

CONFIDENTIAL

October 3, 2012

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Turkey v. Syria (plus Iran)

SOURCE: Sources with access to the highest levels of the Governments and institutions discussed below. This includes political parties and regional intelligence and security services.

1. On October 2 and 3, 2012, Turkish and Syrian forces exchanged fire across their border near the Turkish town of Akcakale; several Turkish civilians (including children) were killed, while Syrian casualties are not yet known. According a sensitive source with access to the General Staff of the Turkish Army, the commanders of the Turkish National Intelligence Service (TNIO) and the Intelligence section of the Turkish National Police (TNP) are warning President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that the Syrian Government of Bashar al Assad is trying to draw Turkey into the fighting in Syria with the goal of giving Syria's ally Iran a reason to engage in the Syrian civil war in a more aggressive manner. This sensitive individual does not believe the Iranians will send their regular forces to Syria, but the deteriorating situation between Syrian and Turkey gives them cover to step up the number and level of activity of Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces, some of whom are already working with the Syrian Army.

2. Erdogan's political advisors are telling him that the Turkish people do not want war, believing it will damage their very successful economy, but they are quite worried about the potential economic and security problems associated with the 100,000 Syrian refugees currently living in camps inside of Turkey. That said, this sources notes that Erdogan is now caught up in the momentum of the situation, and the Turkish Army commanders are pressing for stronger retaliation against Syria in response to the Akcakale incident. They are pressing the idea that this action must be taken for the honor of the Turkish Army, which they believe is attached to the security of the country. At the same time, Erdogan is sensitive to the views of the Army after his government pursued legal action which sent several of its former commanders to prison for coup plotting.

3. In the opinion of this source the Turkish General Staff will not launch a direct attack against Syrian forces without coordinating with their NATO allies, but they will step up aid to the particular factions of the Free Syrian Army with whom they are comfortable. Instead, this source believes the Turkish commanders will increase Special Forces operations in Syria, and conduct selected shelling of military targets by their heavy (155 mm) guns just above the Syrian border. If the situation along the border between Turkey and Syria continues to deteriorate, the Turkish commanders may also take steps to close the air space along their border to Syrian air craft. At the same time, the General Staff has an existing contingency plan to move 15 km inside of Syria, to establish a buffer zone. According to this individual, the Turkish commanders could take this action without NATO support or coordination, however; Erdogan has not decided to move, weighing the internal political and economic issues involved.

4. (Source Comment: A sensitive source notes that Erdogan is aware of the possibility that a war between Turkey and Syria will have serious effect in Europe; this comes at a time when the countries of the Eurozone are working to maintain a stable international environment and to solve their debt/banking crisis. According to this individual, the government of French President Francois Hollande has been particularly active in urging Turkey to avoid allowing the current situation to deteriorate into open fighting.)

5. According to a particularly sensitive source, if the Syrians, backed by the Iranians, take additional action inside of Turkey, Erdogan, pressed by the General Staff, will feel forced to retaliate on an increasing scale. Although many, if not most Turks want to avoid war, they are very patriotic, and more Turkish deaths at the hands of the Syrian Army will only serve to stir these feelings. This individual notes that it is not that difficult to stir up Turkish nationalism when Arabs or Kurds are involved on the other side of the matter

6. (Source Comment: A sensitive source states that anyone watching the situation along Turkish/Syrian border should always remember that Turkey has approximately 1.3 million highly trained troops and ready reserves, equipped with the latest weapons and technology from the United States and NATO. As always, this source adds that perhaps the most important indicator regarding Turkish military activity will be the disposition of elite Special Forces and airborne units based near the Presidential palace in Ankara. These troops will be the spearhead of any force that moves on to the offensive in Syria.)