
TURKEY'S ALLIANCE WITH WEST MAY WEAKEN AFTER RUSSIA DEAL

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin recently met for the third time in two months since the two countries broke the ice and worked to normalize bilateral relations. The agenda of the two leaders included a number of important items: Signing the Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline deal, accelerating the building of the Akkuyu nuclear plant, launching fresh attempts to develop cooperation in the field of defense industry and aerospace, and removing trade sanctions on a number of Turkish products.

The scope of the agenda amounts to an ambitious new beginning for both countries. The two leaders have further agreed to hold a joint economic commission meeting in the coming months, before they co-chair a high-level cooperation meeting in the first months of 2017.

This course of speedy reconciliation in ties seems to be carrying the relationship to a more strategic level for both countries, as Turkey will set the main route for Russia to export its natural gas to the European market. Bypassing the Ukrainian route through Turkey is a kind of hand extended from Ankara to Moscow, at a time when some European countries are mulling over whether to impose further measures on Russia due to the Ukraine crisis.

Ukraine is not the only source of tension between Russia and the West. The Russian military has also extended support for the Bashar al-Assad regime in recent months in Damascus campaign to re-capture Aleppo, at the expense of committing war crimes through systematic bombing of civilian residential areas, hospitals and schools.

France has taken the lead against this, saying it is working to find a way for the International Criminal Court to launch an investigation into war crimes committed by Syrian and Russian forces in eastern Aleppo. A merciless campaign carried out by al-Assads army aims to break the resistance of rebel groups in eastern Aleppo, which could eventually lead to the seizure of Syrias second largest - and most strategic - city by the regime.

Since Turkey's normalization process with Russia began, it has not been criticizing Russian acts inside Syria and it has been less vocal against al-Assad. In return, neither Russia nor Syria have made Turkey's Euphrates Shield Operation a major issue, even though they did not expect the operation to push further south.

A meeting between the two countries' chiefs of general staff last month likely produced an understanding between the two armed forces, in which they both try to keep away from each other's radar screens while continuing respective military operations.

This strategic rapprochement between Turkey and Russia comes at a time when both countries are at odds with the Western world, particularly the U.S., over a number of issues. With weeks left until the grand Mosul operation, Turkey is experiencing serious spats with Washington over its support for Syrian Kurds and its opposition to the Turkish military's presence at the Bashiqa base in northern Iraq.

This suggests a new strategic understanding between Ankara and Moscow, which could further complicate the situation in our immediate neighborhood. One of the consequences of this beginning will surely be a weakening of Turkey's alliance ties with the West. Ankara must seek a balance in keeping its foreign policy intact and unharmed during this process.

Kaynak/Source: