

Turkey is pushed towards conflict with Iran

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Annotation

ARVAK analyzes geopolitical trends in the Middle East that signal the possibility of a clash between Turkey and Iran.

The text draws a historical parallel between modern Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, which repeatedly acted as a “battering ram” for European powers against Russia and Persia. The rise to power of R. T. Erdogan and the intensification of his “Neo-Ottoman” foreign policy is viewed as a Western project designed to destroy the “Kemalist” doctrine and the use of Turkey as a regional “battering ram”. It is noted that the key regional conflicts (including the Karabakh issue, the so-called “Zangezur Corridor” project and the process of disarming of the Kurdish formations) serve as Turkey’s preparation for active actions on the anti-Iranian front.

The conclusion is that Turkey, trapped by its own ambitions, is drawn into a conflict with Iran, catalyzed through Azerbaijan, in line with the strategic goals of Israel and its global allies to establish dominance in Western Asia and create a new world order.

Keywords: Turkey, Iran, Geopolitics, confrontation, West, Neo-Ottomanism, Kemalism, Azerbaijan, Israel, regional security, Middle East.

1. Geopolitical prelude to Turkish-Iranian confrontation

Current trends in the Middle East suggest a high probability of a conflict between the region's two most prominent Islamic nations: Turkey and Iran. While Ankara and Tehran presently exhibit no interest in such a development, the geopolitical maneuvers of leading Western powers—namely, Washington, London, and Tel Aviv – are compelling these capitals to escalate their relationship from regional competition to direct rivalry, and subsequently to open confrontation. The core issue resides in the inherent limitations of both Turkish and Iranian authorities’ influence on global processes within the region, coupled with the precariousness of their control over domestic political affairs and public sentiment within their respective nations.

The collective West aims to maintain its global dominance amidst China’s aspirations for leadership and Russia's endeavors to retain its status as the Eurasian hegemon. Consequently, the stakes in the West's pursuit of preserving a unipolar world are so considerable that a Turkish-Iranian confrontation could escalate, irrespective of the genuine national interests of these nations and contrary to the logic of expediency.

2. Historical parallels: the “Muslim Landsknecht” syndrome

Throughout its history, the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) consistently served as a “*battering ram*”, repeatedly propelled into conflicts with the Russian Empire and Shah’s Persia to advance the interests of European powers. The Ottoman elite justified these clashes based on perceived state interests and ambitions, though often the impetus for these wars stemmed from routine bribery of elites, European loans to the Sublime Port (Sultan’s court), incitement, and blackmail. This sustained practice long established Istanbul's reputation as a “*Muslim Landsknecht*” (mercenary) in the service of European political maneuvering. Over 5

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centuries, the Ottoman Empire engaged in 13 wars with Russia and 11 with Persia. In the overwhelming majority of instances, military campaigns initiated by the Ottomans resulted in negative, and frequently catastrophic, consequences for them. These outcomes demonstrate that Sublime Porte often failed to exhibit the capacity for a pragmatic assessment of its own capabilities, which frequently did not align with its aspirations, disregarding expediency and its long-term interests.

Turkey's most recent misguided endeavor was its active participation in WWI, which culminated in the collapse of the empire. The nation narrowly averted complete disintegration solely due to the swift reorientation of one of its military leaders, General Mustafa Kemal, from Ottoman and pan-Turkic ideologies to the principle of national unity within the confines of Anatolian geography.

The strategic acumen derived from the WWI enabled President İsmet İnönü (1938–1950) to safeguard the nation from direct involvement in WWII, a conflict of unprecedented global scale, despite concerted efforts by the Western coalition to solicit its allegiance. Turkey's *de facto* neutrality during this period constitutes a remarkable historical precedent, as Ankara adeptly navigated the complex interplay of global powers, effectively mitigating traditional pressures from its European counterparts, and prudently abstaining from premature alignment with any belligerent faction. This judicious strategy culminated in the preservation of the nation from devastation by Atatürk's associates, under İnönü's leadership. Furthermore, it fostered demographic growth, ameliorated the country's financial and economic standing through wartime trade operations, and ultimately facilitated Ankara's subsequent accession to NATO, thereby securing its protective "*nuclear umbrella*".

It is noteworthy that these achievements by Turkey transpired against the backdrop of its domestic policy, which emphasized the restraint of state ambitions and a pragmatic evaluation of its modest standing within the evolving global order. This judicious approach afforded the nation the latitude and time to concentrate on resolving internal issues and ameliorating deficiencies in state building, alongside advancing its social, economic, and technological sectors. Collectively, these factors established the groundwork for Turkey, a country devoid of significant energy or other fossil resources, to evolve into an economic force with a rapidly expanding industrial base on the cusp of the 21st century, endeavoring to translate its successes into tangible foreign policy gains.

3. Neo-Ottomanism as a project of external actors

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ascendance to power in Turkey is often posited as a deliberate initiative by Western centers of power, aiming to dismantle the Kemalist doctrine of self-containment, which became anachronistic for Ankara's allies following the dissolution of the USSR. In the wake of Russia's diminished influence and the tumultuous period of reorganization in the post-Soviet sphere, Ankara's role as NATO's anti-Soviet bastion on the Southern flank waned. Consequently, the West necessitated a more proactive Turkey, fueled by the deceptive notion of its autonomy and independence in regional Middle Eastern affairs.

For many years, Turkey has been a recipient of NATO-provided security. Concurrently, the West has sought to imbue Turkish political elites and society with the notion of restoring the “*former strength*”, thereby enabling the nation to reconsider the prevailing geostrategic alignment that has emerged within the “*historical territories*” of the Ottoman Empire. The West has demonstrated an interest in harnessing Turkey's accumulated “energy” for the benefit of the NATO bloc yet acting on Ankara’s behalf and in alignment with its reawakened ambitions.

Turkey was deemed unsuitable from the outset for executing a “ramming” strike against Russia, as such a scenario carried a high probability of eliciting a nuclear response from Moscow, inevitably drawing NATO directly into the conflict. Consequently, Ukraine was selected as the destructive anti-Russian “ramming” nation, successfully constraining Moscow in the region extending from the Black Sea to the Baltics and progressively eroding its resources. Ankara was more fitting for the West’s objectives concerning the reorganization of the Middle East’s 20th-century legacy, which, among other factors, was unsatisfactory to the United States and Europe due to China’s emergence onto the global stage and its endeavors to solidify its position in the aforementioned area.

Many experts subscribe to the rather unconventional view that R. Erdogan, who presents himself as an independent figure who has reduced Turkey’s dependence on the West, was, in fact, initially a *protégé* of the American-British alliance. His primary objective is to revive “*Kemalism*” and “*Neo-Ottoman revisionism*” while contributing to the suppression of “*Pan-Arabist*” and “*Pan-Shiite*” trends in the region. The West perceives these trends as contributing to the strengthening of China’s position in Western Asia. This perspective explains Erdogan’s persistent struggle against the political legacy of K. Ataturk, a struggle that has endured for a quarter of a century. Ataturk viewed the Ottomans’ Middle Eastern ambitions as a burden on the Turkish nation, hindering its secular development and its rightful integration into the progressive Western world.

4. Strategic trajectory towards the Anti-Iranian front

Observations suggest an emerging pattern of Turkey employing excessive force in the Middle East, particularly directed against Iran. It appears evident that Ankara’s actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, the pursuit of the so-called “*Zangezur Corridor*”, engagements in Syria, and efforts to disarm Kurdish forces are not solely driven by internal ambitions but rather serve the strategic objective of positioning Turkey at the forefront of an anti-Iranian alliance.

The geography of Turkey’s military and political engagement is increasingly encroaching upon Iran’s immediate borders. The dynamics of this process appear to be beyond the control of R. Erdogan himself, who has mobilized his nation for potentially perilous intervention in global transformations initiated by external actors. A salient example of Ankara’s entrapment by its own aspirations is the “*Shushi Declaration*” of June 15, 2021. This accord compelled Ankara to fully endorse Azerbaijan, even as Turkey finds itself unable to regulate or prevent Washington and Tel Aviv from potentially instigating a conflict between Baku and Tehran. Consequently, Azerbaijan has become the catalyst drawing Ankara into an anti-Iranian venture fraught with unpredictable repercussions.

The prospective of Iran’s “disintegration” may appeal to Ankara as an enticing prospect, potentially paving the way for the unification of Turks within the borders of the “*Great Turkey*” or the “*Great Turan*”. However, the history of 11 Turkish-Persian wars, fought with varying degrees of success, has demonstrated that none permanently secured Iranian territories for the Ottomans, nor did they assimilate the Turkic-speaking populations of the Iranian plateau into Ottoman interests. Conversely, each conflict invariably benefited external parties, who sought either to depose the Shah dynasty in Iran, acquire rights to Iranian resources, or draw the Iranian monarchy into debt bondage. A recurring consequence of these sanguinary conflicts was the weakening of Ottoman Turkey itself, thereby diminishing its strength and inclination to exhibit aggression in its European spheres of interest.

5. Conclusion: the vicious circle of history

An increasing number of experts are now inclined to believe that Israel, with the direct support from the United States and Great Britain, is orchestrating a conflict between Turkey and Iran. These two nations are considered primary rivals, whose existence challenges the ambition to establish the dominance of the Jewish state in Western Asia. This is not merely an ambition of Tel Aviv, but rather an integral component of a new global doctrine upheld by the world hegemony backing Israel, aiming to restructure the security system on the Asian continent and establish a new world order. At this juncture, Turkey appears unable to deviate from its role as an anti-Iranian “*battering ram*” and is once again compelled to act in the interests of Western powers, regardless of the sophistication of its propaganda in promoting the notion of Ankara’s independent choices and actions aligned with its own objectives and overarching strategies.

The historical trajectory of Turkish-Persian conflicts records yet another turn in a perpetual cycle, with no substantive changes observed in this historical pattern.