Adept in Pan-Ottomanism, Erdogan Got Carried Away Playing Soldiers

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is well known for his resounding appeals built on the political doctrine of Pan-Ottomanism, which emerged in Turkey in the 1970s, according to which all subjects of the Ottoman Empire are members of a single nation, the Ottomans. However, such verbal passage has been recently increasingly followed by actual actions, which, without a doubt, can be regarded as an attack on the territorial integrity of other states.

To understand the reasons behind Erdogan's behavior, it is worth recalling that the current Turkish President was born in Istanbul in 1954 in the family of a coast guard worker, Adjarian Lazs, who migrated to Istanbul from the Caucasus province of Rize in the northeast of Turkey. As his family was poor, he had to earn his keep since high school by selling lemonade and buns in the lower streets of Greater Istanbul. The same street has fostered many qualities in Erdogan.

As a child, he got into religion. For his religiosity at school, he was called 'hoca'. At the age of 19, in 1973, he graduated from the Istanbul Imam-Hatip Madrasa, becoming imam and hatib (head of the collective prayers, which is responsible for prayers in Islam). Subsequently, this religion was transferred to politics, which he got involved in during his University days, joining the National Student Association at the age of 20. Three years later, he headed the district youth cell in the Islamist National Salvation Party and, after that, all of Istanbul.

The 1980 military coup led by Ahmet Kenan Evren deprived Erdogan of his party and his job. In 2014, the Erdogan government convicted Evren Kenan for life for crimes against the state. Remarkably, Kenan Evren’s reign was accompanied by massive political repression (178,000 people arrested, 64,000 sent to prison, 30,000 stripped of their citizenship, 450 died under torture, 50 executed, and thousands missing), something the rule of Erdoğan has
become increasingly similar to, who has already imprisoned many people accused of complicity in the coup attempt in 2016 in the last five years alone, not counting punitive military operations against the Kurds, both in Turkey and neighboring Syria and Iraq.

Another fact worth mentioning is that in 1998 Erdogan was sentenced to 10 months in prison by a Turkish military court for reciting an Islamist poem at a rally. But in 2011, Erdogan’s Turkish justice would send the then Chief of the Turkish General Staff, Ismail Hakki Karadayi, to the dock, clearly recalling his involvement in the fate of current Turkey’s President in 1998.

Nevertheless, at 45, Erdogan returned to politics and started with a clean slate: He headed the reformist wing of the new Fazilet (Virtue Party), which in its short history, from 1997 to 2001, became the third party in Parliament in 1999. When it was abolished for its “jihad sympathies” and attempts to impose sharia law in the country, Erdogan united young politicians into his party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Over the years, Erdogan’s imperial ambitions have only grown stronger. Erdogan pays special attention to the Islamic factor in his expansionist policy, capturing the general trend of increasing the role and significance of Islam in the world and the emerging process of Islamization of the planet. During his rule, Turkey visibly “turned green,” away from a Kemalist, secular republic into a Muslim regional power. Erdoğan is seriously claiming the role of the leader of the Sunni Muslim branch of Mohammedanism. He is trying to use this factor in his national and foreign policies with the support of “his loyal Turkish army,” whose capacity and loyalty to the current government he has always attached great importance to.

Therefore, Erdogan has emphasized using the Islamic factor in his expansionist policy with the support of the military. And this is evident, particularly in Erdogan's desire to replace Assad’s pro-Iranian regime in Syria with a pro-Turkish one under the auspices of moderate Islamists from the country’s Arab Sunni majority and Turkomans. Hence the active reinforcement of the Turkish leader’s grouping of troops in this direction, the increase of his stationary observation posts, the provision of opposition fighters and groups of radical Islamists with a new shipment of weapons and ammunition, including ATGM and MANPADS.

The Turkish leadership does not reduce its interest in neighboring Iraq, Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean and does not hide its plans to conquer the pearl of the former Ottoman Empire, Egypt. All the more reason to march victoriously across the Maghreb, across North Africa, to the borders of Morocco, as well as to actively seek to implement its expansionist plans in the Transcaucasus and Central Asian countries.

It is clearly demonstrated by the Turkic Council Summit that took place on November 12 in Istanbul (with participation of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and, of course, Turkey, while Turkmenistan and Hungary have the status of observers), which Erdogan wants to present as an absolute triumph: the participants decided to rename the Turkic Council into the Organization of Turkic States. This wording suggests a higher level of “cooperation” under the direct auspices of Ankara, which is also documented: the summit adopted a Turkic World Vision 2040. Also noteworthy is the decision taken at this summit to “form a common alphabet.” Given that Turkey uses the Latin alphabet and some Turkic countries like Kyrgyzstan use the Cyrillic alphabet, the motion vector is clear - strengthening the separation of post-Soviet states from Russia, including through the abolition of the Cyrillic alphabet adopted in Russia.

Thus, the coordinating body evolved into something more politically significant. Erdogan has previously stated that his dream is the emergence of six states and one nation.

This consolidation by Turkey of the post-Soviet republics, which are allies of Russia in the EAEU and the CSTO, is taking place with Ankara's increasing military cooperation with these states. This is particularly evident in Turkey's military aid to Kyrgyzstan after the conflict with Tajikistan, and Turkey's military involvement in the recent events in Karabakh, where the Shusha Declaration, signed by the victorious countries, laid the foundations for Turkey’s future expansion.

One cannot remain silent about Erdogan’s openly hostile stance on Crimea, Prime Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu participation in the Crimean Platform summit in Kyiv, and Ankara’s declaration of Ukrainian ownership of the peninsula, with the explicit aim of Turkification of the peninsula.

And the cherry on top for Russia was Erdogan’s recently demonstrated map of the “new Turkic world,” which includes a large part of Russia, including Siberia. In particular, several Russian regions, from Dagestan and the Orenburg region to Altai and Yakutia, could be identified. Ankara’s “new world” includes Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, the
Balkans, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, part of the territories of Mongolia and Iran, Europe.

Time will tell how far Erdogan will go in realizing his ambitions to recreate the Ottoman Empire in modern terms and conquer Europe and other countries. However, in any case, the mentioned expansionist policy of Erdogan can hardly be regarded otherwise than as an attack on territorial integrity. And the states on the map of “Erdoğan’s new world” will undoubtedly demonstrate their official assessment of such actions to him.

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