Turkey’s Erdogan comes closer to Russia

Turkey’s Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is nothing if not a political survivor. After weathering a US led year-long attempt to oust him for his failure to execute a Turkish military ground war to topple Bashar al Assad in neighboring Syria, now Erdogan, a student of Realpolitik perhaps even more than the Koran, is looking abroad for new strategic allies. At a time when NATO, the Obama Administration and others are doing everything to demonize Russia’s Putin, using the pretext of Ukraine, Erdogan is moving significantly closer to—guess which world political leader. Yes, Vladimir Putin and Russia. The implications of a Turkish fundamental geopolitical realignment could have global consequences far beyond Turkey’s mere size or political weight.

The first steps to a closer economic alliance between Turkey and Russia came this past April, well after the illegal US-orchestrated coup in Ukraine and after the Crimean Parliament requested to join Russia, opening a flood of anti-Russian propaganda from the west. On April 21 Turkish Minister of Energy Taner Yildiz invited Gazprom deputy chairman Alexander Medvedev to Akara to work out details of a major increase of Russian gas to come to Turkey via Gazprom’s Blue Stream pipeline. Turkey is already Russia’s second largest gas and oil importer after the EU. The two agreed how to increase the capacity of the Blue Stream gas pipeline from 16 to 19 billion cubic meters per year, further adding to the economic ties binding the two historical rivals.

Joining Eurasian Economic Union?

Now Erdogan’s government is opening talks with Russia and other member nations of the Eurasian Economic Union to open a free trade zone between Turkey and the EEU countries-- Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, according to Russian Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev after talks with Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci on July 19 at the height of the NATO and Washington demonization of Putin and Russia and blaming them for the MH17 Malaysian airliner downing over eastern Ukraine.

“We have discussed the possible forms of cooperation, including the formation of a free trade zone between the Customs Union and Turkey. We have agreed to create a working group and to begin a more detailed discussion of these possibilities and prospects in September,” Ulyukayev said on the sidelines of the meeting of G20 trade ministers in Sydney, Australia. The talks took place during the recent G20 summit in Australia.

There is significant economic benefit for both groups. Currently the trade volume between Russia and Turkey amounted to $32.7 billion in 2013. Russia is Turkey’s second-largest trade partner after the European Union. Turkey ranks eighth among Russia’s foreign trade partners. Turkey wants to also build a transport and logistics hub in Russia with links to sea ports, airports, railways and highways, Zeybekci added.

Other steps which add to the snowballing trend of other nations to find ways of avoiding the US dollar, a main pillar of American global power, Turkey has proposed just two days before the Eurasian Union talks, using national currencies in trade with Russia, Russia’s Ministry of Economic Development. "Turkey is offering Russia to switch to national currencies in mutual payments," the ministry's press service announced after the meeting between Russia's Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev and his Turkish counterpart Nihat Zeybek. Since the Ukraine crisis and growing US economic sanctions Russia has been moving aggressively to avoid using the dollar in its trade.

In addition Erdogan has expressed strong interest in Turkish membership in the emerging BRICS organization of
Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The BRICS just agreed to create a major alternative to Washington’s IMF and World Bank to finance infrastructure and other projects in the emerging markets, independent of severe Washington conditionalities that historically acted as a covert neo-colonial wedge to force emerging economies to open to major US and EU multinationals and banks.

All this adds up to a potential significant geopolitical shift to Turkey, a country that Washington lured into NATO along with Greece in 1952. Over the past sixty some years Turkey was not only a NATO watchpost to spy on the Soviet Union and later Russia. Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991 NATO and especially the CIA and US State Department have worked to use Turkey, especially via the CIA-run “former Imam, Fetullah Gülen, now in exile in Saylorsburg Pennsylvania, to organize fundamentalist Islamic Jihadist organizations in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Chechnya and other Islamic regions of the former Soviet Union.

A shift by Erdogan, who has had a bloody falling out with Gülen and Gülen’s powerful bloc within Turkish police and court system, could deal the Washington neoconservative warhawks a major blow in their current drive to foment conflict across the Middle East, Eurasia and beyond. Since the British manipulated the 1850’s Crimean War to foster tensions between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Turkish empire, it has been Anglo-American policy to keep the geopolitically strategic Turkey an enemy of Russia. That era may soon end.

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