The Coup in Turkey has Thrown a Wrench in Uncle Sam's "Pivot" Plan

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A failed coup in Turkey has changed the geopolitical landscape overnight realigning Ankara with Moscow while shattering Washington's plan to redraw the map of the Middle East.

Whether Turkish strongman Recep Tayyip Erdogan staged the coup or not is of little importance in the bigger scheme of things. The fact is, the incident has consolidated his power domestically while derailing Washington's plan to control critical resources and pipeline corridors from Qatar to Europe. The Obama administrations disregard for the national security interests of its allies, has pushed the Turkish president into Moscow's camp, removing the crucial landbridge between Europe and Asia that Washington needs to maintain its global hegemony into the new century. Washington's plan to pivot to Asia, surround and break up Russia, control China's growth and maintain its iron grip on global power is now in a shambles. The events of the last few days have changed everything.

This is from the *Daily Sahbah:*

> "Turkey's changing rhetoric toward Russia is also a direct consequence of Ankara's unmet expectations regarding the Syria conflict. Turkey's disappointment with the United States' policy in Syria has increased with time, especially considering Washington's continued support for the Kurdish fighters of the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria. Ankara sees this group as an affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization (Daily Sabah, 12 June).
> (A Change in Turkish-Russian Relations: What Sort of Rapprochement?, The Jamestown Foundation)

Obama can only blame himself for the debacle that is now unfolding. Erdogan was completely clear about Turkey's red lines, the most important of which is preventing the Kurdish militias from moving west of the Euphrates and creating a contiguous state along the Syrian side of Turkeys southern border. Here's Erdogan commenting on developments a few months ago:

> "Right now, there is a serious project, plan being implemented in northern Syria. And on this project and plan lay the insidious aims of those who appear as 'friends'. This is very clear, so I need to make clear statements."

Instead of addressing Erdogan's security concerns, Obama brushed him aside in order to pursue the US goal of establishing bases and seizing territory in East Syria that will eventually be used as pipeline routes from Qatar to the EU. Naturally, Erdogan responded in kind, forming alliances with former enemies (Russia, Syria, Israel) in order to reset Turkish foreign policy and address the growing threat of an emerging Kurdish state on his southern flank. Keep in mind, Turkey believes that America's new proxies in Syria–the Kurdish YPG– are linked to the PKK, which is listed as a terror organization by the U.S. and EU. Had Obama committed US troops to the fight, (instead of using the YPG) Erdogan would not have reacted at all. But the fact that Obama was deliberately strengthening Turkey's traditional rivals in their westward move, was more than Erdogan could bear.

Erdogan Apologizes

At the end of June, Erdogan apologized to President Vladimir Putin for the death of a Russian pilot who was killed when Turkey downed a bomber flying over Syrian territory last November. The shootdown prompted Putin to break off relations with Ankara ending all communication between the two countries. Then, in the last week of June, Erdogan sent a letter to Putin "expressing his deep sympathy and condolences to the relatives of the deceased Russian pilot." He added that Russia was "a friend and a strategic partner" with whom the Turkish authorities would not want to spoil relations." (The Turkish pilots who shot down the Russian Su-24 have since been arrested and charged as members of the Gulenist coup.)

The White House inexplicably never commented on this thawing of relations which posed obvious risks to US ambitions in the region.

Why?

Then, just two weeks ago, reports began to emerge that Erdogan was making an effort to normalize relations with Syrian President Bashar al Assad. The news wasn't reported in most of the western media, but the Guardian ran an article titled "Syrian rebels stunned as Turkey signals normalisation of Damascus relations". Here's an excerpt:

> "More than five years into Syria's civil war, Turkey, the country that has most helped the rebellion against the rule of Bashar al-Assad, has hinted it may move to normalise relations with Damascus.
> The suggestion made by the Turkish prime minister, Binali Y?ld?r?m, on Wednesday, stunned the Syrian opposition leadership, which Ankara hosts, as well as regional leaders, who had allied with Turkey in their push to oust Assad over a long, unforgiving war.
>
> "I am sure that we will return [our] ties with Syria to normal," he said, straying far from an official script that has persistently called for immediate regime change. "We need it. We normalised our relations with Israel and Russia. I'm sure we will go back to normal relations with Syria as well."
> (Syrian rebels stunned as Turkey signals normalisation of Damascus relations, Guardian)

You'd think that would set off alarms at the White House, after all, if Turkey wanted to normalize relations with Damascus, then clearly it had abandoned the war it had supported (through its proxy militants and jihadists) for more than five years signaling a fundamental shift in policy that could have broader implications for the US effort. But did the Obama team show any interest in the announcement or make any attempt to keep Erdogan in the fold?

Of course not. Washington gives orders and everyone else is expected to click their heels and stand at attention. Obama and Co don't bother with the incidentals like the fear of the nascent Kurdish state that could pose a direct threat to Turkey's national security. Why would they bother with something as trivial as that? They have an empire to run.

Then came the coup which, by the way, Erdogan may have been tipped off to by Russian intelligence agents who

have a strong presence in Turkey. By informing Erdogan of the coup, Putin might have hoped that Erdogan would return the favor and block NATOs plan to deploy permanent fleet to the Black Sea that will further encircle and threaten Russia. (And, yes, Putin knows that Erdogan is a ruthless autocrat and a backer of terrorist organizations, but he also knows he can't be "too picky" when NATO is making every effort to surround and destroy Russia. Putin must take his friends as he finds them. Besides, some analysts have suggested that Putin will require Erdogan to abandon his support for jihadists in Syria as a condition of their new alliance.)

In any event, Putin and Erdogan have settled their differences and scheduled a meeting for the beginning of August. In other words, the first world leader Erdogan plans to meet after the coup, is his new friend, Vladimir Putin. Is Erdogan trying to make a statement? It certainly looks like it. Here's the story from the Turkish Daily Hurriyet:

> "Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and Russian President Vladimir Putin may meet in a face-to-face meeting in August as part of mutual efforts to normalize bilateral ties following months of tension due to the downing of a Russian warplane by the Turkish Air Forces in November…
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> With the normalization of ties, Russia removed some sanctions on trade and restrictions on Russian tourists, though it will continue to impose visa regime to Turkish nationals. A deeper conversation between the two countries over a number of international issues like Syria and Crimea will follow soon between the two foreign ministers before the Putin-Erdo?an meeting." (Putin, Erdo?an to meet soon in bid to start new era in Turkey-Russia ties, Hurriyet)

Is it starting to sound like Turkey may have slipped out of Washington's orbit and moved on to more reliable friends that will respect their interests?

Indeed. And this sudden rapprochement could have catastrophic implications for US Middle East policy. Consider, for example, that the US not only depends on Turkey's Incirlik Airbase to conduct its air campaign in Syria, but also, that that same facility houses "roughly 90 US tactical nuclear weapons." What if Erdogan suddenly decides that it's no longer in Turkey's interest to provide the US with access to the base or that he would rather allow Russian bombers and fighters to use the base? (According to some reports, this is already in the works.) More importantly, what happens to US plans to pivot to Asia if the crucial landbridge (Turkey) that connects Europe and Asia breaks with Washington and joins the coalition of Central Asian states that are building a new free trade zone beyond Uncle Sam's suffocating grip?

One last thing: There was an important one-paragraph article in Moscow Reuters on Monday that didn't appear in the western press so we'll reprint it here:

> MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russia's joint projects with Turkey, including the TurkStream undersea natural gas pipeline from Russia to Turkey, are still on the agenda and have a future, RIA news agency quoted Russian Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich as saying on Monday." (Russian Dep PM says joint projects with Turkey still on agenda, Reuters)

This is big. Erdogan is now reopening the door the Obama team tried so hard to shut. This is a major blow to Washington's plan to control the vital resources flowing into Europe from Asia and to make sure they remain denominated in US dollars. If the agreement pans out, Putin will have access to the thriving EU market through the southern corridor which will strengthen ties between the two continents, expand the use of the ruble and euro for energy transactions, and create a free trade zone from Lisbon to Vladivostok. And Uncle Sam will be watching from the sidelines.

All of a sudden, Washington's "pivot" plan looks to be in serious trouble.