

German report criticizing Turkey highlights growing tensions within NATO

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Relations between Ankara and the Western powers—particularly Berlin—have reached new lows, more than four weeks after the aborted military coup against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which by all indications enjoyed at least the tacit backing of Washington and sections of the German ruling elite.

On Wednesday, German Interior Minister Thomas De Maizière told German regional broadcaster RBB: “There’s nothing to regret,” when asked if he regretted the release of a paper prepared by his ministry. The Interior Ministry document accuses Turkey of having been “a central platform in the Middle East” for Islamist groups since 2011 and criticizes Erdoğan for having an “ideological affinity” to Hamas in Gaza, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and armed Islamist forces in Syria.

The report, largely drawn up by the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND), came as a confidential answer to a parliamentary query by the Left Party (Die Linke). It unleashed fury within the Turkish government after it was disclosed by German public broadcaster ARD earlier this week.

“The allegations are a new manifestation of the twisted mentality, which for some time has been trying to wear down our country by targeting our president and government,” the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in an official statement. It also accused Berlin of double standards, demanding that the German government offer Turkey more support against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

“It is obvious that behind these allegations are some political circles in Germany known for their double-standard attitudes in the fight against terror,” the statement continued. “As a country which sincerely fights against terror of every sort whatever its source, Turkey expects that its other partners and allies act in the same way.”

The hostile exchange between the German interior

ministry and the Turkish foreign ministry—each openly accusing the other of supporting terrorism—highlights the stark deterioration in relations between the Western powers and Ankara that had already developed prior to the July 15 coup attempt.

As far back as June, a resolution passed by the German parliament (Bundestag) describing the mass deaths of up to 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as “genocide” led to a sharp reaction in Ankara. Erdoğan warned that Berlin’s move could “damage... diplomatic, economic, political, commercial and military relations between the two countries.”

Another row followed weeks later, when Turkey blocked a visit by German parliamentarians to 250 German soldiers stationed at Incirlik air base in southern Turkey. Not only does Incirlik serve as the main base for the US-led bombing campaign against Syria and Iraq, but it turned out to be at the center of the failed putsch against Erdoğan.

The coup attempt took place amid a stark shift in Turkish foreign policy towards Russia, after Erdoğan became increasingly concerned that the Western-backed regime change operation in Syria is strengthening separatist Kurdish forces backed by the US and Germany.

The tensions that have continued to grow since the failed coup between Washington and Berlin on the one side, and their nominal NATO ally Turkey on the other, confirm the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site*. It explained from the beginning that the coup has been organized to prevent a possible alliance between Russia and Turkey and possibly Iran and China that would cut across Western foreign policy in the Middle East—in particular, plans to overthrow Russia’s last remaining Arab ally, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

In the past days, Western officials and foreign policy strategists attacked Ankara sharply for purging pro-Western putschists in the Turkish army, and raised

concerns over Ankara's rapprochement with Moscow after Erdoğan met with Russian president Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg last week.

"Coup-proofing doesn't work except that it fractures and divides armed forces," complained Aaron Stein, a Turkey expert at the Washington-based think tank Atlantic Council.

Soner Cagaptay, an expert on Turkish security issues at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy warned: "For the first time in recent memory, some in Ankara are questioning Turkey's NATO membership and discussing whether the country should instead move toward becoming a 'friend' of Russia."

NBC's foreign correspondent Matt Bradley reported that "among the newly promoted leaders are a group of officers who are typically distrustful of the U.S. and NATO and seek a closer relationship with Russia and military powers further east."

On August 12, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif visited Ankara. Unlike Western leaders, he congratulated "the Turkish nation for the defiance they showed against the coup-plotters." He praised the improvement of Russia-Turkey relations and their new efforts to stem the conflict in Syria. "We also have great ties with Russia on the [Syrian] issue, and we believe that all parties must cooperate to provide security and peace and stop the conflicts [in the region]. We are ready to co-operate with both Turkey and Syria on this issue," he said.

In an interview with the Turkish *Hurriyet Daily News* this week, Turkish defense minister Fikri İhsanoglu indicated that Ankara is indeed considering a closer strategic and military alliance with Russia and China: "Our priority is our allies, but that cannot prevent us from cooperating with Russia or China when necessary. If our allies' approach remains to keep Turkey at arm's length, that will force us to develop our own capacity with other types of cooperation. We can't shut the door to non-NATO countries like Russia or China."

As relations warm between Russia, Iran, China and Turkey in the Middle East, and with US-backed Islamist forces on retreat in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, the Western powers are increasingly building up Kurdish militias as proxies to further their imperialist interests in the region.

On August 12 the strategically important Syrian town of Manbij near the Turkish border was reconquered from the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) under the coordination of the US Central Command. The strongest force within the

SDF are the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). At the same time Germany began resupplying the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in Northern Iraq.

According to the *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, around 70 tonnes of German weaponry—including 1,500 G36 assault rifles, 100 anti-tank missiles and three armoured vehicles—arrived on Tuesday in Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region.

In Turkey itself a series of bombings targeting Turkey's security forces, blamed on Kurdish rebels, killed at least 11 people and wounded 226 others, Turkish media reported on Thursday. Two of the attacks were car bombings targeting police stations in eastern Turkey, while the third—a roadside blast—hit a military vehicle carrying soldiers in the southeast of the country.

The independent European media platform *EurActiv* reported yesterday that, in a move which could amount to virtual breakdown of the US-Turkish alliance, Washington has started transferring its nuclear weapons stationed at Incirlik air base in Turkey to Deveselu air base in Romania. According to an anonymous source, the transfer is very challenging in technical and political terms: "It's not easy to move 20+ nukes."

As the danger of direct conflict between the great powers grows in the Middle East, tensions are not only exploding between NATO member states, but also within the Western governments themselves.

In an unprecedented move, the German foreign ministry led by Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) dismissed the German interior ministry's report attacking Ankara. After the meeting between Erdoğan and Putin, Steinmeier had declared: "There won't be a solution to the civil war in Syria without Moscow and without Iran, Saudi Arabia or Turkey."



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