

Erdogan's Coup for Wider War In Southwest Asia

by Dean Andromidas

May 9—Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in forcing out Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu, has removed the last internal obstacle to his consolidation of power, bringing Turkey one step closer to igniting a wider war in Southwest Asia. The move is a dangerous continuation of his Anglo-Saudi policy of supporting the overthrow of the Syrian government and sabotaging the efforts by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in coordination with Secretary of State John Kerry, to end the war in the region.

Through a not-so-subtle manipulation of the executive council of the ruling Justice and Development Party, Erdoğan forced the resignation of Prime Minister Davutoğlu to consolidate his power as the sole authority in the state. On May 8, within 72 hours of the dumping Davutoğlu, Erdoğan ordered Turkish special forces to conduct its first incursion into Syria with U.S. and allied backing and assistance, including air strikes. According to the Daily *Yeni Safak*, known as a mouthpiece for Erdoğan, the sending of the 20-member commando team

was only a prelude to establishing a “safe zone” along the Turkish border in Syrian territory.

Yeni Safak also reported that Turkey is planning to respond militarily against the Democratic Union Party



Turkish President Erdogan is threatening to expand Turkey's conflict with the Kurds into Kurdish areas in Syria and Iraq that border Turkey. Areas with Kurdish populations are shown in the map.



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President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



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Former Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu

(PYD), the Syrian Kurdish militia backed by Russia and the West, including the United States, if the PYD hits Turkish soil, or poses any threat to Turkey's border, or to its security more generally.

It reports that if the government finds evidence that the PYD is attacking Turkish territory, including in cooperation with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Turkish forces will apply the rules of engagement and will strike PYD targets in Syria.

Erdoğan could also throw the hapless Europeans into disarray once again by reopening the refugee floodgates.

Erdoğan is threatening to cancel Turkey's agreement with the European Union (EU) on refugees, if the EU demands a change in Turkey's broad terrorism law. Erdogan is using this issue to go after his internal political opposition.

Threatening the Europeans, Erdoğan said, "If there is a[n additional] condition, there is no deal." He added, "You can go and make a deal [with] whoever you like."

Hurriyet senior commentator Yusuf Kanli warned May 9 that these statements should "be taken very seriously by Europe . . . if he said he will dump the deal if his conditions are not met, he will surely dump it. Is Europe ready for a new flood of Syrian, Iraqi, Asian, and African refugees? What comes first for Europe, its interests, or norms and values? Europe must decide."

Part of that deal is €6 billion which is supposed to

finance projects for the refugees, but Erdoğan wants the money transferred directly to the Turkish treasury.

Erdoğan's Coup

Speaking at a news conference called by the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), party leader Kemal Kiliçdaroğlu charged: "Davutoğlu's resignation should not be perceived as an internal party issue; all democracy supporters must resist this palace coup."

Also denouncing the move as a coup, Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Co-chairman Selahattin Demirtaş declared that Davutoğlu was elected by the will of the people, but the "person at the palace wants to decide on who will rule this country. This is called a coup."

It is indeed a coup, since according to the Turkish Constitution, the President is the ceremonial head of state, and is supposed to withdraw from party politics and have nothing to do with who becomes prime minister.

Erdoğan declared openly that he is assuming the powers of an executive presidency even before any change in the Constitution. On May 6, one day after Davutoğlu stepped down, Erdoğan said, "At this point, there is no turning back. Everyone should accept this now." He said that it was "natural" for the party leadership to do as he wished, since he has been their "leader" for the last 12 years.

The chief editor of *Hurriyet*, Murat Yetkin, wrote May 6 that the dumping of Davutoğlu means, "A de facto shift to a semi-presidential system, where the prime minister effectively acts as the cabinet coordinator of the President."

In another commentary on May 9, Yetkin wrote, "That is also a very clear message to the outer world to show who the boss is in Turkey. From U.S. President Barack Obama to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin, from the United Nations to the European Union and international finance institutions, Erdoğan is sending the message that



The devastation of the Kurdish town of Cizre in Turkey, resulting from fighting between the Turkish government and Kurdish fighters. Cizre is on the Tigris River, and on the border with Syria.

there is one and only one address to talk to in Turkey and that is the President, himself.”

Although Davutoğlu was hand-picked by Erdoğan as prime minister in 2014 when Erdoğan became President, he has been accused of not fully carrying out Erdoğan’s wishes, especially his demand that a change in the Constitution be forced through parliament, or accomplished through a referendum, to enable him to acquire executive powers officially.

In listing the conflicts between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, *Hürriyet* pointed to Davutoğlu’s scheduled meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, which was to have taken place the same week he was forced out. It was officially canceled because the White House claimed the President’s schedule was too crowded, but in fact, Erdoğan let it be known to his friend in the White House that he opposed the meeting and Obama obliged. There is little doubt that the Kerry-Lavrov Syrian ceasefire and transition policy were to be on top of the agenda. The question to ask is whether Erdogan and Obama acted to sabotage the efforts of Kerry by getting Davutoğlu out.

The new prime minister will not be named until the ruling Justice and Development Party holds a special party congress on May 22, when a new party leader will

be elected. There is a long list of possibilities, including Energy Minister Berat Albayrak, Erdoğan’s son-in-law. All have one thing in common. They owe their political careers to Erdoğan.

Turkey As Anglo-Saudi Marcher Lord

There were signs for weeks that Davutoğlu was attempting to shift Turkish policy towards sanity. Not that he had lost his Muslim Brotherhood credentials, but Erdoğan’s insane policies have bought catastrophe onto Turkey itself.

It should be remembered that in 2003, Davutoğlu, who was then foreign minister—along with former President and Prime Minister Abdullah Gul—opposed Turkey’s entry into the war

against Iraq launched by President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, and managed to carry with him enough AKP members of parliament to prevent Turkey’s entry into the war. By contrast, Erdoğan wanted Turkey not only to back the war, but to send Turkish troops into northern Iraq. The fact that Turkey did not enter the war enabled it to enjoy almost ten years of peace.

Unlike in 2003, Erdoğan in 2013 brought Turkey fully behind the operation to overthrow the Syrian government, bringing upon Turkey the disaster it avoided in 2003.

Because of that decision, the country is beginning to look like Iraq. Erdoğan’s support for the Syrian opposition—including backing the terrorist Al-Nusra Front and sending Turkish (ostensibly ethnic Turkmen) fighters into Syria—has caused a massive blow-back into Turkey. Deadly suicide bombings seem to be taking place every week, including in the capital, Ankara, and Istanbul, the country’s largest city and major tourist venue, bringing tourism to a standstill. The shooting down of a Russian war plane last November has brought Russian sanctions down on Turkey, leading to a collapse of agricultural exports to Russia and reducing

Russian tourism to nearly zero. The economy is beginning to tank because of the perceived instability, and long-term private investment, not just foreign investment, has reportedly collapsed.

The cities in the predominantly Kurdish regions in Turkey's South East are already looking like Syria's war-torn Aleppo. There are now no less than 500,000 internal refugees in Turkey, refugees who have fled cities in Turkey's South East that have become battlegrounds between Turkish security forces and the PKK.

All of this is the result of Erdoğan's policy of turning Turkey into the marcher lord for the Anglo-Saudi Sunni alliance, not just against Syria, but also against Egypt and Iran. In the last six months, Erdogan has consolidated a military alliance with Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Erdoğan's obsession with resurrecting the "grandeur" of the Ottoman Empire has seen him bring Turkey into the center of the politics of the Arab region and into direct alliance with Saudi Arabia.

Erdoğan has been a frequent traveler to the Saudi Kingdom, both as prime minister and President, to ingratiate himself at the feet of the House of Saud. It is well known that the billions of Saudi petrodollars pouring into Turkey enabled Erdoğan to repeatedly win elections.

When Obama went to Saudi Arabia last month, he was met at the airport by the equivalent of the mayor of Riyadh. But the Saudi King himself greeted Erdoğan at the airport when he made an official visit in December 2015. The Sultan and the King hammered out what they called a Strategic Cooperation Agreement, including a mutual security pact that includes joint military exercises and even holding joint cabinet meetings at least twice a year.

These arrangements were solidified by subsequent visits to Riyadh by Prime Minister Davutoğlu and King Salman's official visit to Turkey in April, when Erdoğan bestowed on the King the Order of State of the Republic, Turkey's highest honor for a foreigner, while praising him to the heavens as a deliverer of peace throughout Southwest Asia. Saudi Arabia's idea of creating a NATO-style alliance of Arab states was also said to have been on the agenda.

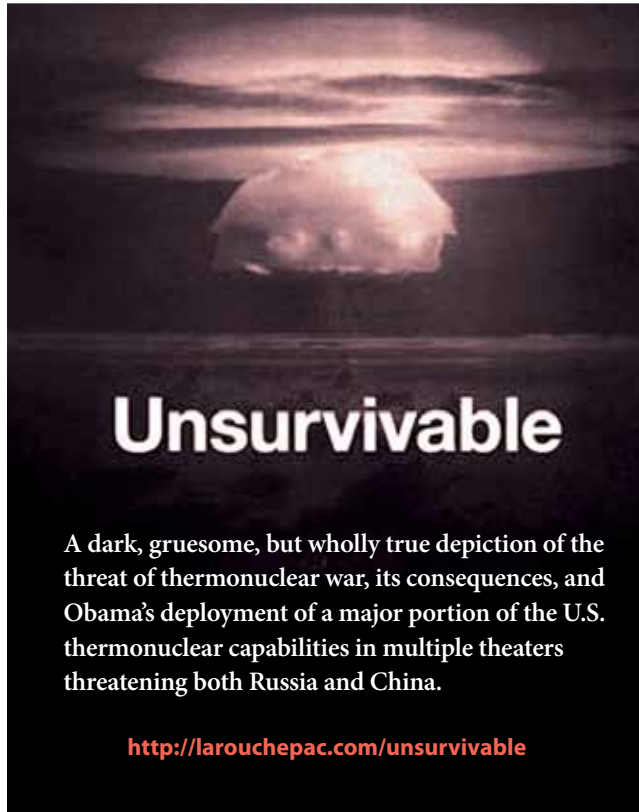
Of course the target of such an alliance would be Iran: Erdoğan listens closely to the Saudi position on the issue. When Erdogan made his official visit to Iran

in April 2015, he made sure to meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef in Ankara just a few hours before his departure for Tehran.

Since Erdoğan is not satisfied with the billions he gets from the Saudis, he has been cultivating ties with Qatar, the principal supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. These efforts have led not only to more billions flowing into Turkey, but also to military cooperation. Last April, following a two-day visit to Qatar by then Prime Minister Davutoğlu, a military agreement was signed for the deployment of the Turkish Armed Forces in Qatar.

The agreement, signed by Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz and his Qatari counterpart, Khalid bin Mohammad al-Attiyah, calls for a military base to be built in Qatar, the first Turkish military facility in the region, which is expected to be ready within two years.

Foreign troops are only needed in Qatar and Saudi Arabia to protect the governments from their own populations, or to fight Iran if the Anglo-Saudi alliance should launch such a war. Erdoğan has become a very dangerous man for all of Southwest Asia.



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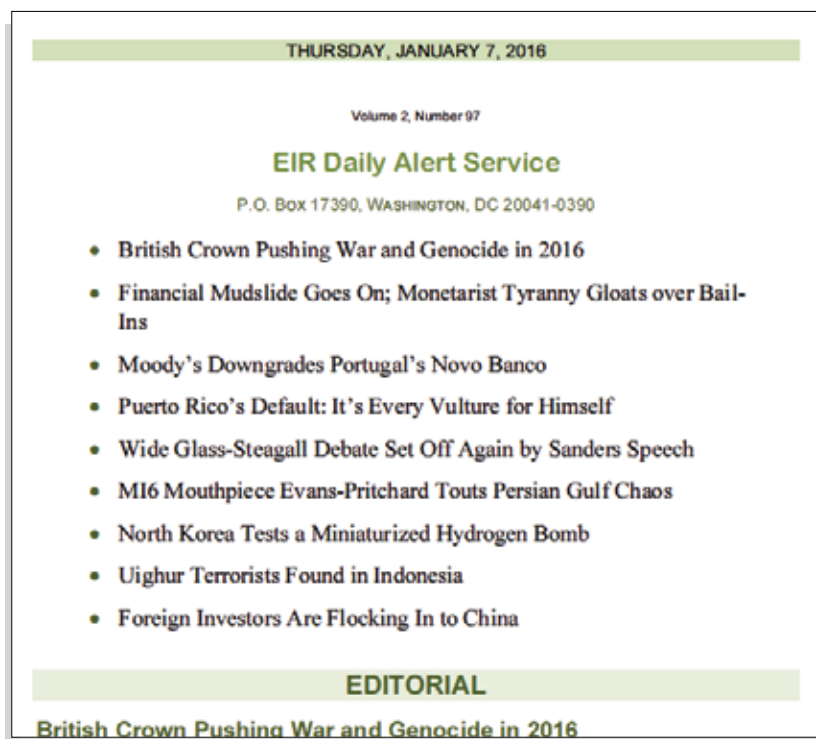
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