

Turkey's Military Engagement with the "Lublin Triangle" (Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine) Aims to "Balance Russia"

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Poland's agreement to purchase Turkish attack drones speaks to Ankara's desire to enhance military engagement with the Warsaw-led "Lublin Triangle" in order to balance Russia's recent geostrategic gains in the Black and Mediterranean Sea regions that the West Asian country might have suspiciously considered to be an unstated attempt by Moscow to contain it.

Russian-Turkish relations are incredibly complex, but can nowadays be characterized as a "friendly competition" between historic rivals whose leaders ultimately decided to responsibly regulate this dynamic for the sake of stability within their overlapping "spheres of influence". I explained this more at length in an analysis that I wrote for Azerbaijan's Axar in early April asking "[Will Turkey's Partnership With Ukraine Worsen Its Relations With Russia?](#)" Generally speaking, this model of "friendly competition" is sustainable, though only so long as neither side does anything to decisively upset the military balance between the other and any of their rivals. That's why Russia is [so concerned](#) about Turkey's sale of combat drones to Ukraine since these could shift the military dynamics in [Donbass](#). Foreign Minister Lavrov also [warned](#) Turkey against "fueling Kiev's militaristic sentiment" earlier this week, but it's Turkish-Polish military cooperation that might be much more dangerous.

Polish President Duda agreed to purchase [24 Turkish attack drones](#) during his latest trip to the country in Ankara's first such sale to an EU or NATO state. What's so disturbing about this development is that Poland [previously lost the war games](#) that it staged earlier this year related to a speculative conflict with Russia, one in which neighboring Kaliningrad would play a major role for both sides. In that scenario, Russia would either attack Poland from that region or be attacked by Poland there. Either way, the point is that Kaliningrad is in Poland's military crosshairs and represents the only realistic target for the Central European country's new Turkish drones other than Belarus, the latter of which is part of the Russian-led CSTO mutual defense pact so any Polish attack against it could in theory be treated as an attack against Russia itself. Considering the intensity of Poland's "[negative nationalism](#)" vis-a-vis Russia, a drone attack against either can't be discounted.

It's one thing for the US to bolster its Polish regional proxy's offensive military capabilities and another for Turkey to do the same, especially considering the sensitive nature of contemporary Russian-Turkish relations and associated need to not disrupt the fragile balance between them. By selling drones to both Ukraine and Poland, Turkey is essentially enhancing its military engagement with the Polish-led "[Lublin Triangle](#)" which aims to "contain" Russian influence in Central & Eastern Europe (CEE) both at Poland's independent prerogative but also America's indirect behest. Poland aspires for [regional hegemonic status](#) through this platform, the core of the "[Three Seas Initiative](#)", which could also help it reduce Germany's influence in this strategic space as an asymmetrical response to its neighbor's [ongoing Hybrid War against it](#) and especially against the backdrop of the US [pragmatically allowing](#) the Nord Stream II pipeline that Warsaw is [so suspicious of](#) to be completed.

It's unclear exactly why Turkey would so provocatively bolster the Lublin Triangle's military capabilities through attack drone sales to both the bloc's Polish leader and its Ukrainian partner, but it might be the case that Ankara believes that this is a symmetrical response of sorts to recent Russian geostrategic gains in the Black and Mediterranean Seas that the West Asian country might have suspiciously considered to be an unstated attempt by Moscow to contain it. To explain, Russia's victory in the 2008 peace enforcement operation against Georgia secured Abkhazia within its "sphere of influence", while Crimea's 2014 democratic reunification with Russia further expanded Moscow's influence in the Black Sea that it shares with Turkey. On the southern front, Russia's decisive 2015 anti-terrorist intervention in Syria placed the country's military forces squarely within Turkey's soft underbelly.

Although Russia has no intention whatsoever to attack Turkey, both due to their leaders' pragmatic agreement to regulate their "friendly competition" within their overlapping "spheres of influence" and also to avoid an apocalyptic World War III scenario with NATO, Ankara might have nevertheless feared such a scenario no matter how unlikely it is in reality. This might especially have been the case ever since the agreement to deploy Russian peacekeepers to part of Azerbaijan's Karabakh region as part of last November's Moscow-mediated ceasefire between that country and Armenia. Although Turkish troops are there too, this still might not have dampened suspicious of the containment scenario. In response, Turkey might have thought it necessary to enhance its military engagement with the Polish-led Lublin Triangle, ergo its drone sales to Ukraine and most recently Poland.

What's so concerning about these possible calculations is that Russia probably hadn't ever thought that CEE would become a theater of "friendly competition" with Turkey. Unlike Turkish moves in the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan), Levant (Syria), and North Africa (Libya), its attack drone sales to those two Lublin Triangle states directly affect Russia's national security. By contrast, Russian moves in the South Caucasus (Abkhazia and Azerbaijan's Karabakh), Black Sea (Crimea), and Levant (Syria) don't pose any such threat to Turkey's national security since Moscow remains in full control of its forces there and isn't building up its partners' military capabilities as anti-Turkish proxies. With these observations in mind, Russia might need to review the nature of its "friendly competition" with Turkey, perhaps even as high as the leadership level due to the fact that the very close ties between their Presidents is largely responsible for managing these dynamics.

Some frank discussions between their leaders could be forthcoming if Russia believes that Turkey's attack drone sales to those Lublin Triangle states could adversely affect the military balance between it and those two recipient countries. Turkey must clarify the reasons behind its enhanced military engagement with this unquestionably anti-Russian

bloc that's forming before Moscow's eyes right on its very borders. It would still be concerning if Turkey is just doing it for the sake of business, but even worse if it's for some larger strategic purpose. In either case, the move can be interpreted as unfriendly but perhaps also as a sly means for Turkey to restore the balance between it and Russia if some of its decision makers (whether rightly or wrongly) regard it as having recently tilted in Moscow's favor, especially after last year's peacekeeper deployment in Azerbaijan's Karabakh. Regardless of its ultimate intent, the situation must be clarified soon in order to preserve their pragmatic ties.

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