



Syrian Buffer Zone – Turkey-Qatar Pipeline

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Abstract

Erdogan's demand for a US-Turkey buffer zone in Syria is likely to prevent Kurdish autonomy and not fight ISIS, and enable the building of the Turkey-Qatar natural gas pipeline proposed back in 2009. With the proposed pipeline traveling through the Aleppo region—the same area for the buffer zone—the Turkey-Saudi-Qatar backed *Army of Conquest* would be able to establish a sunni salafist statelet in Syria and enable Ankara, Riyad and Doha to share in the future wealth of the pipeline.

About the Author of this Issue

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Analysis

Erdogan's latest feat in coaxing US/NATO to back his demands regarding Syria is a masterpiece.

Employing a familiar Chinese stratagem of 瞒天过海 (mán tiān guò hǎi) often associated with Emperor Liu Bei's (161-230 AD) military strategist Zhuge Liang in the Three Kingdoms period, in one fell swoop of offering access to Incirlik air base to fight ISIS, Erdogan obtained what he's coveted all along: buffer zone for anti-Assad rebels courtesy of US air force, prevention of Kurdish expansion along Turkey's borders, opportunity to pummel PKK, and legitimacy for his actions from NATO.

Mán tiān guò hǎi means deceive the heavens to cross the ocean—to use the ruse of a fake goal until the real goal is achieved.

To what end? The golden prize is likely the proposed Qatar-Turkey pipeline¹ to tap into EU's lucrative market².

Erdogan Gains Pipeline Dream

First proposed by Qatar in 2009³, the natural gas pipeline would run through Syria's Aleppo and Turkey unto Europe. However, Assad dampened this dream in 2011 when he instead forged a pact with Iraq and Iran to run an "Islamic pipeline" eastward to the European market.



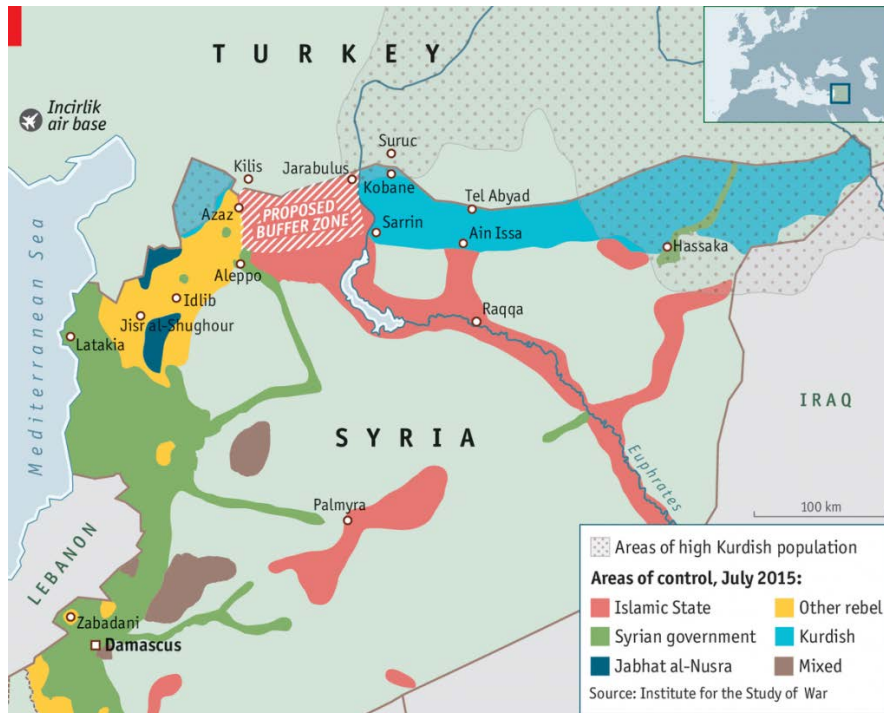
Turkey-Qatar pipeline

¹ http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/NI28Ak03.html

² <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/08/201285133440424621.html>

³ <http://www.thenational.ae/business/energy/qatar-seeks-gas-pipeline-to-turkey>

Now coincidentally, around the Aleppo region is also where Turkey proposed for US to set up the buffer zone to supply “moderate rebel” forces.



Economist.com
 Proposed Syrian buffer zone

If Kurds had connected along Turkey's border and formed an autonomous region, plans for the Qatar-Turkey pipeline via Saudi Arabia would be completely destroyed. It is not surprising that Turkish officials drew a line from Aleppo to Kobani as a buffer zone and the US agreed to their demands.

ISIS also benefits from the aggressive Turkish onslaught against PKK—the most effective boots on the ground fighting ISIS. United by their mutual hatred of the Kurds, Turkey also sat back and watched ISIS pound the YPG in Kobani last year.

Writing in *Armed Forces Journal*⁴, Major Rob Taylor joined numerous other pundits in observing that the Syrian civil war is actually a pipeline war over control of energy supply, with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey needing to remove Assad “so they can control Syria and run their own pipeline through Turkey.”

“Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as al Qaeda and other groups, are maneuvering to depose Assad and capitalize on their hoped-for Sunni conquest in Damascus. By doing this, they hope to gain a share of control over the ‘new’ Syrian government, and a share in the pipeline wealth.” Even if it includes Turkey surreptitiously supporting ISIS⁵ against Assad.

⁴ <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/pipeline-politics-in-syria/>

⁵ <http://uk.businessinsider.com/links-between-turkey-and-isis-are-now-undeniable-2015-7?r=US&IR=T>



Thus, even if the Saudi/Qatar/Turkey backed Army of Conquest can control just enough land in Syria for a salafist statelet to build the Qatar-Turkey pipeline, then these sunni states can finally realize their pipeline dream.

Indeed, the 2012 Defense Intelligence Agency report⁶ corroborates their desire to carve out a salafist statelet in Syria east of Assad-controlled territory in order to put pressure on his regime (In 2012 it was further east, but now that Assad has lost much territory it is just east of Latakia).

But what are the costs for this ploy?

Costs of US-Turkey bargain

Firstly, jihadists in charge of Syria would mean the further extinction⁷ of Mideast Christians⁸, as well as genocide of other Syrian religious⁹ and ethnic¹⁰ minorities.

Secondly, US and NATO moral legitimacy would be eroded and rightly or wrongly, be perceived by the non-western world as complicit in backing al Qaeda terrorist groups and the persecution of religious minorities.

Thirdly, credibility of US as an ally would further corrode especially since Washington has betrayed the Kurds more than once. Already, US security experts are warning allies such as South Korea and Japan¹¹ to hedge themselves and build nuclear weapons due to loss of trust in US security guarantee.

Additionally, as some Chinese scholars assessed, Syria/Turkey would become the new AfPak with a safe haven for salafist jihadists to gain power and launch attacks elsewhere, much like western-backed Afghan Mujahideen morphed into al Qaeda and continues to attack the west.

In fact, German politician Cem Oezdemir already called Turkey a “mini-Pakistan”¹² and Berlin has issued a travel advisory, following in the footsteps of China after violent anti-China protests¹³ broke out in July.

Finally, this risks escalation into a great power conflict by drawing in China, Russia and Iran into Syria.

Iran’s interest in sustaining Assad is already well documented, and as for Russia, the Qatar-Turkey pipeline to Europe directly challenges its dominant position as energy supplier.

That is why Saudi Prince Bandar¹⁴ bin Sultan tried to convince Putin to abandon Assad and promised that “whatever regime comes after” Assad, it will be “completely” in Saudi Arabia’s hands and will “not sign any agreement allowing any Gulf country to transport its gas across Syria to Europe and compete with Russian gas exports”.

Nonetheless Putin refused, and the Prince vowed military action.

⁶ <http://levantreport.com/2015/05/19/2012-defense-intelligence-agency-document-west-will-facilitate-rise-of-islamic-state-in-order-to-isolate-the-syrian-regime/>

⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11247798/Syrian-Christians-Help-us-to-stop-arming-terrorists.html>

⁸ <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/christian-village-besieged-syrian-rebels-article-1.1446060>

⁹ <http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2015/04/01/syrian-rebel-group-ahrar-al-sham-executes-christians-in-liberated-idlib/>

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33092902>

¹¹ <http://asia.nikkei.com/Viewpoints/Geopolitico/Arthur-Waldron-Japan-needs-its-own-military-might>

¹² <http://www.dw.com/en/%C3%B6zdemir-warns-of-mini-pakistan-in-turkey-as-germany-sharpens-travel-advisory/a-18616789>

¹³ <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/06/asia/china-turkey-warning/index.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2013/aug/30/syria-chemical-attack-war-intervention-oil-gas-energy-pipelines>



Chinese interests are also harmed due to link of Uyghur insurgents with Turkey's anti-Assad rebels, threatening Xinjiang secession and destroying the crown jewel and bridge head of Xi Jinping's silk road grand strategy.

The Turkey/Qatar/Saudi-backed Army of Conquest includes Chinese Uyghur-led terror group, Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), that in April joined al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat-al-Nusra (JN), Uzbek-led Imam Bukhari Jamaat and Katibat Tawhid wal Jihad to defeat the Syrian army at Jisr al-Shughur in northwestern Syria's Idlib governorate.

As such the rebel coalition now has a direct supply line open from Turkey's Hatay Province to Idlib, further expanded by the new proposed buffer zone. Counter-terror expert Jacob Zenn assessed that the "rebels may have enough resources to establish a de-facto state in northwestern Syria led by JN and supported by several Central Asian militias."

This de facto state poses a grave security threat to China s a safe haven for militant groups to launch attacks in the home front, especially with the recent revelation¹⁵ by Chinese security officials that Turkey has been issuing fake passports to recruit Chinese Uyghurs for its anti-Assad group.

TIP has already claimed numerous high-profile terrorists attacks against China over the past two years, including the Kunming train station attacks which Beijing calls her 9/11¹⁶.

The Middle Kingdom has in the past threatened support for PKK as leverage over Turkey's backing of Uyghur separatists. As Turkey continues to support Uyghur militants and attack PKK, it would be interesting to see if Emperor Xi levels the playing field and decides to arm PKK via the strategy of Jiè dāo shā rén (借刀杀人), or killing with a borrowed sword.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

¹⁵ <http://atimes.com/2015/07/uyghurs-being-sold-as-cannon-fodder-for-extremist-groups-china/>

¹⁶ http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/845570.shtml#UxKm_s6xfX4