

Turkey's Poisonous Hand of Friendship with Ukraine

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Global Research, July 21, 2020

[South Front](#) 19 July 2020

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*While the situation in Libya continues to escalate and the parties are preparing for a decisive battle for Sirte, Turkey, which actively supports forces of the Government of National Accord (GNA), is negotiating with its strategic partners. On July 10, National **Defense Minister Hulusi Akar** went on an official visit to Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. During the visit, Akar checked the work of the diplomatic mission, had dinner with representatives of national minorities, namely Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks, with Ukrainian businessmen and the head of the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Taking into account the high tension of the situation in Libya, the defense minister's dinner in Kiev was of great importance for the Turkish side.*

According to Ukrainian Minister of Defense **Andrei Taran**, during the talks with Akar, they discussed ways to deepen cooperation in the defense sphere.

"The cooperation of defense companies of Ukraine and Turkey is of particular [importance]. The reached agreements will strengthen the defense potential of Ukraine. The potential and maneuverability of the Ukrainian army will significantly increase, what will contribute to the protection of peace in the region," Taran said.

It cannot be excluded that one of the goals of the visit was to demonstrate to Kiev that Turkey favors provocative actions against Russia. Instability in the East of Ukraine or new provocations in Crimea are in Turkey's interest at the moment. They allow to weak Russia's position in the negotiation process on Libya at the very moment when GNA fores, supported by Turkey, are actively preparing for military action on the territory of their country.

In recent days, Kiev has become noticeably more active and has been pursuing a policy of discrediting Russia in all possible directions.

In the East of Ukraine the most recent incident happened on July 14 when 2 Ukrainian fighters died and another one received injures in [a failed attempt to enter the territory controlled by self-defense forces of the Donetsk People's Republic near the village of Zaitsevo](#). The sabotage and reconnaissance unit tried to attack positions of DPR forces but blew up on landmines in the area.

The Ukrainian side announced that one of the dead soldiers was a military medic, Mikola Ilin, who turned out to be a citizen of Estonia. His death was captured on video.

Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Dmitry Kuleba, called the murder of a medic an act of barbarism.

“I want to make it very clear that from a legal point of view, this murder has signs of a war crime, and from a moral point of view, it is nothing else but an act of barbarism,” Kuleba said.

He stressed that the diplomats will try to make the incident public.

“I will personally raise this issue. The response will be as tough as possible. We will attract all our partners. This situation will be made public,” the foreign minister said.

The death of Ilin led to the desired result, which was required by the Ukrainian authorities. The case was widely publicized. The accusations were immediately joined by the US Embassy, which previously rarely commented on the deaths of Ukrainian soldiers in the Donbass.

The European Union called the murder of a military medic a violation of the Minsk agreements, the agreements of the Normandy summit and international law.

Member of European Parliament, **Michael Galer**, blamed the Kremlin for the incident in eastern Ukraine on Twitter.

Besides the growing tension in the East of the country, Ukraine is increasingly speculating about Russia’s supposed intentions to conduct offensive operations in the South, which could be a response to the blocking of water supply to Crimea from Ukraine through the North Crimean channel. Water in Crimea is really critically scarce, but to solve this problem, Russia is completing the construction of a water pipeline, and is not preparing to seize the southern territories of Ukraine.

Despite the improbability of rumors about upcoming Russian attacks, on July 13, the head of the Kherson region (southern Ukraine), **Yuri Gusev**, appealed to the National Security Council to increase the number of military personnel in the region. Gusev also assured that Ukrainian military exercises will be held in autumn together with the Estonian military. However, the exact date of the exercise is unknown and depends on the conduct of large-scale military exercises of the Russian Armed Forces – “Caucasus – 2020”.

It is obvious that at the moment there are no signals that Russia is preparing for an offensive operation on the territory of Ukraine. Russia is currently experiencing quite acute domestic political problems, which the Putin administration is coping with worse. These include mass demonstrations in the city of Khabarovsk in the Far East and the introduction of constitutional amendments. Russian military forces are already involved in Syria, Moscow is actively participating in the negotiation process on the conflict in Libya, and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is escalating near its borders. For a number of internal and foreign policy reasons, Russia is currently unable to deploy a major military force in new theater of operations. Thus, there is no real threat to Ukraine, but there are more and more rumors and information noise created in order to discredit Russia.



The tactical Turkish support pushes Kiev to continue its provocations against Russia. In the current situation, Erdogan has a number of levers to promote its own interests through Kiev.

Turkey and Ukraine are far from being equal partners. This fact is confirmed by the indicators of bilateral trade. Ukraine is much more interested in the Turkish market than vice versa. Ukraine is on the 27th place in the ranking of import countries to Turkey, while Turkey is one of the main importers of Ukraine.

Since 2012, Ukraine and Turkey have been negotiating the free trade zone agreement, but the document has not yet been signed. Economists note that the parties cannot agree on the terms of access for both industrial goods and agricultural products to each other's markets.

Vladimir Volya, an expert at the Ukrainian Institute of policy analysis and management, claimed that it was difficult for Ukraine to defend its interests in negotiations with Turkey, because "Turkey is the 17th largest economy in the world and the 6th largest in Europe".

While the economic dimension is certainly important in Turkish-Ukrainian relations, the main tone of interaction between the two countries is set by the political dimension.

As part of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, Kiev has special hopes for Ankara's support. First of all, on the issue of Crimean peninsula. Turkey does not recognize Crimea as part of Russia, to a large extent it is connected with the Crimean Tatar population, which is presented by Kiev as allegedly oppressed by Russia. The policy of protectionism gave Turkey a broad influence on the peninsula until 2014. Before Crimea became part of Russia, the Turkish-backed Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people had notable political power in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Also, thanks to Turkey, various extremist religious organizations, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, felt blessed on the peninsula. Today Mejlis is banned in Russia and has been replaced by other representative organizations, and the cells of the terrorist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami are consistently eliminated on the territory of Crimea. However, various sources indicate that there is still an extensive network of agents of the Turkish special services among the Crimean Tatars. Ankar still cherishes hopes

The important sphere is cooperation in the defense sphere. Recently, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF), Colonel-General Ruslan Khomchak, announced that the Ukrainian Armed Forces troops deployed in Eastern Ukraine will be equipped with Turkish-made [Bayraktar TB2 UAVs](#). State-controlled Ukrainian company UkrSpetsExport and private Turkish UAV specialist Baykar Makina signed a \$69 million strategic cooperation agreement. Baykar Makina company is the most prominent of new Turkish drone makers penetrating the domestic and foreign markets.

"Turkish-Ukrainian defense cooperation will potentially go beyond drone systems," the Ankara-based expert forecast. "Promising businesses could be armored vehicle modifications and, most notably, the Altay."

While only a few European countries have agreed to supply weapons to Ukraine, Kiev is increasingly dependent on US and Turkish military assistance.

The Ukrainian State Company Ukrspetsexport in December 2019 exported to the Turkish company K.B.A.T. Ithalat Ihracat Mumessillik Ve Danismanlik Ticaret Ltd. the first batch of military goods under a contract for the supply of two S-125M1 Neva-M1 anti-aircraft missile systems totaling \$30 million. [They were subsequently delivered to the Government of](#)

[National Accord in Libya.](#)



Apparently, in the conflict in Libya, Ukraine supports Turkey not only by supplying anti-aircraft missile systems. Shortly after Akar's visit to Kiev, two ships left the Ukrainian ports of Nikolaev and Berdyansk in the direction of Libya. Perhaps Erdogan became more cautious after the [French Ministry of Armed Forces accused the Turkish Navy of harassing an arm embargo on Libya.](#)

Ukraine, in turn, is important for Turkey as a tool of maintaining influence in the Black Sea region and for balancing its own interests in relations with Russia. While relations between Turkey and its NATO partners have been deteriorating, and it cannot count on the military support of European countries in the Libyan conflict, Erdogan can rely on Ukraine, which has also been "betrayed" by NATO countries, because despite the protracted negotiation process and long-term promises, NATO is in no hurry to accept Ukraine into its structures.

Ukraine is not the only country of the former Soviet Union where Turkey is pursuing an active policy in order **to promote its interests and weaken its 'strategic partner', Russia.** Recently there has been an escalation of the conflict on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. The moment of escalation is chosen perfectly. The current political leadership of Armenia has done everything possible to turn the Kremlin against itself. Yerevan has provided its territory and created a favorable political regime for the deployment of Western non-state companies whose goal is the destruction of Russia as a state. These organizations are backed by Western Democrats or the Brussels bureaucracy. As a partner of Russia, Armenia did not recognize the annexation of Crimea. And the President of Armenia, Pashinyan and his entourage have consistently given signals of following a Pro-Western policy. Today, the only state that can ensure the existence of Armenia as a state is Russia, but Pashinyan is doing everything possible to break their ties.

Turkey pursues a policy of incitement among partner countries. It is seen is not only by groundless provocations in Ukraine, but also in the unleashed conflict on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border. While Russia does not hurry to openly support any of the sides, Erdogan accused Armenia of starting the conflict and expressed support for Azerbaijan.

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