

Stratfor's Decade-Old Geopolitical Map Provoking Russian-Turkish Distrust?

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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The recent viral sharing of the speculative map of Turkey's future regional influence that was first published by Stratfor founder George Friedman in his 2010 book about "The Next 100 Years: A Forecast For The 21st Century" is provoking distrust between the Russian and Turkish societies since this image predicts that Ankara will eventually exert sway over Crimea and all of southern Russia by 2050.

Speculative Turkish Regional Influence By 2050

A decade-old [speculative map](#) first published by Stratfor founder George Friedman in his 2010 book about "[The Next 100 Years: A Forecast For The 21st Century](#)" is provoking distrust between the Russian and Turkish societies after it recently went viral on social media. The image predicts that Turkey's future regional influence will eventually extent over Crimea and all of southern Russia, among other places such as the South Caucasus, most of the Mideast with the notable exceptions of Iran and "[Israel](#)", and parts of some Central Asian former Soviet Republics by 2050.



It became such a popular subject of discussion that Turkish TV channel TGRT showed the map on one of their programs, which prompted [RIA Novosti](#) to report on it. Some of the geopolitically unaware masses in both societies reacted as though its unexpected viral popularity served as some implied statement of intent by Turkey, with few realizing that it was a deliberately provocative prediction by an American analyst.

Suspicious Timing For An Old Decontextualized Map

It's impossible to know for sure how and why Stratfor's map went viral in recent days, but it might be because someone suddenly discovered or remembered it and thought the image relevant enough to share in light of current discussions about Turkey's growing regional influence following Ankara-backed Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia late last year in what Baku regards as its [Patriotic War](#). It could also be that a nefarious actor sought to introduce it to the global information ecosystem at this particular point in time in order to provoke the inter-societal distrust that subsequently emerged to a certain extent. Whatever the truth may be, a few insightful observations should be made about the map's prediction. The first is that it's completely decontextualized from the arguments laid out in Friedman's book, leading whoever sees it — especially among the largely geopolitically unaware masses — to imagine for themselves how that outcome could come about, whether through peaceful means or even militant ones. This invites speculation, which can take on a life of its own as is seen.

Unscientific Predictions

The second observation is that the predicted extent of Turkey's 2050 regional influence doesn't make a lot of sense. It's difficult to believe that Turkey would establish influence all

throughout the majority non-Turkic Mideast yet somehow the Turkic Azeris of northwestern Iran wouldn't fall under Ankara's sway while the majority ethnic Russian population of southern Russia would. There's also no accounting for why only particular parts of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan would be within Turkey's sphere of influence. It's also very odd that eastern Ukraine was included in the map too since there's no ethno-religious basis for predicting that. This makes the overall prediction "unscientific", for lack of a better word, from even the most basic geopolitical perspective. The third and final observation of importance is the innuendo that Russia will be so weak by 2050 that Turkey would be able to expand its influence within the Eurasian Great Power's borders in the first place. This very strongly suggests that Friedman gives credence to the flawed theory that Russia might soon collapse.

Inter-Societal Distrust

Some geopolitically unaware but well-intentioned Turks might feel proud when they look at Stratfor's map so long as they don't think about the consequences that its extremely unlikely implementation would have for their country's strategic partnership with Russia, while it's understandable that any patriotic Russian would be greatly disturbed by the predictions being made and feel very angry if they saw some Turks reacting positively to the ones pertaining to Crimea and southern Russia. The larger dynamic at play is that the internet is bringing societies together like never before, and social media is functioning as a platform for them to observe one another's reactions to various developments such as the unexpected viral popularity of this map. Google Translate enables Russians and Turks to read one another's comments, which can lead to heightened distrust if some members from one of their societies voice support for predictions that risk violating the territorial integrity of the other.

Social Media Responsibility

To be fair, though, there was quite a lot of speculation on the Russian side of the internet back in 2015 following the November mid-air incident between their two countries. Some Russians talked about their desire to see Moscow arm regional Kurdish forces that Ankara regards as terrorists, with it being strongly implied or at times even outright stated that the intent would be to promote separatist ends as revenge. Just like Russians are rightly offended by some Turks expressing positive feelings about Stratfor's speculative map predicting that their country will exert influence over Crimea and southern Russia by 2050, so too were Turks rightly offended by some Russians discussing Kurdish scenarios half a decade ago. No one can or should censor anyone in either society or others for expressing their personal views on geopolitical topics no matter how offensive they might be, but everyone should at least become more aware that anything that they publicly post even among friends can be read by anyone else, including unintended individuals from abroad who might get offended.

Different Societies, Different Sentiments

This can be troublesome for soft power and make it all the more complicated. There are times where someone's personal views might differ from their government's official ones, which is natural but might be confusing for foreigners who come across them. They might also wrongly believe that a person's views represent all of society's, which is especially the case when it comes to trolls who misportray themselves as representing their compatriots' true sentiments. All of this could provoke distrust between societies even if it isn't

intentional. There's no silver-bullet solution other than recognizing everyone's right to share their geopolitical ideas on the internet and becoming aware of the fact that it's not a good idea to make generalizations. Furthermore, everyone must acknowledge that different societies have different views on various topics, some of which are mutually contradictory with one's own societies'. It's for this reason why there will always be disputes over historical interpretations of important figures and events.

Concluding Thoughts

Keeping all of this in mind, the more that Russians and Turks acknowledge each other's freedoms of geopolitical expression in cyberspace and sometimes different future visions, the less likely it is that either society will begin to distrust the other anytime their representatives come across something provocative shared or commented upon by their counterparts. It's also worth mentioning that nobody can account for the surprise viral popularity of Stratfor's decade-old decontextualized map, which might have been purely coincidental or perhaps also part of a plot by a third party to drive a wedge between these two strategic partners' societies. The fact of the matter however is that Turkey doesn't have any interest in exerting influence within Russia's borders no matter how nostalgic some Turks might feel about one day seeing this happen once again or how much some Russians fear this scenario transpiring. The Stratfor map scandal should therefore serve as a lesson in [media literacy](#), inter-societal differences, and the need not to let viral images cause problems between strategic partners.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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About the author:

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political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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