

## **TURKEY'S BARBAROSSA SYNDROME**

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"I recommend the international community take the necessary lessons from the Preveza victory. Turkey's national interests in the seas reach from its surrounding waters to the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean." These are the words of prime minister of Turkey at the inauguration of a Turkish made warship named Haybeliada. That day was the 473rd anniversary of the Preveza naval battle during which the Ottoman navy under the command of Admiral Hayreddin Barbarossa defeated a Christian alliance fleet put together by Pope Paul III. Erdogan chooses this symbolic day to send to the international community, not just the Greeks, the Cypriots or the Israelis, a clear and arrogant message. Turkey's areas of interest reach the Indian Ocean and all countries have to respect this otherwise they will be defeated by the new Turkish navy. Are all these just great words chosen because of the special occasion? Turkish actions are telling us a different story. The Turkish Sea Task Group established in order to support Turkey's foreign policy and presence in the world's seas as well as to establish security on the routes used by Turkish commercial ships has shown its presence in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Consisting of four frigates as well as one logistical support ship, sea helicopters as well as SAT, SAS and Diving Teams passed through the Suez Canal and continued on to Oman, UAE, Pakistan, India, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Jordan ports. In the past, the same Task Group has also visited ports in Tunisia, Algeria, Spain, Italy, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Albania and Egypt. The latest Turkish initiative towards this direction is the activation of the Barbaros plan. According to the Barbaros plan the Turkish Navy will be present in neighboring seas and Turkish maritime components will be in constant navigation not only in the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean but also in the Adriatic Sea, the Red Sea as well as the Indian Ocean. Additionally to the above Turkish newspapers revealed recently that Turkey's Military Electronics Industry (ASELSAN) has produced a new identification friend or foe (IFF) system for Turkish jet fighters, warships and submarines. The new software, contrary to the older, US-made version, does not automatically identify Israeli planes and ships as friends. Let me underline that it took two years to develop the new IFF system and the order to start this project came at least one year before the Marmara incident. This is not an isolated development. It's a part of Turkey's policy to become self-sufficient on armaments. Part of this policy is the home production of attack helicopters, artillery guns, warships and in the future even fighter planes.

You may ask how all these fit into the famous 'strategic depth doctrine' that Turkish foreign minister Ahmed Davutoglu created back in 2000 and has been implemented since 2002 when AKP won the first national elections in Turkey. Allow me to say a few words about the strategic depth doctrine. This doctrine supports among other things that Turkey in order to be more secure has to establish a zone of influence in the area of ex Ottoman Empire by mainly using

its soft power. Behind this approach was Davutoglu's fear that sectarian and ethnic conflict in the region may spill over Turkey and increase the existing tensions among Alevis, Kurds and other minorities which since 1923 live within the Turkish state. The Syrian crisis shows how external crises can destabilize the Turkish state. In Davutoglu's doctrine the emphasis was on the use of soft power and especially political, economic and cultural means. Arab Spring took Turkey by surprise. The relations she was building for a decade are now collapsing because they were concentrated on regimes and not on nations. Even the area of influence Turkey had managed to create next to its southern borders by establishing a free trade area and a visa free area is now in ruins. Turkey in the following days is expected to announce sanctions against the Syria's Assad regime. The same time Turkey is hosting the meetings of Syrian opposition's National Council. Jordan's King Abdullah is flirting the GCC grouping of Arab monarchs in order to survive from the Arab Spring pressures. Lebanon is following a pro-Syrian foreign policy and the same time under the influence of Hezbollah develops its relations with Iran.

Republic of Cyprus (RoC) initiatives in its EEZ are challenging Turkish plans for strategic control of East Mediterranean basin and the exploitation of the existing natural resources. Israel's maritime activities such as the exportation of the Leviathan gas field together with the blockade of Gaza increase Turkey's uneasiness. Turkey considers Israel's intention to sign a SAR agreement with the RoC as an aggressive move that challenges directly its strategic control in the East Mediterranean. The failure of the soft power policy and the challenging of Turkey's role in the surrounding seas by Israel and RoC are among the reasons why Turkey is shifted towards using more hard power (as in the case of northern Iraq) or at least threatening to do so in the case of Cyprus and Israel. We should not forget that casus belli tactics are very familiar to Turkey. Turkey is using them against Greece since 1994 (territorial sea issue), has threaten RoC with military action in 1999 (S300 missiles crisis), Syria and Armenia in 1998 (Ocalan case) and even Bulgaria in 1986 (Turkish minority issue). Turkey is not alone in the region. Local and external powers that have their own interests in the region are sending by words or their fleets their messages to the Turkish leadership. Turkey has to remember not only the victorious moments at Preveza but also the defeats at Lepanto and Navarino. Countries need more than hard power in order to successfully promote their national interests. The example of USA failure in Iraq and Afghanistan supports this thesis.