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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

Turkey: Drifting Further into Russian Orbit

by Burak Bekdil
November 9, 2021

- Sanctions are mandated by law for "any entity that does significant business with the Russian military or intelligence sectors" — Office of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Chair Robert Menendez, *Daily Sabah*, September 28, 2021.
- "Any new purchases by Turkey must mean new sanctions." — U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, referring to a December 2020 U.S. decision to impose CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) on Turkey for its acquisition of the S-400 missile system, Twitter, September 28, 2021.
- In addition, Ankara and Moscow would discuss Russian know-how and construction of two more nuclear energy plants for Turkey, in addition to a \$10 billion nuclear reactor already being built on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.
- All that strategic planning will further increase NATO ally Turkey's dependence on Russia, also Turkey's biggest supplier of natural gas.
- "Putin and his administration are well aware of Turkey's weaknesses: a) economy goes from bad to worse; b) the Pandemic is not under control; c) gas prices on increase but Russia is ready to offer a friendly discount to Turkey; d) military acquisitions facing a hostile U.S. Senate." — Eugene Kogan, a defense and security analyst based in Tbilisi, Georgia; to Gatestone.
- "The Turkish president will continue to play a spoiler role within NATO and provide Putin further opportunities to undermine the transatlantic alliance and its values." — Aykan Erdemir, former member of Turkey's parliament and now based in Washington D.C., email to Gatestone.
- [Erdoğan] will not step back from.... the Russia card in his hand, unless he sees that his love affair with Russia will come with a punishing cost.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is trying to make Turkey a unique example of political oxymoron: An "invaluable" NATO ally also in a deep strategic and military alliance with Russia. He will not step back from his horse trading with the West, the Russia card in his hand, unless he sees that his love affair with Russia will come with a punishing cost. Pictured: Erdoğan (right) with Russian President Vladimir Putin. (Image source: kremlin.ru)

Turkey has been a NATO ally since 1952. On October 6, NATO's childishly naïve secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, praised Turkey as "an important ally [that] played an important role in defeating Daesh." Both of his suggestions are grossly incorrect: Turkey is becoming an important Russian ally, not a NATO ally, whose irregular militia allies in Syria are the jihadist remnants of Daesh (Islamic State).

Like a spurned lover, deeply offended by President Joe Biden's refusal to meet him on the sidelines of September's UN General Assembly meeting in New York, Turkey's Islamist President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan rushed to the Black Sea town of Sochi, Russia, on September 29 for a tête-a-tête with Russian President Vladimir Putin. On his way back from New York, Erdoğan told reporters, "the signs are not good in Turkey's relations with the United States."

In an interview with CBS's "Face the Nation," Erdoğan said that the U.S. refusal to deliver F-35 fighter jets that Turkey agreed to purchase and Patriot missiles it wished to acquire gave Turkey no choice but to turn to Russia for its S-400 anti-aircraft missile system. This dispute has been a point of contention between Turkey and the NATO alliance during both the Trump and Biden administrations.

"In the future, nobody will be able to interfere in terms of what kind of defense systems we acquire, from which country at what level. Nobody can interfere with that. We are the only ones to make such decisions," Erdoğan said. Turkey is planning to buy a second batch of S-400 systems from Russia, and would also demand the U.S. to pay \$1.4 billion for the F-35s Turkey did not receive after it was expelled from the U.S.-led multinational consortium that builds the aircraft.

The stakes are now higher. Erdoğan is gambling by using the Russia card to avoid further U.S. sanctions in his S-400 bid. Meanwhile, the office of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Chair Robert Menendez has said that sanctions are mandated by law for "any entity that does significant business with the Russian military or intelligence sectors." The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee wrote on Twitter: "Any new purchases by Turkey must mean new sanctions," referring to a December 2020 U.S. decision to impose CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) on Turkey for its acquisition of the S-400s.

In Sochi, Erdoğan met with Putin only in the presence of interpreters (without an official delegation) defying diplomatic jurisprudence. Both leaders described the meeting as "useful" while smiling to cameras. He said that Turkey and Russia agreed to cooperate on critical defense technologies, including aircraft, engines, submarines and space. In addition, Ankara and Moscow would discuss Russian know-how and construction of two more nuclear power plants for Turkey, in addition to a \$10 billion nuclear reactor already being built on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

All that strategic planning will further increase NATO ally Turkey's dependence on Russia, also Turkey's biggest supplier of natural gas.

"Turkey's turn from the West at large continues uninterrupted," Eugene Kogan, a defense and security analyst based in Tbilisi, Georgia, told Gatestone Institute.

"Putin and his administration are well aware of Turkey's weaknesses: a) economy goes from bad to worse; b) the Pandemic is not under control; c) gas prices on increase but Russia is ready to offer a friendly discount to Turkey; d) military acquisitions facing a hostile U.S. Senate."

Aykan Erdemir, a former member of Turkey's parliament and now based in Washington, D.C., wrote in an email to the author, that Erdoğan's stance serves as a wake-up call to Biden administration officials. Erdemir wrote:

"Erdoğan's statements about purchasing a second batch of the S-400 air defense system from Russia should be a wakeup call for Biden administration officials, who have referred to Turkey as an 'invaluable partner' and an 'important NATO ally' in the last month.

"Erdoğan's insistence on a second S-400 batch reflects the impunity the Turkish president has been feeling since he offered in June to assist the Biden administration during and after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"Erdoğan's impunity also stems from the delay with which Trump imposed CAATSA sanctions against Ankara during the last month of his presidency only after bipartisan congressional pressure and his preference for relatively lighter sanctions that have failed to provide any meaningful deterrence.

"The Turkish president will continue to play a spoiler role within NATO and provide Putin further opportunities to undermine the transatlantic alliance and its values.

"Given the Biden administration's dependence on the Erdoğan government in Afghanistan severely restricts Washington's ability push back against Ankara's transgressions, a bipartisan congressional action is necessary to rebuild U.S. and NATO deterrence against the challenges posed by the Turkish and Russian presidents."

Erdoğan is trying to make Turkey a unique example of political oxymoron: An "invaluable" NATO ally also in a deep strategic and military alliance with Russia. He will not step back from his horse trading with the West, the Russia card in his hand, unless he sees that his love affair with Russia will come with a punishing cost.

Burak Bekdil, one of Turkey's leading journalists, was recently fired from the country's most noted newspaper after 29 years, for writing in Gatestone what is taking place in Turkey. He is a Fellow at the Middle East Forum.

Europe Looks To Build EU Army For Strategic Autonomy From US



European federalists seeking to transform the 27-member European Union into a European superstate -- a so-called United States of Europe -- have revived a decades-old proposal to build a European army.

The call for a supranational army, part of a push for Europe to achieve "strategic autonomy" from the United States, is being spearheaded by French President Emmanuel Macron, who, as part of his reelection campaign, apparently hopes to replace outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel as the de facto leader of Europe.

Macron claims that Europe needs its own military because, according to him, the United States is no longer a reliable ally. He cites as examples: U.S. President Joe Biden's precipitous withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan; the growing pressure on Europe to take sides with the United States on China; and France's exclusion from a new security alliance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Many EU member states disagree with Macron. Eastern European countries, some of which face existential threats from Russia, know that neither the EU nor France can match the military capabilities offered by NATO and the United States.

Other countries are concerned about a panoply of issues ranging from financial costs to national sovereignty. Still others are opposed to creating a parallel structure to NATO that could undermine the transatlantic alliance. A common EU army appears to be a long way from becoming reality.

A logical course of action would be for EU member states (which comprise 21 of the 30 members of NATO) to honor past pledges to increase defense spending as part of their contribution to the transatlantic alliance. That, however, would fly in the face of the folie de grandeur -- the delusions of grandeur -- of European federalists who want to transform the EU into a major geopolitical power.

Strategic Autonomy

The term "strategic autonomy" in European discussions on defense has been in use since at least December 2013, when the European Council, the EU's governing body comprised of the leaders of the 27 EU member states, called for the EU to improve its defense industrial base.

In June 2016, the term appeared in the EU's security strategy. The document -- "A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy" -- was said to "nurture the ambition of strategic autonomy" for the European Union. "An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy," it stated, "is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders."

In recent years, the concept of "strategic autonomy" has taken on far broader significance: the idea now means that the EU should become a sovereign power that is militarily, economically, and technologically independent from the United States.

EU observer Dave Keating noted:

"The Brussels buzzword is now 'strategic autonomy,' an effort to wrestle the word 'sovereignty' away from nationalists and make the case that only a strong EU can make Europeans truly sovereign in relation to Russia, China, and the United States."

European federalists increasingly have called for building an autonomous EU military force over the years.

A History of Failure

The debate over building a European army has been going on since the end of World War 2. In 1950, France proposed creating a common army to protect Western Europe from the Soviet Union without having to rearm Germany. A treaty creating the so-called European Defense Community was signed in 1952, but it was never ratified by the French Parliament due to concerns that France would lose its sovereignty to a multilateral decision-making body.

In the late 1990s, after the EU and its member states failed to prevent a decade of bloodletting in the Yugoslav Wars, and after the United States intervened, European leaders called for the creation of a European Rapid Reaction Force capable of acting in future crises.

In 2007, after years of debate, the EU established two so-called EU battlegroups consisting of 1,500 troops each to respond to crises, but due to intra-European disputes over financing and deployment, they have never been used.

The European Union is now calling for the battlegroups to be rebranded as a "First Entry Force" comprised of 5,000 troops. It remains unclear why EU leaders think the latter will achieve what the former could not. In any event, a force that small is nowhere near enough to give the EU "strategic autonomy" from the United States.

German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, in a recent opinion article published by Politico, concluded that "illusions of European strategic autonomy must come to an end." She added: "Europeans will not be able to replace America's crucial role as a security provider. We have to acknowledge that, for the foreseeable future, we will remain dependent."

Lack of Capabilities

An important obstacle to building a European army is the reluctance of EU governments to invest in defense. At the 2014 Wales Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, allies agreed to spend a minimum of 2% percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to defense spending. In 2020, only nine of NATO's 21 European members honored their pledges, according to data supplied by NATO.

Germany -- the biggest economy in the EU and the fourth-biggest in the world -- spent only 1.53% of GDP on defense in 2020. That represents an increase of less than 0.5% of GDP since 2015. France, the EU's second-biggest economy, spent 2.01% of GDP on defense in 2020, an increase of only 0.3% of GDP since 2015.

Italy, the EU's third-biggest economy, spent 1.41% of GDP on defense in 2020, while Spain, the EU's fourth-biggest economy, spent a mere 1.02% of GDP on defense in 2020, according to NATO data. The numbers show that defense spending is not a priority in most European countries.

The German armed forces (the Bundeswehr) are in an especially sad state of disrepair. A damning report published by the German Parliament in January 2019 found that critical equipment was scarce and that readiness and recruitment were at all-time lows. "No matter where you look, there's dysfunction," said a high-ranking German officer stationed at Bundeswehr headquarters in Berlin.

A May 2018 report by the German magazine Der Spiegel revealed that only four of Germany's 128 Eurofighter jets were combat ready. Germany's obligation to NATO requires it to have at least 80 combat-ready jets for crisis situations.

At the end of 2017, not one of the German Air Force's 14 large transport planes was available for deployment due to a lack of maintenance, according to the German Parliament. In October 2017, a spokesman for the German Navy said that all six of Germany's submarines were in the dock for repairs. In February 2015, Germany's defense ministry admitted that its forces were so under-equipped that they had to use broomsticks instead of machine guns during a NATO exercise in Norway.

Much of the blame falls on German Chancellor Angela Merkel. During her 16 years in office, she has been content to free-ride on the U.S. defense umbrella. Also to blame is Ursula von der Leyen, who was German defense minister between 2014 and 2019, before she was promoted to lead the European Commission, and who now wants to build a European army. As German defense minister, von der Leyen was plagued by scandals and accused of cronyism, mismanagement and nepotism.

EU affairs analyst Matthew Karnitschnig quipped:

"With Merkel on her way out, fixing the Bundeswehr will likely be up to her successor. Until then, plans for a 'European Army' that includes Germany have about as much chance of getting off the ground as the German Air Force."

France, which has just under 300,000 active-duty personnel, has the largest military in Europe. Still, it remains a regional power, not a global one. In September 2021, the RAND Corporation, in a major study -- "A Strong Ally Stretched Thin: An Overview of France's Defense Capabilities from a Burdensharing Perspective" -- concluded that the French military suffers many shortcomings that render as "limited" its capacity to sustain a high-end, conventional conflict.

The French Army "faces a challenge with respect to readiness, owing to past budget cuts and austerity measures, a small number of weapon systems, and the burden of sustaining ongoing overseas operations," according to RAND. The French Air Force "suffers from limited capacity" and "severely lacks strategic airlift." The French Navy, which has only one aircraft carrier, like France's other services, "has issues with readiness, and munitions stocks reportedly are low," according to RAND. The report's takeaway is that the French military would require decades of preparation and massive budget increases to realistically form the basis for a European army.

Poland, which is opposed to a European army because it would "weaken" the armies of NATO's member states, plans to double the size of its armed forces to 250,000 soldiers and 50,000 reserves. The expansion, announced on October 26, would make the Polish military the second-largest in Europe, ahead of that of the United Kingdom. In January 2020, Poland signed a contract worth \$4.6 billion to purchase 32 F-35A fighter jets from the United States.

In October 2018, Belgium signed a \$4.5 billion deal to purchase 34 F-35A fighter jets from the United States. "The offer from the Americans was the best in all our seven evaluation criteria," Belgian Defense Minister Steven Vandeput wrote on Twitter.

"The decision is a setback for Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain, who are behind the Eurofighter program, and also means the rejection of an informal French offer to sell Belgium the Rafale fighter built by Dassault Aviation," according to Reuters.

This implies that in the future the Belgian and Polish militaries will be further integrated with the United States and NATO rather than with a hypothetical European army.

Macron's Motives

One of the most vocal champions of the idea of a European army is French President Emmanuel Macron. He must know that an independent EU military remains only a distant possibility, despite his describing the NATO alliance as "brain dead."

As German Chancellor Angela Merkel is set to retire, it appears that much of Macron's posturing on European "strategic autonomy" is part of a French nationalist campaign strategy aimed at presenting France as a great power that dominates the European Union. Macron seems to be trying to appeal to French voters while carving out a role for himself to replace Merkel as the new leader of Europe.

Macron, who has yet to declare his candidacy, faces reelection in April 2022. Currently he is the clear first-round front-runner at 24%, according to recent polls cited by Politico. His main rivals are two nationalists: Marine Le Pen of the right-leaning National Rally party, and Éric Zemmour, a French essayist and media personality.

Macron has been calling for a European army for several years, but his professed aspiration for "strategic autonomy" shifted into high gear after U.S. President Donald J. Trump threatened to withdraw from NATO if European member states refused to pay their fair share. Trump's warning, which appears to have been more of a bluff than a real threat, prompted many European countries to increase their defense spending, even if most are still below the agreed-upon threshold of 2% of GDP.

Macron subsequently was dealt a humiliating blow by the Biden administration. In September 2021, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States announced a new tripartite strategic alliance aimed at countering China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.

Notably, the so-called AUKUS agreement does not include any member state of the European Union, which was completely left in the dark about the new alliance. AUKUS was announced on September 15, just hours before the EU unveiled its much-hyped "Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific." The EU had been hoping that its new plan would highlight its "strategic autonomy" from the United States in the Pacific region. Instead, the EU was eclipsed by AUKUS and exposed as a paper tiger.

Adding insult to injury, Australia announced that as part of the AUKUS deal, it had cancelled a multi-billion-dollar submarine contract -- once dubbed the "contract of the century" -- under which France was to supply Australia with 12 diesel-powered submarines. Instead, Australia said that it would be buying nuclear submarines from the United States.

France has reacted angrily to its change of fortunes. French Foreign Minister called AUKUS a "stab in the back." The French Ambassador to Australia, Jean-Pierre Thébault, said that Australia's decision to cancel the submarine deal was akin to "treason." The French government claimed that the Australian decision caught Paris by surprise, but the subsequent leak of a text message between Macron and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison revealed that Macron knew well in advance that Australia was planning to cancel the contract.

The AUKUS humiliation set Macron into a rage and appears to be fueling his increasingly frenzied calls for "strategic autonomy." An advisor to Macron said:

Ministers expedite immigration of 5,000 Ethiopians to Israel as conflict worsens

Immigration and interior ministers agree to airlift people claiming Jewish descent and with first-degree relatives in Israel as crisis escalates in African country

Immigration Absorption Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata and Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked said Tuesday they agreed to accelerate the stalled immigration of 5,000 Ethiopians claiming Jewish descent, amid intensifying fighting in the African nation.

Those included in the agreement have first-degree relatives in Israel and were eligible to immigrate under a 2015 government decision, under which 9,000 people would be brought to the Jewish state.

There had been a reported suspension of a planned airlift of 800 people following what was said to be a “difficult” meeting Monday between Shaked and Tamano-Shata, according to Channel 13 news.

The Haaretz daily said Tamano-Shata, who herself is of Ethiopian descent, threatened to quit her post if no more people were airlifted.

There are thought to be 7,000 to 12,000 Ethiopian community members still waiting to come to Israel, many of whom live in the Tigray region, at the heart of the conflict.

Others, who left their villages years ago, eke out livings near the Jewish community centers in Gondar City and Addis Ababa. Many have been waiting for decades to immigrate.

Pressure has been ramped up on Israel in recent weeks to bring thousands of members of Ethiopia’s Jewish community to Israel, as an insurgency by Tigray rebels intensified and neared the capital Addis Ababa.

“We must continue to bring them over to Israel quickly,” President Isaac Herzog said last week.

The Channel 13 report claimed that those slated to be brought to Israel were in no immediate, concrete danger due to their Jewishness. But there may also be doubt as to whether they are all Jews, after Hebrew media reports said Sunday evening that dozens of Ethiopians participating in the



secret operation may have misrepresented their Jewish ancestry and exaggerated the danger posed to them. Members of the community involved in the effort denied the accusations, according to Channel 12 news, which also published an assessment from the National Security Council claiming that there was no urgency to the airlift efforts.

Ethiopian Immigrants arrive in Israel as part of Operation Tzur Israel, March 11, 2021. (Olivier Fitoussi/Flash90)

Since fighting broke out a year ago, over 2,000 Ethiopian Jews have been brought to Israel in state-run operations, among them a group of 61 who needed ministers to sign off on their immigration because they are not part of the Jewish community, claiming only Jewish roots.

Though the plan to spirit them to Israel was put together during the tenure of former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, it was the cabinet of his successor Naftali Bennett that signed off on it, the Haaretz daily reported.

While Ethiopian Jewish immigrants from the Beta Israel community are recognized as fully Jewish, immigrants from Ethiopia belonging to the smaller Falash Mura community are required to undergo Orthodox conversion after immigrating. The Falash Mura are Ethiopian Jews whose ancestors converted to Christianity, often under duress, generations ago. Some 30,000 of them have immigrated to Israel since 1997, according to the Prime Minister's Office.

Because the Interior Ministry does not consider the Falash Mura to be Jewish, they cannot immigrate under the Law of Return, and therefore must get special permission from the government to move to Israel.

Further complicating the effort, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed alleged in a phone call with Bennett that Ethiopians brought to Israel in recent months included officers involved in war crimes, a report said Monday.

Channel 13 news cited a security source involved in the matter saying at least four officers, among the over 2,000 people brought to Israel over the past year, are suspected of taking part in rebel massacres in the Tigray region.

Months of political tensions between Ahmed's government and the Tigray leaders who once dominated Ethiopia's government exploded into war last November.

Following some of the fiercest fighting of the conflict, Ethiopian soldiers fled the Tigray capital, Mekele, in June. Facing the current offensive by Tigray forces who are approaching Addis Ababa to press Ahmed to step aside, the prime minister declared a national state of emergency with sweeping detention powers last Tuesday. The Tigray forces are also pressuring Ethiopia's government to lift a deadly months-long blockade on their region of around 6 million people, where basic services have been cut off and humanitarian food and medical aid are denied.