



MIDDLE EAST

Pan-Turkism as a Rising Threat to Stability



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Ankara seeks to exploit the alliance with Baku to strengthen its foothold in the region and bid to restore the Ottoman Empire and merge the Turkic States of Central Asia in a seamless logistics space with common armed forces.



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Direct involvement of Turkish military and Syrian mercenaries in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the side of Azerbaijan marked the peak of the pan-Turkism policy aggressively pursued by the Turkish leader Recep Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party to extend Ankara's influence to the Turkic States of Southern Caucasus and Central Asia regions. "We celebrate this glorious victory here today. But Azerbaijan's liberation of its lands from occupation does not mean that the struggle is over. The struggle, now waged in the political and military spheres, will continue on many other fronts," Erdogan said during the victory parade in Baku last December after the signature of a peace agreement that cemented the end of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, he unequivocally confirmed Turkey's readiness to secure its geostrategic interests by any means, including military force.

Inciting ethno-religious conflicts

Erdogan's ominous mention of the "other fronts" provides an insight into the very essence of the foreign policy of today's Turkey that is trying to regain its former grandeur by exploiting all openings in the turbulence created by the crumbling unipolar world order led by the United States. The disintegration processes in Europe and the diminishing role of superpowers, which had previously prevented Ottoman ambitions from transcending regional borders, gave Turkey a green light for geopolitical revenge. However, in order to reassert its regional leadership, Ankara chose rather dubious methods, including proliferation of political Islam and encouragement of separatist sentiments in countries with Turkish minorities.

It is worth noting that although the ideology of pan-Turkism precedes the presidency of Recep Erdogan, he is the first leader in Turkey's modern history to vigorously implement it in the most radical fashion.

Turkey and the armed groups Ankara took under its wing pursue a consistent policy of terror against the Kurdish population in the areas of Northern Syria captured during Turkish intervention. Ethnic cleansing, assassination and abduction of Kurdish

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to human rights watchdogs, during the three-year period of Turkish occupation 674 civilians were killed, more than 7,300 were abducted and 300,000 were forcibly displaced. In addition, Turkish companies cut down over 314,000 olive trees and plundered more than 70 archaeological sites.

Besides the Kurds, Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh have also experienced the rise of Turkic nationalism last year. Turkey sent thousands of Syrian mercenaries to support Azerbaijan's troops in the fight for the disputed region. Nagorno-Karabakh is considered part of Azerbaijan, but since 1994 it has had a quasi-independent status, profiting from the protection of Armenia. During three months of fierce clashes, Azerbaijan managed to achieve superiority with Turkey's active support and forced Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to sign an agreement that secured Baku's control over occupied territories.

Military experts say that Azerbaijan's victory was regarded by Ankara as a proof of the correctness of its foreign policy. It also was strategically important in terms of Turkey gaining direct access to the Caspian Sea and the Central Asian region via Nakhichivan Autonomous Region, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the main lands of Azerbaijan for future expansion into the Turkic countries.

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