

Erdogan's bluff and poker games

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One week before the local elections in Turkey, March 30th, a Turkish F16 shot down a Syrian Mig 23 accusing the Syrian side of penetrating Turkish airspace while the Syrian jet came down in Syrian territory and, luckily, the surviving pilot clearly stated that he was shot down on the Syrian side of the border.

Even when hypothetically the Syrian jet crossed for seconds Turkish airspace the Turkish jets could easily escort him out as from a military point of view there is and was not a single reason to shoot the jet down.

So if there is no military reason, the hostile act of bringing a Syrian jet down must be looked at from a political angle.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) is under tremendous pressure because of the steep confrontation with the Gülen movement, corruption accusations in which his own son is mentioned, phone tapping and electronic surveillance practises and widespread social discontent with his conservative policies reigning in personal freedoms in a secular society as laid out by the founder of the modern Turkish Republic Kemal Ataturk.

Feeling the heat and the possible price Erdogan and his party is going to pay in the local elections to come he even became more authoritarian than he already was by blocking Twitter and ordering mass arrests. Turkish jails are filled with journalists writing articles which Erdogan doesn't like or see as a threat. The message is clear. Attack or even question Erdogan and you will end up in jail.

In light of this internal political crisis Erdogan needed some action to show his "bravery". The shooting down of the Syrian Mig could be used by him to show strength and to use this criminal act in his political rallies to bring over the message that he is the "strong man" and leader Turkey needs.

One can say that the downing of the Mig is an expression of Erdogan's political weakness and panic in light of the elections with the aim to boost the morale as well as his status and political standing.

But the Turkish aggression against and interference into the Syrian conflict by facilitating the jihadist criminals and murders - giving them free access out and into Syria through its borders, providing them with weapons and treating their wounded ones in Turkish hospitals - will for sure come back to Erdogan as a boomerang. The majority of Turks is totally opposed against this military adventure not only because of historical good relations between the Syrian and Turkish peoples but also for economic reasons as trade between Syria and Turkey in the border area before the Syrian crisis was flourishing but is now reduced to zero. Furthermore, the Turkish people as well as their European counterparts, are very well aware that the extremists they are supporting now will sooner or later turn their weapons to attack and cut off the hands which are feeding them now.

As a conclusion it can be stated that Erdogan's policies with regard to Syria, including this military adventure of shooting down a jet from a neighbouring country which it is not in war with, is nothing more than a desperate attempt to try to shift the political balance in its favour one week before the elections but Erdogan has to realise that this bluffing and dangerous games will more than probably lead to defeat and punishment by the electorate.

Kris Janssen
Belgium