

# NEO-OTTOMAN AMBITIONS

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In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire extended from the Balkans to the Caucasus and from the Near East to Algeria. The Mediterranean was given over to piracy. This gradually declined after the defeat of the Ottoman fleet at Lepanto in 1571 and the American reprisal raid on Tripoli in 1805. The Ottoman Empire was dismantled from the 19th century when Greece became independent and was reduced to present-day Turkey by the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. Nostalgia for the geopolitical centrality of the Ottoman Empire animates many of the speeches of Turkish President Erdoğan. He also systematically destroyed Atatürk's secular legacy and put an end to Turkey's gradual opening to democracy by imposing an authoritarian regime.

Turkey has a contingent of 30 000 troops in Northern Cyprus, 5 000 troops in Qatar and a base capable of training 10 000 troops in Somalia. A dozen Turkish military bases have been established in northern Iraq to better control Iraqi Kurdistan. Until recently, Turkey had a 99-year lease on Suakin Island in Sudan to establish a military base there.

## The Libyan Swamp

Imitating Iran, Turkey has conscripted several mercenaries who have been sent to defend its interests by interfering in civil wars. Turkey imports more than 90% of its oil and natural gas needs. Erdoğan has his eye on Libyan oil, whose reserves are estimated at 74 billion barrels. But so do Russia and France. Erdoğan has decided to extend its exclusive economic zone in the Mediterranean by drawing a Turkish-Libyan diagonal strip that divides the Mediterranean, in addition to other riparian countries such as Greece.

## The Syrian swamp

Turkey attacked the Kurdish forces



Left to right: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

in northern Syria which were allied with the United States in their fight against the Islamic state. President Trump agreed to allow Turkish forces to occupy a 30-km territorial strip in northern Syria. To protect themselves from the Turkish army, the Kurds and their allies called on the Syrian army. The first clashes with Turkish convoys took place despite the Astana agreement ratified in 2017 by Russia, Iran and Turkey and the Sochi agreement ratified the following year by Russia and Turkey. A deadly conflict could only be stopped after lengthy negotiations which culminated in joint Russian-Turkish patrols. But these were cancelled after nine days.

## Difficult relations with several countries

Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf emirates are opposed to Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, Erdoğan makes unfounded accusations against Israel and the West.

Turkey, which is a member of NATO, has acquired the Russian S-400 air defence system despite American objections. As a result, Turkey has been excluded from the program to

acquire and manufacture F-35 stealth aircraft.

Russia is playing a subtle game to bring Turkey under its tutelage and separate it from the United States and NATO. Turkey and Russia support opposing camps in Syria and Libya. Erdoğan, for his part, reacted to the recent Turkish-Syrian skirmishes by speaking out against Russia's annexation of the Crimea and offering \$200 million to the Ukrainian army.

Erdoğan wants to transfer nearly three million Syrian refugees to the strip of territory that the Turkish army occupies in northern Syria, which is populated mainly by Kurds and regularly threatens to send Syrian refugees back to Europe.

Erdoğan collects enemies and seems to be plunging Turkey from Charybdis to Scylla.

Translated from French by Jacques Chitayat

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