

# Turkey and Russia

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**N**EBUCHADNEZZAR was at the height of his power and musing over his achievements: “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). Indeed, his achievements, humanly speaking, were outstanding. But despite the Almighty’s earlier warning, “This sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that *the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men*, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men” (v. 17, RV), he had failed to take into account that he was merely a pawn in the Divine scheme of things.

In the same way that God revealed His purpose by prophetic message to Nebuchadnezzar to inform him of the ultimate conquest of the kingdom of men by the Kingdom of God, so too did He use His prophets to reveal other aspects of His purpose to His people. Amos records, “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (3:7). Although the prophets have spoken, the nations involved are not usually aware of this fact; nor, if they were, would they willingly comply! However, they will carry out God’s will, because the angels working in the context of man’s free will ensure the progress of the Divine purpose.

This should encourage students of the Word to be patient when the political situation does not match what prophecy seems clearly to show must be the situation before a notable event—such as the Gogian invasion detailed in Ezekiel 38—can take place. One of the members of the Gogian confederacy is Togarmah. Ezekiel says, “Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal . . . I will bring thee forth, and all thine army . . . Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee” (38:3-6). Togarmah was the grandson of Japheth. His descendants by the time of Ezekiel were in Asia Minor, the area now occupied by Turkey.

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## Turkey’s change of allegiance

An example of angelic activity can be seen in the move of Turkey away from alliance with the West towards alliance with Russia, as Ezekiel 38 leads us to expect.

Towards the end of World War I, Turkey expelled the Armenians and, in accordance with the Bible prophecy of the ‘drying up of the Euphrates’, was reduced to its present location in Asia Minor. During the Cold War, Turkey was part of NATO. For more than twenty-two years they have sought membership of the EU. Up to the start of the Iraq War they had good relations with the US. But quite recently things have changed, and a number of factors can be identified.

There is no longer the perceived threat of incursion from what was the Soviet Union; hence their part in NATO is no longer important. Additionally, the very recent American condemnation of the Turkish expulsion of Armenians at the end of World War 1 as genocide has noticeably soured relations between the two countries.

The failure of Turkey to gain EU entry—despite being favoured by Britain<sup>1</sup>—pushes her to look elsewhere for trade and support. In fact, the divide between the EU and Turkey really arises from their different religious backgrounds. A writer in the *Guardian* wrote:<sup>2</sup> “Such curbs on expression, however, have nothing to do with the antipathy directed at Turkey by Nicolas Sarkozy in France and Angela Merkel in Germany. Rather, their opposition to Turkey’s bid for EU membership is explained by what a columnist in the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* accurately described as ‘basic facts not pronounced openly’. ‘Turkey is a Muslim

1. “That project of an outward-looking EU needs, as a clear goal, the inclusion of Turkey as a full and equal member. Turkey and the rest of Europe are bound together by a shared belief in democracy and by shared interests. Membership of the European Union will help to further those shared interests and values and reconcile differences”. David Miliband, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3642448/Turkey-is-vital-to-Europes-future.html>.
2. David Cronin; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/06/turkey-european-union-membership>.



and war. Even after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey became a member of NATO to secure it from possible Soviet attack. The situation has now changed significantly. A *Stratfor* report<sup>4</sup> identified four zones of overlapping interest for the Turks and the Russians; they are:

- economic opportunities arising from the end of the Soviet Empire
- increased opportunity for Turkish influence in the Balkans
- energy
- influence in the Caucasus.

### **Economic opportunities and energy**

Turkey, with its lower-cost exports compared with Western sources, has become the largest supplier of imports into the Russian market. The volume of bilateral trade in 2008 was 35 billion US dollars, but the two countries have recently agreed to increase this to 100 billion US dollars in

the next five years. Another economic factor in the relationship between the two countries is tourism. About 2.5 million Russians visited Turkey in 2008 and the numbers continue to increase. In addition, the numbers of mixed marriages are reaching significant proportions.<sup>5</sup>

Energy accounts for the bulk of the trade volume between the two countries, with Turkey depending on Russia for sixty-five per cent of its natural gas and forty per cent of its oil imports. Turkey, however, is also seeking to diversify its sources of energy supply by looking toward Iraq and Iran.

country', Mehmet Ali Birand wrote. 'And Europe is not ready yet to accept a Muslim country in the EU'. In fact, from the religious point of view, Turkey has more in common with countries like Iran, Iraq and Syria in the Middle East.

Turkey has been fostering cooperation with Iran since early in 2009. *Euronews* reported:<sup>3</sup> "At a meeting in Turkey last year between the Iranian and Turkish presidents, Ankara made it clear it wanted to improve bilateral relations. The Turkish president was quoted as saying their ties are based on their beliefs, culture and deep historical roots". It was also noted that "Iran is Turkey's second-biggest supplier of natural gas after Russia. And in terms of trade, business between the two countries is now worth more than six billion euros, with plans to double that over the next two years". Coincident with this move, the hitherto strong ties between Turkey and Israel have been weakening: "Israeli-Turkish relations began to sour with Israel's offensive in Gaza".

### **Turkey and Russia**

During the time of the Ottoman Empire the relationship of Turkey with Russia was one of rivalry

### **Russia's demographic problem**

One of the factors that drive Russia to expand is the recognition that Moscow has no geographic barriers to invasion. This policy inevitably means that there are many ethnic minorities within the

3. <http://www.euronews.net/2009/10/27/spotlight-on-iran-turkey-relations/>.
4. [http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090317\\_turkey\\_and\\_russia\\_rise](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090317_turkey_and_russia_rise).
5. <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=1314>.

Russian sphere of control that are potentially hostile to Russian rule. This multiethnic population is monitored by Russia's elite intelligence service, but it is growing out of proportion to the native Russian population. As the *Stratfor* report states,<sup>6</sup> "Russia's primary challenge, however, is time. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the bottom fell out of the Russian birthrate, with fewer than half the number of babies born in the 1990s than were born in the 1980s. These post-Cold War children are now coming of age; in a few years, their small numbers are going to have a catastrophic impact on the size of the Russian population. By contrast, most non-Russian minorities—in particular those such as Chechens and Dagestanis, who are of Muslim faith—did not suffer from the 1990s birthrate plunge, so their numbers are rapidly increasing even as the number of ethnic Russians is rapidly decreasing. Add in deep-rooted, demographic-impacting problems such as HIV, tuberculosis and heroin abuse—concentrated not just among ethnic Russians but also among those of childbearing age—and Russia faces a

hard-wired demographic time bomb. Put simply, Russia is an ascending power in the short run, but it is a declining power in the long run. The Russian leadership is well aware of this coming crisis, and knows it is going to need every scrap of strength it can muster just to continue the struggle to keep Russia in one piece".

#### **Encouragement to look for Jesus' return**

We can appreciate the pressure that this puts on Russia to secure its position in the world and to dominate the Middle East, "to take a spoil, and to take a prey" while it thinks that it is able to do so. It is clear that the conditions in the world, geographical relationship and ethnic ties now favour close relations between Turkey, Russia, Iraq and Iran—a situation that seems to have come about naturally yet under the Divine hand to bring about His purpose to set up over the world as King "the lowest of men".

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6. Op. cit.