
RAPID RUSSIA-TURKEY RAPPROCHEMENT CASTS SHADOW ON WEST'S SECURITY ORDER

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If Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, becomes excessively close to Russia, it would affect the security order led by the United States and Europe. The current situation is serious.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has held talks in Russia with Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which they agreed to mend the bilateral relations strained after the shooting down of a Russian military jet by Turkey in November.

Stating that Erdogan apologized for the downing of the plane in June, Russia is set to gradually lift economic sanctions on Turkey, including restrictions on sightseeing trips to the country and an import ban on Turkish livestock and agricultural products. During his latest visit to Russia, Erdogan even described Putin as his "dear friend."

The easing of tensions between the two nations can be a positive move conducive to preventing the regional situation from becoming complicated. What is worrying is that the rapid formation of a closer relationship between the two countries noticeably points to their ulterior motive of restraining the United States and European nations.

Erdogan escalated a purge of opponents after an abortive coup took place in July. The president has demanded Washington extradite a religious leader living in the United States whom Erdogan regards as the mastermind of the coup attempt. He is also considering reinstating the death penalty, a move the European Union opposes.

Erdogan's efforts to forge a highly amicable relationship with Russia without listening to U.S. and European criticism directed at him may indicate his determination to adhere to an iron-fisted regime, even by abandoning his country's long-cherished aim of gaining accession to the EU.

Turkey has also hinted at suspending a measure to accept Syrian refugees remaining in Greece. If Turkey's accord reached with the EU in March is scrapped, there would inevitably be a renewed rise in the number of refugees who are smuggled into European countries.

It is important for Turkey and the EU to maintain their dialogue so common ground can be found in their positions, a task necessary to steadily implement the agreement.

Russia has been at odds with the United States and European nations over the Ukraine situation and other issues. Russia's acceptance of Turkey's calls for improving their ties at this juncture may signify an attempt to shake NATO and take the initiative in dealing with the Syrian situation.

Russia joins Iran in supporting the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad. In mid-August, Russian forces for the first time used an air base in Iran to conduct air strikes in Syria.

Given that Turkey, as a member of the U.S. and European camp, is supporting Syria's antigovernment forces, the mending of ties between Moscow and Ankara seems to have been intended to keep the Assad administration in place by drawing Turkey closer to the Russian side.

The U.S. military is conducting air strikes on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant militant group in Syria using an air base in Turkey from which to send planes. If Turkey continues to cozy up to Russia, it would adversely affect the U.S. operations. That could also hinder peace talks over Syria.

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden will soon visit Turkey. His visit must serve as an opportunity to find out about Erdogan's true motives while also rebuilding relations between their nations.

Kaynak/Source: