsequently moved their war to the Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, Washington intervened in Kiev and sought to empower its own puppets while toppling, in February 2014, the democratically elected Viktor Yanukovich. When advised by then US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt that the Europeans were leery of her interventionist policies, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland famously instructed "Fuck the EU!" Meanwhile, the carnage in eastern Ukraine continues unabated as Ukrainian economy has all but collapsed.

After Russia annexed the Crimea in March 2014, the Obama White House decided it was now imperative to deprive any hold over the Black Sea. There began the still growing US pressure on Bulgaria, Romania and then also Greece to abandon all imports of Russian Gas in the name of diversification. South Stream was cancelled by Russia in December 2014 in response to obstacles put by Bulgaria and the EU. Secretary of State John Kerry continues the relentless pressure to prevent gas deals with Russia. Meanwhile, in late-2015, Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 over Syria with US connivance. Subsequently, Turkey threatened to violate the Montreux Convention regarding the Turkish Straits and block Russian naval traffic. The US cheered and promised a NATO



umbrella. In May 2016, the US and the UK conducted a major military exercise in Georgia that was clearly anti-Russia. The scenario was a swift reinforcement of Georgia and the creation of a NATO trip-wire in case of conflagration with Russia. Also in May 2016, the US opened a missile base in Deveselu, Romania. Ostensibly part of a missile defense shield against Iran, in reality the radar and missiles deployed in Romania are anti-Russia despite Washington's and Brussels' explicit guarantees to the contrary.

Throughout, there continued in the Black Sea the cruises of US Navy combatants – skirting Russian territorial waters and initiating provocative encounters with Russian Navy vessels. In June, the US escalated the anti-Russian rhetoric surrounding the ostensibly “routine” Naval operations in the Black Sea. US Navy Secretary Ray Mabus visited the fleet in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea in mid-June. “We’re going to be [in the Black Sea],” Mabus declared. “We’re going to deter. That’s the main reason we’re there – to deter potential aggression.” Even the staunchest US allies in the region are getting cold feet. Romania announced its Navy will only participate in “periodic drills” but will not be part of “a separate fleet” arrayed against Russia. “Nobody wants to create NATO fleet. That’s nonsense. NATO has neither the resources nor the desire to maintain a Black Sea fleet,” said Romanian President Klaus Iohannis. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borisov also ruled out participation in a NATO Black Sea Naval Task Force dedicated to countering the Russian Navy. “I always say that I want the Black Sea to see sailboats, yachts, large boats with tourists and not become an arena of military action,” Borisov said. “I do not need a war in the Black Sea. ... To send warships as a fleet against Russian ships exceeds the limit of what I can allow.”

By now, Erdoğan has become a most vocal advocate of confronting the Russians in the Black Sea. Back in May, at the 10th Balkan Countries Chiefs of Defense Conference, Erdoğan recalled NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's visit to Ankara in the second half of April. “During his [Stoltenberg's] visit I told him: ‘You are not visible in the Black Sea. And your invisibility in the Black Sea turns it into a Russian lake, so to speak.’ As riparian countries we should live up to our responsibilities. As NATO members, we should take all required steps in all spheres, including the sea, air and ground. Otherwise, history shall not forgive us. And we should also deepen our existing cooperation in accordance with an approach of regional inclusiveness. I would like to express that we will keep sharing our proposals on this issue with riparian countries of the Black Sea in the coming days.” Erdoğan stressed that Turkey supported all regional initiatives to contain Russia. “I would like to reemphasize that we will continue our contributions to your efforts of capacity-building under NATO as well. We should transform the Black Sea into a basin of stability again on the basis of cooperation among riparian countries around the Black Sea.” However, should NATO fail to meet the challenge – Turkey will go alone, Erdoğan warned.

Thus, although Turkey was involved in only some of these NATO activities, Ankara quickly comprehended the overall gist of Washington's strategy. Thus, Erdoğan volunteered and Obama embraced gratefully the Turkish proposal for shielding the US activities, as well as destabilizing and undermining the potential allies of Russia, in the GBSB by establishing a Sunni Islamist-Jihadist three-prong surge – Erdoğan's trident.

- In the east – a corridor into the North Caucasus, subverting Shiite Azerbaijan and exploiting the Chechen corridor in eastern Georgia.
- In the west - a corridor in the west Balkans exploiting the myriad of Muslim communities and Islamist-Jihadist entities.
- In the middle - a corridor across the Black Sea by supporting Ukraine where Washington can't, and, most important, by sponsoring the Crimean Tatars' Jihadist insurgency and terrorism.



As the Obama White House escalates their anti-Russia provocations in the GBSB in quest of a new Cold War and the renewed subjugation of Europe – Turkey's help in shielding the US activities earns Erdoğan Obama's gratitude and support. Obama's patronage emboldens Erdoğan in his self-empowerment, the forced Islamicization of Turkey, the brewing civil war against Kurds and Alavis, and the escalation of Turkish interventionism in Libya, Syria-Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and the entire Turkic world – from the Balkans all the way to the heart of China. Ankara is convinced that a grateful Obama will shield Erdoğan from the inevitable repercussions of Turkey's aggressive pursuit of neo-Ottomanism and pan-Turkism.

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The real challenge is that Erdoğan is playing with fire. He does not control the neo-Salafi Jihadism. At best, there are symbiotic relations between Turkish Intelligence and its various protégés throughout the GBSB. The Jihadist Trend enjoys the Turkish support, relishes the sponsorship, but its components are pursuing their own strategies and policies.

Most dramatic has been the shift in the eastern axis where Erdoğan profoundly reversed long-term principled policies of Turkey – namely, putting Sunni-vs-Shiite identity issues ahead of pan-Turkic solidarity. Erdoğan committed to this policy change while making chauvinistic Sunni pan-Turkism a cornerstone of his own neo-Ottomanism.

Turkish Intelligence has long had close relations with the Jihadists in Chechnya, Dagestan and the rest of the Northern Caucasus. Turkey provided extensive military and logistical support since the beginning of the Chechen Jihadist insurrection and the fall of the USSR. Turkish Intelligence established a corridor from the North Caucasus via eastern Georgia into Turkey. Initially, the corridor was used for bringing Jihadists from the North Caucasus for training in Turkey and their clandestine return into Russia.

In recent years, as Turkish-sponsored Jihad escalated in Syria and Iraq, Turkish Intelligence established a recruitment center for Jihadists from the entire North Caucasus and Georgia in the Pankisi Gorge. The center is run under clerics loyal to Turkey, most notably Imran Akhmadov (who is also a senior religious leader of the Islamic State/Caliphate in Syria while being sheltered in Turkey with a Georgian passport in the name of Kavtarashvili), and managed by officers of Turkish Intelligence. Akhmadov and his fellow Imams argue that "Jihad against the Russians in al-Sham paves the way for the return of the Caliphate, and taking the Jihad back to the Russian heartland."

The recruits are organized in Pankisi Gorge. They are provided with Georgian papers and Turkish work documents. They are then taken in buses escorted by Turkish and Georgian security personnel to Turkey where they undergo basic training. The majority are then infiltrated into Syria-Iraq. (The most brilliant recruits are diverted to intelligence training centers of Turkish Intelligence for advanced training in the service of Turkey.) Significantly, the sponsorship system run by Turkish Intelligence serves and supports both al-Qaida-affiliates and Islamic State/Caliphate entities depending on their locations and their contribution to the Turkish security interests. The volume of traffic in the Georgia corridor is growing markedly as Turkey's need for North Caucasian Jihadists keeps rising.

Azerbaijan used to be a Turkic sister state. Baku considered Ankara its closest ally. In recent years, all has changed in the context of the ascent of Erdoğan's Sunni neo-Ottomanism and pan-Turkism. At the root of Ankara's change of attitude is the apprehension of the Chinese revival of the Silk Road that historically relied on Shiite Persia and particularly the Azerbaijani region and its capital Tabriz. Erdoğan fears that China will revive



these relations with Shiite Azerbaijan at the expense of Sunni Turkey. Moreover, Turkish Intelligence considers it imperative to obtain a secure Sunni-dominated springboard along the shores of the Caspian Sea as a precondition for a pan-Turkic surge into the greater Central Asia that for Turkey includes China's Xinjiang.

Hence Ankara's commitment to a Sunni-dominated axis along the shores of the Caspian Sea. To subvert Azerbaijan, Turkish Intelligence initially relied on Azerbaijan's Lezgins and Dagestanis, as well as Kist Chechens from neighboring Georgia, because they had close relations with them while sponsoring the anti-Russian Jihad. However, Sunni Azerbaijanis fighting in the ranks of the various Jihadist forces in al-Sham have become the most important assets. Toward this end, Turkish Intelligence sponsors Azerbaijani Jama'ats both in the ranks of the al-Qaida affiliates and in the ranks of the Islamic State/Caliphate. As with all Jihadists from the Caucasus, the Turks play an instrumental role in facilitating travel from and back to Azerbaijan via the Georgia routes used by the Chechens and other Jihadists from the North Caucasus. In mid-2015, Turkish Intelligence established a forward base south of Gardabani, in the Kvemo Kartli region, southern Georgia, that is densely populated by Azerbaijanis. The clandestine transporting of Azerbaijani Jihadists to and from Azerbaijan is controlled by this base.

The first Azerbaijani Sunni converts arrived in Syria in 2011-12 and joined the Chechen-led Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar when it was still under the command of Omar al-Shishani and affiliated with al-Qaida and Jabhat al-Nusra. Most Azerbaijani Jihadists received advanced training at a camp run by Salahuddin al-Shishani. In Spring 2013, there were already a few hundreds of Azerbaijanis in Syria and they formed their own Azerbaijani Jama'at under Abu-Yahyah Azeri. Most of them moved to the Islamic State/Caliphate and joined the new elite formation of Jihadists from the Caucasus organized by Omar al-Shishani still as a distinct Azerbaijani Jama'at. The remaining Azerbaijani mujahedin joined the various Russian-Speaking and Chechen-dominated units affiliated with al-Qaida in northwestern Syria where they still fight. In Spring 2014, the Azerbaijani Jama'at, then under the leadership of Muhammad al-Azeri, was recognized as a Raqqa-based elite force. The Azerbaijani Jama'at is presently a distinct component of the Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar of the Islamic State/Caliphate. In winter 2014/15, leading Azerbaijani Jihadists were accepted for highly specialized training in camps run by Omar al-Shishani in preparations for their insertion back into Azerbaijan and the launching there of a Sunni Jihadist insurrection. These Azerbaijani Jihadists are now the primary assets of Turkish Intelligence for the subversion of Azerbaijan.

In the western axis, Turkish Intelligence relies on solid foundations cemented since the Jihad of the 1990's. With US enthusiastic tacit support, Turkey provided extensive military support to the various Muslim forces and, to a great extent, prevented their collapse. In the 2010's, Turkish Intelligence continues to maintain close relations with the Islamist-Jihadist elements in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro (the Sanjak region and particularly Novi Pazar) and Croatia. In recent years, there has been a marked expansion and reinforcement of the Jihadist milieu throughout the western Balkans as a result of the major role they play in supporting the Jihad in the greater Middle East – particularly in providing safe and clandestine transfer of Jihadists between Western Europe and Syria-Iraq, as well as serving as forward distribution point for weapons and explosives destined for Europe Jihad.

The Islamist-Jihadist milieu in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the best organized and most deeply entrenched. The driving force are radical militant Imams who build on the legacy of the Jihadists of the 1990's in order to inculcate and radicalize a younger generation for both at-home and far-away Jihads. One of the most influential Imams and organizers is Husein 'Bilal' Bosnic – a decorated veteran of the 7th Mujahedin Brigade whose influence extends to Germany, Italy Switzerland and other expat communities in Europe. The hardcore



Islamists-Jihadists in Bosnia-Herzegovina established their own enclaves – “Sharia villages” – that are effectively no-go zones comprised of a few villages each. By early 2016, there were more than 65 such “Sharia villages.” To-date, the Bosnian “Sharia villages” have evaded and escaped half-hearted attempts at crackdown.

Over half of the more than 300 Bosnians who left for Jihad in the Middle East via Turkey come from these villages. Among them are Bajro Ikanovic, the commander of one of the largest training camps of the Islamic State/Caliphate in northern Syria, and Nusret Imamovic, a senior commander of Jabhat al-Nusra. At least 50 Bosnian Jihadists are known to have returned home. They established training camps in the “Sharia villages” where, according to an Europol report, local youth are indoctrinated with the teachings of the Islamic State/Caliphate and are “trained in specific killing techniques, which include beheading.” The most important contribution of the Bosnian Jihadists is logistical support for the Jihadist networks in Western Europe – including weapons supplies. Both Europol and Frontex estimated in early-2016 that some 800,000 weapons were “in illegal civilian possession” in Bosnia-Herzegovina alone, and thus available for the building Jihadist networks in Europe. Indeed, the weapons used in both Paris and Brussels originated in the former Yugoslavia.

Most dramatic is the radicalization of the Albanians in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia. Within less than a decade, Turkish recruitment and Saudi Arabian funds and education have transformed the once-tolerant Albanian Muslim society into what Europol now calls “a font of Islamic extremism and a pipeline for Jihadists.” While the Turks shielded the organization of radical mosques and groups from their NATO Western allies, the Saudis introduced neo-Salafi and Jihadi literature. They subsidized social services, charities, mosques and Imams advocating violent Jihad as the sole means for protecting Islam. Over 200 Kosovars received generous scholarships to study Islam in Saudi Arabia. All of them returned radicalized and zealot.

Indeed, over 300 Kosovars and over 120 Albanians are known to have left for Jihad in the Middle East. All traveled via Turkey where they were directed to all-Balkan Jihadist units comprised up of Albanians, Kosovars, Bosnians and other Muslims from the western Balkans. Around 30 Albanians and 120 Kosovars are known to have returned home with extensive combat experience. Western security authorities are worried about the emergence of a new Jihadist organization/entity called “Harausham” in the western Balkans. The “Harausham” was recently established by a few hundred Albanians and Kosovo-Albanians who fought in the ranks of the al-Qaida-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria between November 2013 and July 2014 – about a quarter of those known to have left for Syria. They have since been joined by several hundreds of Albanians and Bosniaks who had fought in the ranks of the Islamic State/Caliphate in both Syria and Iraq. These new Balkan-based networks already provide support and sustenance to the Jihadist networks in Western Europe while preparing for Jihad at home.

Turkish Intelligence is coordinating between the various Jihadist foci in the west Balkans. Some of these activities take place in the area, while the sensitive contacts and coordination take place in training camps in Turkey and with commanders of combat units in Syria-Iraq. In Spring 2016, the Turkish focus was on further subverting Kosovo, Albania, and the Albanian-populated parts of Macedonia in order to reach the Bulgarian Turks. Such a Jihadist bloc amounts to creating a “Green Corridor” stretching from Turkey, along the shores of the Adriatic, all the way to the Italian border and Western Europe. This corridor is already the main venue for the flow of migrants and the Jihadists hiding among them.

The highlight of the central axis is covering the Black Sea from the north through the invention and sustenance of Jihadist forces in support of the “Ukrainian revolution”, and subsequently the sustenance of the Crimean Tatar Jihad.



Acting as Washington's willing proxy, Ankara got actively involved in the "Ukrainian revolution" from the very beginning. With the Ukrainian military collapsing and the ultra-nationalist chauvinistic militias strong on rhetoric but militarily amateurish – Turkish Intelligence quickly organized for the dispatch of combat-hardened Chechen and other North Caucasus Jihadists from Syria, Iraq, Georgia and Turkish bases. The lure of "fighting Russians" appealed to the Jihadists from the North Caucasus. There began an orchestrated transfer of Chechen Jihadists from Syria to Turkey and on to Ukraine. The first to travel were veterans of the Jihad in the North Caucasus who had made their way to Syria and fought in the ranks of al-Qaida-affiliated entities. They were sent as commanders and organizers of the forthcoming Jihadist units. Subsequently, Turkish Intelligence added Jihadists who trained and fought in the ranks of the Islamic State/Caliphate.

By Autumn 2014, the Jihadists were organized in three "Chechen battalions" that were under the overall command of the ultra-nationalist Right Sector (one of the main Ukrainian militias). The Sheikh Mansur Battalion is predominantly comprised of Chechen and other North Caucasian fighters. The Dzhokhar Dudayev Battalion is also mostly Chechen but also includes Uzbeks and Balkars. The Crimea Battalion is comprised predominantly of Crimean Tatar Jihadists and other North Caucasian fighters. The vast majority of these fighters are veterans of the Jihads in the Middle East and the North Caucasus. These battalions presently have some 1,200-1,500 mujahedin who still fight in eastern Ukraine, mainly in the challenging Mariupol sector near the Black Sea. The Chechen Battalions are renowned for their bravery, vicious ambushes and raids deep into the pro-Russia separatists' territory.

Meanwhile, once Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014, Turkish Intelligence added a new Jihadist liberation struggle – that of the Crimean Tatars inside and on the border of Crimea. The first unit was named after Abu Khaled Krimsky – a Crimean Tatar martyr-bomber who died in Aleppo on 25 April 2013 while fighting for an al-Qaida affiliate. Initially, Crimean and other Jihadists who were in the Crimea area on their way to Syria were diverted to the new unit. They were quickly joined by Crimean Tatar and Chechen veterans who launched a comprehensive training program for the Jihadists.

The Jihadist leadership portrayed the effort as a spontaneous grassroots uprising by humiliated Muslims against their Russian oppressors. In March 2014, Mustafa Dzhemilev Kirimoglu, a leader of Crimean Tatars, raised the point while stopping short of explicitly endorsing Jihad. "We have Islamists, Wahhabis, Salafis ... groups who have fought in Syria. They say: an enemy has entered our land and we are ready," he explained. "We can't stop people who want to die with honor."

The theme reinforced by the al-Qaida leadership in the Middle East who were more explicit. In May 2014, Abdul Karim Krymsky, a Crimean Tatar and the Deputy Emir of the al-Qaida-affiliated Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar, urged all Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian Muslims to "start on the path of Jihad" in their homeland. "You have to open up lands yourselves and defeat the infidels," Krymsky declared. "We see now that Muslims, Tatars, who went to Crimea and Ukraine have reached such a level of humiliation" that they must rebel against their Russian tormentors. "I want to say to those brothers, and I am addressing those brothers who remain [in Crimea], that they should feel dignity, so that they can start on the path of Jihad," Krymsky concluded. Salahuiddin Shishani, a Chechen and the Emir of the Jaysh, endorsed the call to arms.

In Summer 2015, Erdoğan ordered Turkish Intelligence to markedly increase support for the Crimean Tatar Jihad as part of Ankara's overall escalation of the support for the pan-Turkic neo-Ottoman campaign. Erdoğan urged the Tatars "to slam totalitarian Russia." On 30 July, Tuncer Kalkay, the Chairman of the Crimean Turks Culture and Fraternal Association, gave an interview on Turkish State TV in which he focused public attention



to the Crimean Tatar cause. He blasted the oppression of the Crimean Tatars by the Russian authorities and expressed support for the Ukrainian Government. "Crimean Tatars, who turned back to their hometowns after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, are still under the same totalitarian pressure of Russia," Kalkay claimed. The Crimean Tatars remain loyal to Kiev. "The peninsula's 350,000-strong Crimean Tatars largely boycotted the referendum [on Crimea's joining Russia], which was denounced as illegal by Ukraine and the most of the world."

Ankara's change in handling the Crimean Tatars issue was far more than words. In late-July, Erdoğan held both publicized and secret meetings with Crimean Tatar leaders – including the most bellicose Mustafa Dzhemilev Kirimoglu and Refat Chubarov. In the secret meeting, Erdoğan reassured the Crimean Tatar leaders that Turkey would never recognize the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. He also promised that Turkey "will do everything possible" to protect the Tatars' rights and Turkic identity on "the occupied peninsula". Erdoğan assured them that Turkish Intelligence was instructed to commit all resources to free Crimea, restore the rights of the Crimean Tatars, and establish a Muslim State in Crimea (which he did not specify whether as part of Ukraine or not). Erdoğan claimed that Kiev already promised Ankara to form "an Autonomous Crimean Tatar Republic" once Russia was evicted from Crimea.

The first concrete program was to give a Muslim face to the Ukrainian confrontation with Russia over Crimea. Erdoğan told Kirimoglu and Chubarov that Turkey already "convinced" Ukraine to permit Turkey to build "a Muslim battalion" that would be led by Turkish military personnel. The troops of the battalion would include Crimean Tatars, Kazan Tatars, Uzbeks, Chechens, Azerbaijanis, Meskhetian Turks and other Muslim groups including Turkish "volunteers" drawn from Turkey's Special Forces. The Muslim battalion would be deployed in the Kherson region on the Crimean border to guard the area and monitor transportation of goods and people between Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula. Turkish Airlines announced additional weekly flights to Kherson from Ankara and Istanbul in order to enhance Turkey's presence and influence. Significantly, this Muslim battalion would come on top of the three Chechen Battalions recruited by Turkish Intelligence in Syria and Georgia that were already fighting the pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Crimean Tatar Jihadists let their presence be known almost immediately. In September, heavily armed Crimean Tatar "activists" established a "blockade" of roads between Ukrainian and Crimea. Although the blockade was not condoned by official Kiev, the authorities did not interfere with the blocking of all commercial traffic to and from Crimea. The commander of the battalion of the "activists" is Lenur Islyamov. He is an Ukrainian Crimean Tatar oligarch with major investments in both Ukraine and Turkey. Islyamov claimed that he "personally invested \$10 million in an enterprise on the [Crimean] peninsula but later had to leave" when the Russians took over. Islyamov expects Kiev to compensate him for his losses.

In October, Mustafa Dzhemilev returned from Ankara with an offer for Turkish military support against Russia. "I personally delivered the letter from the Ministry of National Defense of Turkey to the Ukrainian Minister of Defense [Stepan Poltorak], in which it stated Turkey is willing to consider the supply of necessary equipment, although it did not specify the exact type. The military delegation of Turkey is expected to arrive in Ukraine soon." He stressed that Ankara was ready to circumvent NATO's embargo on Ukraine because "when it comes to the weapon that is made directly by Turkey, it is the country's personal decision whether to supply weapons or not."

The first confirmed major operation of the Crimean Tatar Jihadists took place in late-November 2015. In two cycles – on 19 November and just after midnight on 21 November – Crimean Tatar Jihadists blew up the four



pylons carrying electricity from Ukraine to Crimea through the Kherson region. Close to two million people on the Crimean Peninsula were left without power. Although there was no claim, both Ukrainian nationalist and Jihadist web-sites immediately posted pictures of the damaged pylons with the flag of the Crimean Tatars attached to one of the blown up pylons. Official Kiev explained that “unknown persons” whose motives were not clear brought down the pylons with “explosive devices”. On site, Crimean Tatar “activists” declared that the stopping of electricity was a natural extension of their two-months-long blockade of food. Meanwhile, armed Pravoseki (Right Sector militants) rushed to join the heavily armed Crimean Tatar “activists” in preventing repair of the blown off pylons.

On 22 November, an incited mob waving Crimean Tatar flags held a noisy demonstration under the building of the Presidential Administration. They demanded the right to take any measure necessary in order to help liberate their brethren in Crimea and punish Russia for their plight. President Petro Poroshenko immediately met with Mustafa Dzhemilev and other Crimean Tatar leaders and assured them that Kiev would not try to interfere with civilian protests such as road blocking. He assured the leaders that Ukraine did not want to restore power lines but only to insulate the wire of the fallen pylons in order to minimize the risk of electrocution to the nearby Crimean Tatars. Mustafa Dzhemilev announced that the “activists” would only permit the restoration of lines leading into Ukrainian territory. The Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that “the blockade continues! No lights in Crimea! Glory to Ukraine!”

On 23 November 2015, Kiev imposed an official ban on “all trucks ferrying goods” to and from Crimea. Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk asked the government to quickly ratify the decree and draft a law “taking into account the interests of our brotherly Crimean Tatar people.” Poroshenko promised that this was only the beginning because Kiev is no longer “satisfied with today’s status quo, when an occupying power neglects the basic rights of the Crimean Tatar people. ... Crimea is Ukrainian territory. We will defend the rights of the Crimean Tatar people and all Ukrainians who are living on occupied territory.”

By the turn of 2016, even Poroshenko could not ignore Moscow’s ire. Since early December, Poroshenko held lengthy conversations with Joe Biden who advised Kiev to turn to Ankara for a viable security umbrella against Russia. Since Turkey is a NATO member, Biden explained, any entanglement with the Russians will immediately get the US and the rest of NATO involved. In mid-January, Kiev and Ankara resolved to begin military and security cooperation. In January, Poroshenko and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu discussed the issue while in Davos.

In mid-February, Davutoglu visited Kiev in order to boost defense industry cooperation. He was accompanied by procurement and defense technology officials who nailed down specifics with their Ukrainian counterparts. A senior Turkish official called the move “strategic.”

In early March, the navies of Turkey and Ukraine conducted maneuvers in the Black Sea – starting from the shores of Ukraine and ending up in the Turkish Strait. The entire operational part of the Ukrainian Navy – the “Hetman Sadaydachny” frigate and a few smaller boats – participated. Poroshenko arrived in Turkey at the end of the maneuvers, accompanied by Chief of the General Staff Viktor Muzhenko and several other senior officers. He took a short cruise on the “Hetman Sadaydachny” off the Istanbul coast. Poroshenko and Erdoğan chaired a session of the Ukraine-Turkey High-Level Strategic Council that condemned the Russian “aggression against Ukraine.” They committed to raising the military relations “to a new strategical level.” They also agreed on concrete measures to help “de-occupy Crimea”. Consequently, Ukraine and Turkey signed in May 2016 a comprehensive military cooperation roadmap that outlines a practical implementation plan until 2020.



Not by accident, the Crimean Tatar Battalion was declared fully operational in March 2016 after lengthy training in Turkey. Indeed, Poroshenko spent time in Turkey dealing with the Crimean Jihad. The militant Crimean Tatar leaders – Refat Chubarov and Mustafa Dzhemilev – were part of Poroshenko's official delegation and joined him and Ukrainian senior officers in visiting the Crimean Tatar Battalion. Significantly, Poroshenko brought with him Ukrainian uniforms for the graduating Crimean Tatars. The Turkish military committed to providing the unit with weapons and other military equipment.

The Crimean Tatar Battalion deployed in the Kherson region on the border with Crimea in early April. Refat Chubarov declared the unit to be "a national military unit." However, Mustafa Dzhemilev announced that the new battalion is called "Asker" – a Muslim Army. The Crimean Tatar soldiers describe their unit as a "Suicide Bomber Battalion" committed to the liberation and Islamicization of Crimea. "If there is bloodshed and ethnic cleansing in the Crimea, this battalion will rescue its compatriots and do whatever it takes. That's why they call themselves the Suicide Bomber Battalion," Dzhemilev explained.

According to Refat Chubarov, the establishment of the Crimean Tatar Battalion is the beginning of a major historic program agreed upon by Erdoğan and Poroshenko. "Turkey and Ukraine worked out a plan to occupy Crimea by doing subversive actions," he explained.

At the heart of the program is the transformation of Ukraine's Kherson Province into a Turkic bastion from where the liberation campaign will be launched. The demographic change will commence with the emigration of 200,000 Meskhetian Turks from Turkey. They will be followed by Crimean Tatars and other refugees from the North Caucasus currently in Turkey. This new Muslim population will provide manpower pool for the recruitment of the Muslim forces needed for what Refat Chubarov calls the "reoccupation of Crimea." The new province will serve as the springboard for a comprehensive Jihadist campaign throughout Russian Crimea aimed, in the words of Refat Chubarov, to "explode social and political situation in this region." Moreover, a Turkic-Muslim Kherson will also break in two the presently contiguous Russian-speaking part of Ukraine that seeks secession.

Refat Chubarov noted that Erdoğan and Poroshenko agreed that Kherson will be named the Khan Giray Province. The Giray Dynasty were the Genghisid/Turkic dynasty that ruled the Khanate of Crimea from its formation in 1427 until its occupation by the Russians in 1783. The Giray Khans had special standing in the Ottoman hierarchy between the early 15th and the rebellion of Semiz Mehmed Giray in the early 16th Centuries. By Ottoman protocol, the Giray Khan was second to the Ottoman Emperor and superior to the Grand Vizier. Subsequently, the Ottoman Sultan demoted the Crimean Khan to the level of Grand Vizier and the Sultan retained the right to install and depose the Khans at his will. Significantly, the current flag of the Crimean Tatar Battalion under the command of Lenur Islyamov has the emblem of the Giray Dynasty at the center. Senior Turkish Intelligence officials acknowledge that Erdoğan's "Ankara has been dreaming for long of occupying Crimea again, which was lost during Russian-Turkish wars."

Erdoğan and Poroshenko also agreed that the US will be offered naval, air and military bases in de-occupied Crimea in order to guarantee US and NATO umbrella against Russian retaliation.

In the last week of June, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan committed to the marked escalation of the training and preparing of Turkic Jihadists for the escalation of the pan-Turkic Jihad. This is going to be a most audacious and risky undertaking for Ankara is going out of its way to ensure credible deniability of the entire program.

Turkish Intelligence nominated a retired General known for his chauvinistic pan-Turkic ideology to head the



undertaking. He was instructed to set up a private security firm that will provide cover for the undertaking. The security firm will recruit retired or fired high-ranking officers from the military, intelligence and security services to run the training program. The retired Turkish General was explicitly told to focus on recruiting retired and expelled generals and colonels in order to reinforce Ankara's ability to deny all association with the security firm and its efforts. The former senior officers were promised immunity from future prosecution regarding coups and other plotting against Erdoğan if they commit to the new training initiative.

The funding of the new security firm will come from Bilal Erdoğan's various energy and transportation companies. Businesses associated with Bilal are already funding a myriad of deniable sensitive operations for his father. As well, Ankara is expecting Riyadh to provide lavish funding – albeit through deniable third parties and individuals. Erdoğan is convinced he has the commitments of both King Salman and the all-important Prince Muhammad bin Salman. The Turkish military and intelligence services will provide all the weapons and other military equipment through deniable fronts.

In the first phase, the security firm is to formulate for, and present to, Erdoğan "important security master plans for the war" throughout the Turkic world. Erdoğan wants to create an "Army of Islam" that will spread his neo-Ottomanism and pan-Turkism. The master plans will include specific plans for specialized training for the various Jihadists of this "Army of Islam" who will spread the pan-Turkic Jihad.

The company will quickly take over a few training camps currently used by the Turkish military and intelligence services in order to train Jihadists for both Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State/Caliphate. They will introduce their own highly experienced trainers and experts as well as retain some of the current staff as "volunteers". The company will continue to train the Jihadists for the al-Sham front, but will increasingly focus on highly specialized training for Jihadist from 34 Sunni Islamic nations.

The first non-Arab trainees will come from nations that distinguished themselves in combat in the al-Sham Jihad front. These are, in the order of priorities of Turkish Intelligence, the Chechens-Dagestanis (and all other North Caucasus Jihadists), the East Turkistanis/Uighurs from China, the Uzbeks, and the Greater Albanians (from Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia). A special training program will be set for the Crimean Tatars on account of their geo-political importance rather than combat record in al-Sham.

Meanwhile, Erdoğan rushed to reassure Poroshenko of Turkey's enduring commitment to the confrontation with Russia. Erdoğan called Poroshenko who was in Brussels on 27 June. "Turkey is a strategic partner for Ukraine, and Ukraine is a strategic partner for Turkey," Erdoğan stated. He also guaranteed that "all of our existing projects would be continued and would be broadened." Erdoğan assured Poroshenko that there was no real rapprochement with Moscow, and that Ankara only expressed "sympathy for the family of the killed [pilot]" rather than apologized for the shoot-down of the Russian Su-24. Poroshenko was most satisfied with Erdoğan's assertion and promised Kiev's unyielding commitment to, and support for, their joint confrontation with Russia.

The next day, 28 June, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim formally repudiated all reports about a rapprochement with Russia. "Compensating Russia is not on the table, we have only expressed our regrets," he stated on Turkish TV. Although Erdoğan was expected to speak with Vladimir Putin in the coming days, there would be no change in the Turkish policy. Ankara "reached an understanding on this affair. We will put this incident behind us and continue on our path," Yildirim said.

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Erdoğan is actively preparing for the 8-9 July NATO Summit in Warsaw. His plan is to compel the NATO leaders to focus on the brewing crisis in the GBSB as a diversion from dealing with Turkey's policies in Syria and the escalating migrant crisis in Europe (where Turkey is ignoring a series of recent agreements with the EU). With Obama pushing hard for NATO pressure on, and provoking of, Russia along its borders, as well as the escalation of the war in Ukraine as an anti-Russia measure – Erdoğan emerges as one of Obama's best allies. Although Warsaw is eager to escalate the confrontation with Russia – Berlin strongly objects Washington's bellicosity. And NATO cannot escalate in Central Europe without Germany playing a leading role.

Hence, the Black Sea – including Ukraine – remains the most alluring theater for giving Russia hard time. Obama is clearly committed to making the Black Sea an American Lake despite Russia's warning. Erdoğan's Jihadist trident is the key to shielding the US activities, as well as destabilizing and undermining the potential allies of Russia, in the GBSB. Moreover, the establishment of a Turkey-sponsored Sunni Islamist-Jihadist three-prong surge will also expedite Erdoğan's own goal of making Turkey a pan-Turkic neo-Ottoman global power spreading its influence into the heart of Europe, the heart of Russia, and deep into the greater Central Asia all the way to China's Xinjiang.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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