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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Ezekiel's Hoofbeats Get Louder With Turkey's Influence Over Libya

By Dore Gold/JNS.org January 06, 2019

Since it came to power in 2002, and especially under the leadership of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the AKP Party, which has ruled Turkey for nearly 20 years, has become increasingly preoccupied with Turkey's Ottoman past.

At its zenith, the Ottoman Empire covered much more territory than the present-day Republic of Turkey. It stretched from Algiers in the west across North Africa and the Middle East to Iraq in the east. The Ottomans seized Jerusalem in 1517. The Ottoman patrimony also covered territories from southern Poland in the north to Aden at the tip of Arabia in the south, including the holy cities of Islam, namely Mecca and Medina.

Yet the Ottoman Empire steadily contracted over the centuries as it lost successive battles with European powers. It lost Crimea to the Russian Empire. For a time, Egypt fell to the French. The Mediterranean Sea stopped being an Ottoman lake as European navies began defeating Ottoman fleets.

The Ottoman Empire was finally dissolved after the World War I, and its sultanate disbanded. With the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, it formally surrendered its sovereignty over Middle Eastern territories to the south of Anatolia. In the years that followed, the Republic of Turkey strictly adhered to its treaty obligations.

In the last two decades, however, there have been growing indications that certain parts of the AKP leadership have reservations, even resentment, about the territorial divisions of the last century. Leaked US State Department cables from 2004 and 2005 quoted these new voices as saying that Turkey needed "to take back Andalusia [Spain] and avenge the defeat at the siege of Vienna in 1683."

Of course the Turks are not about to launch a land invasion of Eastern Europe, but their leadership may have other ways of promoting their traditional interests, which they believe are threatened by their old Western rivals.

In October 2009, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu spoke in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where he laid out the goals of Turkish foreign policy. He declared: "Like in the 16th century, which saw the rise of the Ottoman Balkans as the center of world politics, we will make the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, together with Turkey, the center of world politics in the future. This is the objective of Turkish foreign policy."

A new opportunity for restoring what are viewed as former Ottoman territorial claims has recently arisen

with the Turkish-Libyan maritime agreements concluded on November 27, 2019. Following the Arab Spring, Libya split into several subdivisions, including the Government of National Accord (GNA), based in Tripoli, under the leadership of Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj, and the Libyan National Army (LNA), based in Tobruk, under General Khalifa Haftar.

Each Libyan ruler is backed by a different network of international partners: Haftar's partners in Tobruk include Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, and Russia. US officials have met with Haftar and argued that his forces control 80 percent of the country. This past April, US President Donald Trump spoke with Haftar by phone.

Prime Minister Sarraj in Tripoli works with Turkey, Qatar, Italy, and the United Nations. Sarraj also has links with the Muslim Brotherhood and has met with their representatives. Turkey has been supplying weapons, including drones, as well as training to Sarraj's forces.

Last month, with Turkish support, Sarraj created an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for Libya, extending 200 nautical miles into the Mediterranean Sea, in accordance with the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Libya's EEZ touches the EEZ of Turkey, making their maritime borders contiguous in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. These agreements do not establish sovereignty over the Mediterranean seabed, but they do help define the rights of Mediterranean states to exploit hydrocarbon resources.

Nonetheless, the new agreements were celebrated in Turkey. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) reported that the editor of the mouthpiece of the AKP wrote an opinion column on the Libyan agreement entitled "Barbaros is Back," referring to the Ottoman admiral who secured the Mediterranean for the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century.

The Libyan move was opposed by many states; Egypt registered its objections to the United Nations Security Council. In private conversations, reported in the press, Israeli leaders called the Libyan-Turkish deal illegal. Erdogan has announced his intent to dispatch Turkish forces to Libya to protect the Sarraj government in Tripoli.

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned last July that Syrian militants from Idlib were already infiltrating Libya and could be used in a number of conflict zones. He did not identify which jihadist group was coming to Libya, but two days after Putin spoke, a Libyan Islamic State cell reaffirmed its allegiance to the organization. Clearly, the struggle for Libya has all the potential to draw in multiple powers who have a direct stake in its outcome.

Assassination ::

Matt Ward raptureready.com January 9

Late on Thursday night, the United States military launched four missiles, via drone, that have sent shock waves crashing through Iran, the Middle East and the world.

In the strike, authorized directly by President Donald Trump, legendary Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani, head of Iran's elite Quds Force and spearhead of Iran's spreading military influence in the Middle East, was killed. The impact within Iran's leadership has been huge.

This is a hammer blow to Iran; make no mistake about it. It is also no over-exaggeration to say that such an action could well be the spark for a renewed war in the region, with some commentators even questioning if this could be the opening salvo of a much wider regional confrontation. Some commentators are even whispering "World War III" in hushed tones.

“At the direction of the president, the US military has taken decisive defensive action to protect US personnel abroad by killing Qasem Soleimani,” a Pentagon statement reads.

The assassination of Qasem Soleimani comes amid the widespread US belief that he was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq, and throughout the region, in the very near future.

There is also a widespread belief in America that Soleimani is personally responsible for the deaths of hundreds of American and coalition service members, and the injuring of thousands more.

Up until this point, Qasem Soleimani has always been the “man that got away,” seemingly immune from any Israeli or American retaliation. Many believed that he acted in the Middle Eastern theatre with near impunity. Not anymore.

Iran has openly called this a “declaration of war,” and declared three full days of national mourning. Qasem Soleimani was much more than merely a military leader to the Iranians.

Within Iran, Soleimani was an emblem, a figurehead, for Iran’s stand against the West in the Middle East, and the world generally. He was a revered hero, seen by many as an all-conquering warrior against the Zionists and the infidel West; he was a national icon, second only to the Ayatollah himself in popularity and esteem.

He is now dead.

For Iran, Qasem Soleimani’s death was the unthinkable. But it has happened, and the response from Tehran has been immediate, vowing that America will receive a “crushing” retaliation for this strike.

Iranian Defense Minister Amir Hatami, also a top military leader for the elite Al-Quds Brigade, of which Qasem Soleimani was the head, said, “A crushing revenge will be taken for this unjust assassination. We will take revenge from all those involved and responsible for his assassination.”

US Defense Secretary Mark Espira has, in the wake of this attack, announced the United States’ policy to begin pre-emptive strikes against her enemies in the Middle East, “to Iran and it’s proxies: we will not accept the continued attacks against our personnel and forces in the region. Attacks against us will be met with responses in the time, manner and place of our choosing. We urge the Iranian regime to end malign activities.”

There is no doubt that this assassination could be the catalyst for a major escalation in the Middle East. Some have even described this as akin to throwing a stick of dynamite into a dry powder keg. Others to the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914 that sparked the beginning of World War One. This assassination is potentially that important.

Such an action, without question, carries with it the risk of swift and significant escalation, yet it is difficult at this early point to estimate with any specificity what Iran’s response will be. But that they will respond is an absolute certainty.

The immediate Western response from Israel, the United States and regional allies has been to put embassies, bases and all personnel, military and non-military, on high alert for immediate retaliatory strikes.

Additionally, all embassies and consuls around the world, not just in the region, have now been placed on a state of high alert. The Iranians are masters of asymmetric warfare, something we may all potentially

learn in the weeks ahead.

At this point, all eyes must be on Iran. Much of what happens over the coming weeks, months and even years will be determined by how Iran responds to this assassination right now, over the coming days. When Iran does respond, they will be walking a very fine tightrope indeed. Not go far enough, and they look weak; go too far and they will provoke war with a country that they cannot hope to defeat in direct, conventional warfare.

There is a very real danger that any Iranian response could lock both them and the United States into a cycle of mutual escalation that might end in a much wider regionwide war, one which would impact all of us, and be almost impossible to pull back from.

In any direct military confrontation between the United States and Iran, the probabilities of the conflict becoming a major regionwide war within 48 hours are currently estimated to be about 90% or higher, quickly drawing in other nations and US allies.

The Iranians have equipped and paid for a massive missile force in Lebanon, estimated by some to be as many as 110,000 rockets. This evening, Israel sits firmly in the crosshairs of any potential Iranian response.

It is hard for me to overstate the potential significance of this moment. Whatever happens over the next few days, one thing is certain: the United States is closer now to a real, direct hot war with Iran than it has ever been in recent times.

Equally, for the US, the end result of this may be a huge loss of influence. Iraq has already declared this US assassination to be against their sovereignty. In this context, it may well now lead to the forced military withdrawal of the United States from Iraq, a question that the Iraqi government was already considering before the strike occurred. This would be a huge, worldwide humiliation for America.

Considering the tangled alliances in the Middle East, and that Soleimani controlled Iranian foreign policy across the region, we very well could be looking at a Franz Ferdinand, 1914 moment.

I have been watching the Middle East intently for 25 years now, and this is one of the most frightening set of circumstances I have ever seen.

What happens next no one can reliably predict, but one thing is for sure – something is going to happen. When, where and how? We will just have to wait and see.

This one is a bit long but starts to make sense when you factor in Ezekiel 38:

Germany Puts Its Head in Russia's Energy Pipeline Noose

by Soeren Kern December 30, 2019

A report by the Swedish Defense Research Agency found that Russia has threatened to cut energy supplies to Central and Eastern European more than 50 times. Even after some of those states joined the European Union, Russian threats continued.

Not surprisingly, Germany's current Social Democratic Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, has criticized the U.S. sanctions as foreign interference. "Decisions on European energy policy are made in Europe, not the USA," he tweeted on December 12. "We fundamentally reject foreign interventions and sanctions with extraterritorial effects."

U.S. President Donald Trump, like his predecessor Barack Obama, has opposed the pipeline project. Trump in particular has criticized German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her refusal to increase defense spending while at the same time supporting the pipeline that will funnel billions of dollars to Russia.... "So, we're supposed to protect you against Russia and you pay billions of dollars to Russia and I think that's very inappropriate. Germany will have almost 70 percent of their country controlled by Russia with natural gas. You tell me, is that appropriate?" — U.S. President Donald J. Trump.

"One must assume that Putin's pet pipeline is not really a business venture — and that the fools are the Europeans, in particular the Germans.... In short, Nord Stream 2 could make Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states less secure, undermine the EU's security strategy, give Russia a big stick for threatening Eastern Europe and sow discord among NATO allies. To Mr. Putin, causing so much trouble for a mere \$11 billion must seem like a bargain. For Europe it is a trap.... The mystery is why Germany has fallen into it and has been twisting French arms to do the same." — The Economist.

U.S. President Donald Trump, like his predecessor Barack Obama, has opposed the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. Trump in particular has criticized German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her refusal to increase defense spending while at the same time supporting the pipeline that will funnel billions of dollars to Russia.

A Swiss company working on the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline directly linking Russia to Germany has suspended pipelaying operations after U.S. President Donald J. Trump signed into law new sanctions.

The sanctions are part of an effort by the United States to halt completion of the €9.5 billion (\$10.5 billion) pipeline, which would double shipments of Russian natural gas to Germany by transporting the gas under the Baltic Sea. Opponents of the pipeline warn that it will give Russia a stranglehold over Germany's energy supply. Proponents counter that with European domestic natural gas production in rapid decline, the pipeline will enhance security of supply.

American sanctions may delay Nord Stream 2, but they are probably too late to kill the project. More than 80% of the 1,230-km (764-mile) pipeline has already been laid and the project is expected to be completed in 2020, according to Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak.

On December 17, the U.S. Senate, by a vote of 86 to 6, passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the annual defense spending bill, which includes the Nord Stream 2 sanctions language. The measure previously cleared the U.S. House of Representatives on December 11 by a vote of 377 to 48. President Trump signed it into law on December 20.

The legislation requires the U.S. State and Treasury departments to submit a report within 60 days that identifies "vessels that are engaged in pipe-laying at depths of 100 feet or more below sea level for the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, the TurkStream pipeline project [a new gas pipeline stretching from Russia to Turkey across the Black Sea] or any project that is a successor to either such project."

Approximately 350 companies are involved in building the undersea link, including the Swiss company Allseas Group SA, whose ships have been laying the last section of pipe in Danish waters.

On December 21, Allseas said that it had suspended its activities until further notice. Its decision came after U.S. Senators Ted Cruz and Ron Johnson warned AllSeas CEO Edward Heerema that the company would face "crushing and potentially fatal" sanctions if it continued work on the pipeline:

"Allseas and its key personnel who knowingly sell, lease, or provide those vessels for the Nord Stream 2 project will be sanctioned if those activities do not cease immediately. For the next half decade your

company and those personnel will be entirely barred from the U.S. In the meantime, any transactions they attempt to conduct with anyone who is in the U.S. or using the U.S. financial system will be blocked. Moreover, all property you have within our jurisdiction will be frozen, including assets related to Allseas USA headquartered in Houston, TX, any financial assets in U.S. banks, and any physical vessels or materials owned by Allseas that come into the U.S.

"If you were to attempt to finish the pipeline in the next 30 days, you would devastate your shareholders' value and destroy the future financial viability of your company."

Russia will now have to find alternative vessels to complete the pipeline. This will result in delays and additional costs to completing the pipeline, but it is unlikely to halt the project. On December 26, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said that only 160 km (99 miles) of the pipeline remains to be completed and that Russian ships would finish the work within months.

During his nomination hearing on October 25, John Sullivan, the next U.S. Ambassador to Russia, said that sanctions may impose a substantial cost on Russia, but will not stop the pipeline: "My concern is we may already have reached the point where the Russians will have the resources and ability to complete the pipeline no matter what we do."

U.S. lawmakers have warned that the pipeline would funnel billions of dollars to Moscow and help Russian President Vladimir Putin solidify his influence in Europe. The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Republican Senator James Risch, said in a statement:

"Projects such as the Nord Stream 2 pipeline are a threat to European energy security and a provocation by the Russian government. Imposing sanctions that will prevent the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is an important tool to counter Russia's malign influence and to protect the integrity of Europe's energy sector.... I hope all parties involved will realize that stopping this project is in the best interest of our friends and allies who wish to curb Putin's efforts to make Europe reliant on Russian energy."

Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen added: "The Nord Stream 2 project is another means by which Russia can spread its malign influence by exploiting Europe's energy dependence — a tactic that the Kremlin has a history of deploying. Many European leaders have voiced their concerns loud and clear regarding this pipeline and the threat it poses to Europe's independence.... I believe that this bill will help preserve our collective efforts within the transatlantic alliance to counter Russian aggression."

A German-Russian Project

Nord Stream 2 is led by Russia's Gazprom, with half of the funding provided by Germany's Uniper and Wintershall, the Anglo-Dutch company Shell, Austria's OMV and France's Engie.

Despite the multinational participation, the pipeline is essentially a German-Russian project promoted from its inception by Germany's center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), which, even during the Cold War, viewed closer economic ties with Russia as a way to defuse East-West tensions.

Germany's former SPD chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, a confidant of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has been Europe's leading proponent of the pipeline. Schröder, who led Germany between 1998 and 2005, has been the Chairman of Shareholders' Committee of Nord Stream since 2006. He is also Chairman of the Board of Directors of Rosneft, Russia's biggest oil producer. He has used his connections in Germany and elsewhere in Europe to lobby for both Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2.

In 2017, when Nord Stream was suffering from several serious setbacks, the former SPD leader and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel revived the project, as did his successor, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who is now Germany's president.

Not surprisingly, Germany's current Social Democratic Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, has criticized the U.S. sanctions as foreign interference. "Decisions on European energy policy are made in Europe, not the USA," he tweeted on December 12. "We fundamentally reject foreign interventions and sanctions with extraterritorial effects."

Europe is, in fact, deeply divided over the Nord Stream project and Germany is in the minority position. Russia is the largest supplier of natural gas to the EU, according to Eurostat. Just over 40% of EU imports of natural gas come from Russia, followed by Norway (at around 35%). Nord Stream 2, when combined with the existing Nord Stream 1, would concentrate 80% of the EU's Russian-imported gas along that pipeline route.

Germany's Nordic, Baltic and Eastern European neighbors have accused Berlin of ignoring their concerns that the pipeline is a threat to Europe's energy security and that it will strengthen Gazprom's already dominant position on the market.

A report by the Swedish Defense Research Agency found that Russia has threatened to cut energy supplies to Central and Eastern European more than 50 times. Even after some of those states joined the European Union, Russian threats continued.

In December 2018, the European Parliament, by a vote of 433 to 105, condemned Nord Stream 2 as "a political project that poses a threat to European energy security." It called for the project to be cancelled.

Ukraine has said that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline will deprive the country of more than \$3 billion in transit fees and undermine existing economic sanctions imposed by the West to compel Russia to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine and end its occupation of Ukraine's Crimea region.

Roughly one-third of Russia's gas supplies to the EU currently pass through Ukraine, but a ten-year pipeline contract between Russia and the Ukraine expires on December 31, 2019.

Nord Stream 2 should have been operational at the end of 2019, but the project was delayed after applications to lay pipes under Danish waters were left pending since April 2017. Nord Stream Chairman Gerhard Schroeder blamed U.S. political pressure on Denmark as the main reason for the delay in approving the permits. "Denmark is putting Europe's energy security at risk," he said.

After Denmark's Social Democratic Party won the Danish general elections in June 2019, the new government removed the last major hurdle to complete the Russian-led project. On October 30, the Danish Energy Agency approved a permit for Nord Stream to lay pipes in a 147-km section in the Danish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) southeast of the Danish island Bornholm in the Baltic Sea.

A Russian Trap

U.S. President Donald Trump, like his predecessor Barack Obama, has opposed the pipeline project. Trump in particular has criticized German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her refusal to increase defense spending while at the same time supporting the pipeline that will funnel billions of dollars to Russia.

Ahead of a NATO summit in Brussels in July 2018, Trump said that it was "very inappropriate" that the United States was paying for European defense against Russia while Germany, the biggest European economy, was supporting gas deals with Moscow.

He added that Germany had become "a captive" to Russia:

"When Germany makes a massive oil and gas deal with Russia, we're supposed to be guarding against Russia and Germany goes out and pays billions and billions of dollars a year to Russia.

"We're protecting Germany, we're protecting France, we're protecting all of these countries. And then numerous of the countries go out and make a pipeline deal with Russia where they're paying billions of

dollars into the coffers of Russia.

"So, we're supposed to protect you against Russia and you pay billions of dollars to Russia and I think that's very inappropriate. Germany will have almost 70 percent of their country controlled by Russia with natural gas. You tell me, is that appropriate?"

"Germany is totally controlled by Russia, because they are getting 60 to 70 percent of their energy from Russia and a new pipeline.

"I think these countries have to step it up [on defense spending], not over a 10-year period, they have to step it up immediately. Germany is a rich country, they talk about increasing it a tiny bit by 2030. Well they could increase it immediately, tomorrow, and have no problem.

"If you look at it, Germany is a captive of Russia. They got rid of their coal plants, they got rid of their nuclear, they're getting so much of their oil and gas from Russia. I think it is something NATO has to look at. It is very inappropriate."

In February 2019, the London-based Economist magazine warned that, because of Chancellor Merkel's dependence on her coalition partner, the SPD, to remain in power, Germany had fallen into a Russian trap:

"When a megaproject makes no commercial sense, there are two possibilities. Either its sponsors are fools, or they have other motives. Since Vladimir Putin is no fool, one must assume that his pet pipeline is not really a business venture — and that the fools are the Europeans, in particular the Germans....

Economically, it is unnecessary.... European demand for imported gas, because of energy efficiency, weak demand for manufacturing and the rise of renewables, is not expected to reach a level that would require the new pipeline anytime soon. Unsurprisingly, Russia's majority state-owned energy behemoth, Gazprom, is the scheme's only shareholder.