



BOA-EMT Intelligence Center

Turkey's Neo-Ottoman Humanitarian Power Projection: 3 Black Swans

Summary: Under the Erdogan administration, Turkey has pursued a policy of humanitarian power projection to help pre-empt conflicts outside of its sovereign borders; largely within the maximum extent of its former Ottoman sphere of influence, as well as expanding into Turkic Central Asia. Turkish humanitarian power projection serves both a national security function, as well as a tool of diplomatic soft power. Despite Turkey's recent pivot away from a solely EU and NATO-based orientation, Turkish humanitarian power projection may be an exceptionally important asset to US national security and humanitarian interests. This is especially evident for 3 Black Swan events: 1) the collapse of the Mosul Dam; 2) Abrupt Climate Disruption re-creating Arab Spring-like environment in the Middle East and North Africa; and 3) declaration of Kurdish autonomy in Northern Iraq.

Background: Under the administration of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, external humanitarian operations have been largely spearheaded by the Turkish Red Crescent and closely coordinated with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within its former Ottoman sphere of influence, Turkish relief operations have augmented the governance functions for complete disaster management life-cycles.

Turkish humanitarian operations within both its former Ottoman and Central Asian spheres of influence include extensive bootprints in Somalia, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, and Balkans.

Turkey recently has pivoted away from the European Union, in large part due to perceived European resistance to full integration, as well as the tenuous status of the EU post-Brexit. Similarly, Turkey's thaw with Iran and Russia, and the procurement of the controversial S-400 Russian anti-aircraft missile system has alarmed NATO members,

who may not be able to integrate that capability into its security architecture. Despite this re-adjustment for Turkey's regional security posture, especially as a NATO ally, the symbolic importance and actual activity of Ankara's humanitarian power projection capabilities should not be underestimated by US military, diplomatic, and relief professionals.

Black Swan Scenarios: There are three humanitarian "black swan" scenarios that would pose tremendous security risks for US interests. In each case, Turkish humanitarian power projection could potentially be in play.

Scenario 1 - Collapse of the Mosul Dam - As currently assessed by the US Army Corps of Engineers, a failure of the Mosul Dam would result in a Hurricane Katrina-like scenario for Iraq, creating a catastrophic riverine tsunami on the Tigris River from Mosul through Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. Dam failure would likely result in full power loss of the entire nation, similar to post-Hurricane Maria Puerto Rico. 1.2 million internally-displaced refugees in Northern Iraq could be uprooted again. Most of Baghdad's six million residents would experience Katrina-like conditions, and the Green Zone would be inundated. It is unlikely that the Iraqi government would be able to conduct effective Swiftwater Rescue or evacuation operations. Projected fatalities could total 1.5M Iraqis. The long-term resulting complex emergency could dwarf the post-Arab Spring environment that fostered the rise of Islamic State.

Scenario 2 - Abrupt Climate Disruption Re-Creates the Arab Spring Food Price Crisis - The rapid warming of the Arctic, exponential loss of sea ice, and resulting disruption of the jet stream has potential to strongly impact wheat-growing regions of China. 2017's drought in Northern China, near Inner Mongolia, was the worst on record according to Chinese officials. 2010's catastrophic drought in Southern China impacted wheat production to such an extent that bread prices rose dramatically in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Although China currently has a wheat surplus the pace of Arctic amplification, including the Beaufort Sea area north of Alaska, continues to intensify. A protracted trough or crest in the Northern Hemispheric jet stream could impact Chinese wheat production and can not be dismissed. If a shift in drought pattern were to occur, Turkey's Ottoman sphere of influence, from North Africa to Somalia to Syria and Iraq, could once again experience a) economic and political instability b) massive internal displacement c) and refugee outflows,

including an increase in maritime refugee flows across the Mediterranean Sea.

Scenario 3 - Iraqi Kurdistan Pursues Sovereignty - Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) recently conducted a referendum on sovereignty that deeply unified Turkey, Iran and Iraq in opposition. This includes Turkish-Iranian intelligence collaboration, as well as joint Turkish-Iraqi military operations in Northern Iraq. Turkey's multi-billion dollar oil trade with the KRG was threatened by Erdogan, who stated that the Kurds may "go hungry" and that the region may be driven into a bloody sectarian war. Turkish relations with the KRG had been good due continued collaboration to counter the insurgent Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and its reach into Southeast Turkey. However, when a Magnitude 7.2M earthquake struck Northern Iraq and Iran on November 13, 2017, Turkish relief operations were the first international responders on-scene via military cargo plane and truck convoys. The humanitarian force package included doctors, medical supplies, and Urban Search and Rescue Teams. The power of "earthquake diplomacy" was clear. Erdogan himself stated, "...in times of such difficulty, Turkey always rushes to its brothers in the region." Post-earthquake, diplomatic ties between the KRG and Turkey are reported to have been restored.

Black Swan Implications: The collapse of the Mosul Dam, the possibility of climate disruption re-stimulating another Arab Spring, and a possible re-pursuit of Kurdish sovereignty aspirations in Northern Iraq are all low probability but game-changing Black Swan events that would challenge US interests in the Middle East and North Africa. If the Mosul Dam creates a post-Katrina New Orleans or post-Maria Puerto Rico environment for Iraq, Turkish response and recovery activities will be pivotal to a successful response by initiating earlier than others. If China experiences a wheat crop failure that re-creates Arab Spring causal factors, Turkey's efforts in Somalia, Libya, Syria, and Iraq will be significant players supporting refugee outflows and internally displaced populations. Turkey's maritime SAR and naval operations would be vital to interfacing with NATO activities in the Mediterranean; and despite severe tensions over Kurdish autonomy, humanitarian diplomacy has played an undeniable role in soothing regional tensions centered on Northern Iraq.

Recommendation: Defense planners, intelligence analysts, and humanitarian operators are highly recommended to re-evaluate the

potential force-multiplying benefits of Turkish humanitarian power projection in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Despite a perceived pivot away from US and European interests, Turkey's global relief operations would be highly useful in high-leverage, catastrophic humanitarian emergencies.

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References for final draft

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