

Erdoğan Offers Donbass Mediation so Turkey Can Encroach on Russia's Sphere of Influence Again

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*Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** has said his country is ready to mediate between Russia and Ukraine in peace talks. Although Erdoğan presents Turkey as a potential mediator, his country will certainly favor Kiev when considering the continued accusations made against Russia for the supposed human rights violations that Crimea's Tartars experience and the Turkish Military Industrial Complex now heavily relying and placing its hopes on Ukraine to achieve its ambitious aims.*

With such an offer to mediate, Erdoğan is attempting to project Ankara's foreign policy ambition of expanding its influence in the post-Soviet space. Most recently was Turkey's blatant involvement in Azerbaijan's invasion of historically Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus in 2020. Today, Azerbaijan is not just an ally of Turkey, but seen as an extension of the Turkish state, especially in the military and economic sectors where Russia was formerly more dominant in.

Erdoğan had set his eyes on Ukraine a long time ago and always aimed to strengthen his position there, especially because the level of Russophobia in the country works in his favor. He said that Turkey is committed to ensuring peace, with an emphasis on the Crimean Tatars, and expressed hope that the region will not turn into a warzone and for peace to prevail.

The Turkish president's offer for his country to be a mediator between Russia and Ukraine was positively assessed by Kiev as the two countries are essentially allies. Turkey officially refused to recognize the results of the 2014 Crimean status referendum and the reunification of the peninsula with Russia. It is recalled that Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev transferred Crimea from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954. Despite this fact, in September Erdoğan reiterated at the UN General Assembly that Ankara attaches importance to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, including Crimea, and again emphasized that Turkey does not recognize the reunification.

In building Turkish-Ukrainian relations, Erdoğan took small but specific steps. He first sent military advisers to Ukraine, then instructors, and then delivered Bayraktar drones and other weapons to the Ukrainian military. Therefore, Kiev believes that Erdoğan is an ally against Russia. Moscow has repeatedly warned that Turkey is encouraging militaristic fever in Ukraine by delivering such weapons to Kiev, and that this could destabilize the situation in Donbass.

Although Erdoğan is now apparently taking the initiative to resolve the conflict in Donbass and ease relations between Kiev and Moscow, when remembering his interests and his attempts to turn Turkey from a regional power into a more global power, he challenges Russia's interests and traditional sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In this way, it is obvious that Erdoğan is not interested in peacebuilding in Eastern Europe, especially when considering Turkey's recent direct and indirect invasions of Nagorno-Karabakh and large areas of Iraq, Syria and Libya, as well as refusing to adhere to UN Security Council resolutions regarding the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus.

Erdoğan does not need peace between Kiev and Moscow, nor does he have the resources or experience to achieve peaceful settlements. Therefore, Erdoğan's cunning offer to mediate is just a desperate attempt for Ankara to involve itself in issues that it has no business being in.

Turkey has nothing to do with the Minsk agreements, which are the basis for solving the problems in Donbass and was made between Russia, Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), France and Germany. These agreements are an international obligation of Ukraine, which Kiev is not fulfilling.

Ukraine adheres to the Minsk agreements only in words and does not respect them as Kiev's forces continue to fire against Donbass. Although Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky expresses hope that the Donbass issue can be peacefully resolved, it will be a difficult task as he actually has no real authority in the country and rather serves the oligarchs and military leaders as a figurehead.

For this additional reason, it is ridiculous to think that Erdoğan will go to Kiev, meet with Zelensky, and resolve the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine is effectively being shaped by the US and its Eastern European allies like Poland and the Baltic States to be a resource of pressure and conflict against Russia.

Although it appears that Ankara and Moscow have strengthened their relations, especially as Erdoğan boldly announced that he expects Russia to assist Turkey in building nuclear plants, establishing a space program and acquiring new weapons, the geopolitical convergence of the two countries clashes. So long as Turkey continues challenging Russia's sphere of influence, suspicion and mistrust will remain, and hence why Moscow will never allow Erdoğan to involve Turkey in Eastern European matters concerning Russia.

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