



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, sits by French President Emmanuel Macron during a news conference following a summit on Syria held in Istanbul October 27, 2018. (Image source: AP)

Deciphering the Dilemma Between France and Turkey

April 8, 2021 | Volume 14 | Issue 9
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Recent mediatic, populist, more or less calamitous events in and affecting France are just the tip of a complex geopolitical iceberg. I refer, first, to the external pulse represented by the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. Second is the dreadful Turkish rise in the Mediterranean and its regional emancipation—for France, a resentful resurrection as an emerging power in fundamental conflict with the supposed values of the French Republic. The controversial slogan of agitation is secularism—which is not even part of the republican currencies stamped constitutionally in the fourth paragraph of Article 2 of the Constitution of 1958, though it is part of the preceding definition in Article 1 ("La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale") which ensures equality based on race, sex, religion, and fraternity. This essay will try to decipher the spurious motives of a geopolitical conflict over Eastern Mediterranean hegemony promoted mainly by Saudi Arabia[1] and France.

France's Present: Opportunity and Animus

The European Union's agglutination was built up along two geopolitical edges with an industrial economic tractor (Alnasir, 2020). The first two are France and the United Kingdom which, because of their representation in the UN Security Council, were delegated European nuclear powers. France has always been jealous about its military operational capacity, asserting through its special status in NATO a strategic post-colonial position in Africa and its scattered colonies around the globe. However, and despite this post-imperial greed, Germany understood after the disaster of the Second World War that the age of military operative hegemony had ended, so that

its career was focused on economic-industrial prosperity, abandoning its military career to the actors of the old concept. Germany has maintained the power of the European last word due to its industrial talent and might.

Now, however, Brexit implies the institutional re-ordering of the Union, not simply the departure of a Member State as it would be in the case of Poland, Greece, or even Spain. Brexit means a French monopoly of nuclear capacity in the European Union. France suddenly elevates itself as an unquestionable regional hegemon, which seriously endangers the order of stability for which the EU has been forged.

On the other hand, Turkey's emergence as a new actor has been long overdue. Since its dismantling by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the Western powers kept Turkey just as close as they wanted it through its tactical membership in NATO, thereby denying free passage for the Soviet navy into the Mediterranean. Now, as a result of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Turkey is demanding compensation for its contribution to the Western powers as the Bosphorus bottleneck of the Mediterranean. The Bosphorus plug is vitally important to Russia; it leaves Russia stuck in the interior of the Black Sea, having no other Atlantic access than the North Sea, and thus renders its entire Mediterranean fleet without effect and frees NATO from that source of pressure.

The new situation complicates things. On the one hand, Turkey, in support of Russia, is planning the excavation of an alternative channel to the Bosphorus, over which it would have full sovereignty. This puts the Bosporus bottleneck in check, thus creating alternatives for both Russia and Turkey itself: leaving the obligations of the Treaty of Lausanne without effect and opening the way for confrontation with the West, and strengthening Turkey's role in the new Euro-Asian rivalry. Now, Turkey would not face the West by itself, but its "revenge" would come from the hand of Russia.[2] Furthermore, the maritime readjustment agreed with Libya, by which Turkey significantly gains maritime sovereignty that threatens all the maneuverability of the Mediterranean, puts French interests in check (Butler & Gumrukcu, 2019).

Since Macron's rise to power, France has been intentionally looking for any reason to irritate Turkey. Besides the unprecedented media campaign of demonization (Coudurier, 2020), consider also the 2019 consecration of Armenian memory (ignoring the Greek genocide of the Turks (St. Clair, 2008, pp. 1–12) and the depths

of Turkey's Armenian problem)—not for love of the Armenians, but to irritate the Turks. In the background, this is all about the French geopolitical problem, hence its interest in locking up European support.



Site of the proposed Istanbul canal, with the Bosphorus indicated by an arrow to the right.

While it postulates itself as a secular state, France has strongly criticized the modification of the administrative status of the Hagia Sofia (*Turkey – Hagia Sophia – Statement*, 2020), which is ultimately a Turkish internal affair. No one questions Spain about what it is doing with Granada, nor about its decision to remove the bust of Abderraman II from Cadrete (Zaragoza). So why single out Turkey?[3] Still, it is not Turkey placing itself in the line of fire with the EU, but rather, it is France pushing the whole of the EU towards the line of fire with Turkey, testing its limits. The provocative conduct of Charlie Hebdo—which in Spain and many other countries

might amount to a crime—becomes a State affair in France, and a cross-border geopolitical gambit. These are a few of many more spurious examples of French animus toward Ankara.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussing the Turkish Project 2023. (Source: Milliyet)

The Passion 2023

The Turks now dream the so-called “2023 dream” which primarily refers to reclaiming their extirpated possessions in the Levant, specifically Syria and Iraq. Since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Turkey has materially introduced itself into various border villages, imposing its de facto sovereignty over them without any

legal title or formal declaration. Turkey played an instrumental role in the formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, or DAISH), of which it was not only the promoter but also, without doubt, the main beneficiary. Turkey was the only state that quasi-formally hosted a diplomatic delegation of ISIS on its territory—a move with huge ramifications beyond the region (Speckhard & Shajkovci, 2019). In addition, Turkey was its first buyer of hydrocarbons at low cost on the black market, which have been used to fuel its industrial revolution. Moreover, under the pretext of fighting against ISIS and the obligation to defend the civilian population, Turkey formally invaded Northern Syria and Iraq, with tacit international support but without legal basis, settling in several villages in northern

Syria since 2014 and occupying the capital of the province of Idleb since 2018—barely 40 kilometers from Aleppo, the economic capital of northern Syria.

The AKP government in Ankara established administrative, postal, and educational control (even including the extirpated cities in their national weather maps), thus exercising what amounts to de facto sovereignty.

These decisions, made by the Turkish government without a democratic process, have also rendered Southern Turkey a free space for ex-combatants of the Islamic State, who, as soon as they returned from adventures around the region, not only settled in Turkey but were rewarded with Turkish nationality. This also meant either settling as full Turkish citizens, or being redirected to new conflict zones such as those in Libya and Kazakhstan, financed by Turkey as well.[4]

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Animating much of this tension between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq are conflicts relating to territorial claims going back to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, whereby Turkey still claims around 30% of Iraqi and Syrian territories allocated to them by Anglo-French power as well as a water quota of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.[5] Connected to the latter, Turkey has completed construction of the disputed Ilisu Dam on the Tigris River in southeastern Turkey, which renders flow agreements with Iraq and Syria without effect. With Turkey’s 2023 goal clearly the neutralizing of the treaty of Lausanne, it does not acknowledge complaints lodged by the governments of Iraq and Syria, and instead publicly positions them as usurpers of power.[6] In this way

Ankara has generated a de facto situation that gives Turkey control of water from the vital and historic rivers of Iraq and Syria. Mesopotamia is no longer where it was—it is moving to Turkey.[7]



Greek and French vessels sail in formation during a joint military exercise in the Mediterranean Sea. (Image source: Reuters, undated)

Conclusion

The French instrumentalization of the Turkish case has far more transcendent implications than what the French media claims. On the one hand, France intends to enhance its geopolitical status vis-a-vis the European Union, presenting itself as the only leading military power of European corporate potential. This move instrumentalizes European values in its favor, and agitates for republican principles as justification for closing ranks and inducing Germany to impose sanctions against Turkey (Schnee, 2020). On the other hand, France arms its media artillery defending secularism, while also defending the Christianity of the Hagia Sofia—which is not even a Catholic monument but an Orthodox one, and which the Russians themselves

(Orthodox) declare is an internal affair of Turkey.

What is clear is that all the Euro-Mediterranean dynamics hint at the next conflict to bring down Turkey, in which France intends first to forge social support through a media lynching, as well as to close the European ranks, under the pretext of collective solidarity. By finally toppling that rival, it would fully consolidate its strategic leadership in the new post-Brexit Europe.

Notes

1. The Saudi factor is complex, but in brief the media potential financed by Saudi Arabia and its main figurehead, the Arab Emirates, had mobilized for the dismantling of the Egyptian government by coup d'état in 2013, and promotes since then the demonization of so-called Political Islam. But given the context of the Saudi struggle for regional hegemony against emergent Turkey, the latter came out in defense of the legitimacy of democratic power in Egypt, against the coup d'état instigated by Saudi Arabia. This has resulted in clash and continuing tension between these regional powers. In the Saudi discourse, "Political Islam" implies Turkey.

2. A vengeance brewing since the Greek genocide of the Muslims in 1821 and the subsequent Treaty of Paris for the Crimean War, a humiliation that the Turks have never forgotten.

3. The move seems to be the opposite of what Eduard Soler I Lecha of the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs recently made of it (Soler i Lecha, 2020).

4. $200/month salary to fighters on the spot, along with equivalent payments to families. But this also means that, if France is the European hit man with its colonial troops invading nations in the light of day, Turkey has become an incubator of hitmen and militia deployed in international conflicts under its shadow.

5. Between Iraq, Syria and Turkey there's a historical dilemma regarding the flue management of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. As since the fallen of the Ottoman Empire after the I World War, the unique existing treaty was into the UK and France at 23 January 1920, as both colonial superpowers in legacy of the Ottoman Empire, thus imposed to the post-ottoman emergent states' of Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The most recent treaty was in 1989 into Iraq and Syria establishing a quota of 58% of the Syrian caudal for Iraq, but indeed all the protocols of friendship and

neighborhood with Turkey haven’t concrete exactly the quota which Turkey should allow to both countries, but was only a procedural treaties to try to find a participation system, which has never been clarified from the Turkish side, as Turkey own the sources of these revers, thus has the key power of maintaining the agony.

6. In 2016 Erdoğan answered the Iraqi Prime Minister when asked the Turkish troops to get out of Iraq after an illegal incursion by saying "You're not my homologue, you are none to claim my troops what has to do or what not. Take care of your own self, and don't address me with your words" (France24, 2016).

7. This fact is not banal, not even vital in Turkish hydraulic terms, because Turkey has plenty of water, but it retains it and then pours much of it into the sea. Still, reducing the flow means reducing the agricultural power of downstream countries, and therefore generating consumption needs for which Turkey is the supplier. This was one of the main arguments of the Iraqis and Syrians for boycotting Turkish products harvested at the cost of their drought. This could be argued as one of the reasons for the poor follow-up of the boycott of French products in those countries where people are already involved in several other boycotts of Turkish products for that reason, and of Iranian products for other ethnic and ideological ones. Consumers have no longer any remedies or alternatives, and are left to ponder the immediate servitude and expropriation of their vital resources by Turkey and Iran, or to France.

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European Union

Turkey

conflict



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