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## Why Turkey Was Planning a False Flag Operation in Syria

By Nick Giambruno

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You've probably heard about the recent leaked conversations involving Turkey.

It was stunning to hear the highest-ranking Turks causally discussing how to provoke a false flag incident that would justify a large military intervention in Syria.

This is a big deal because Turkish troops in Syria opens the door to NATO troops in Syria, which drastically expands the conflict.

As someone who has spent a number of years living and working in the Middle East, and having been to Syria multiple times, I was encouraged by my colleagues at Casey Research to share my perspective on this.

In case you didn't know, a false flag is an incident that is designed to deceive people into thinking it was actually carried out by someone else.

It's like the scene in the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. There's a character who plays on the high school football team and has a fancy sports car. Later, his little brother's friend accidentally trashes this car. Terrified at how the big brother could respond, they come up with a clever plan to shift the blame on someone else. They make it look like a rival football team

vandalized the car, decorating it in the rival team's colors and slogans. The plan works—the big brother is tricked into thinking that a rival football team trashed his car instead of the little brother.

This is the essence of a false flag, and the same tactic is used by the world's militaries and intelligence services to nefarious effect. Many believe the Reichstag fire incident that allowed Hitler to drastically expand his power was a false flag operation.

So, why would the Turks propose doing such a thing in Syria?

To answer that question, we need to sift through the complexities of the Syrian situation.

First, the Syrian rebels are divided into mostly Salafi Islamists and secularists, or what was once known as the Free Syrian Army. As things stand right now, the latter is essentially irrelevant and has little influence on the ground—a reality that the Obama administration stubbornly refuses to acknowledge. The Salafi Islamists are the real power of the opposition and can be divided into roughly three groups.

**1. The Islamic Front:** This is the so-called “moderate” or “mainstream” group and is supported mostly by Saudi Arabia, but also by Turkey and Qatar. It's the largest group in terms of men, but not necessarily the most militarily effective.

**2. The Nusra Front:** This is the official Al Qaeda franchise in Syria. It's more radical, known for beheadings and suicide attacks, and is supported by wealthy individuals in the Gulf and allegedly to some degree from Qatar. Al Nusra also widely coordinates its activities with the Islamic Front. This leads many to question whether there's any meaningful distinction between the two groups, other than giving the latter a “mainstream” veneer to potential Western backers.

**3. ISIL:** This stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. These guys are so hardcore that *even* Al Qaeda disavowed them, as their brutal tactics have alienated many locals. But that doesn't mean they aren't powerful on the ground, though. In fact, they control a huge swath of territory that stretches from eastern Syria into the Iraqi city of Fallujah, which for all intents and purposes is a distinct yet unrecognized political entity controlled by these guys.

Now back to the Turkish situation.

Turkey owns a very small piece of territory inside of Syria that dates back to the Ottoman Empire. This small piece of land is the tomb of Suleyman Shah, a relative of one of the founding Ottomans. It's guarded by 24 Turkish troops and is considered sovereign Turkish territory.

Having Turkish troops in this area is not controversial, as the Syrian government has long agreed to it.

The region where this tomb is located has totally fallen out of the Syrian government's control for many months. And now, the hardcore ISIL group controls the surrounding area. It has

threatened the Turkish soldiers and told them to leave. The Turks refused, and that's why the Turkish government is getting skittish.

This is where the leaked tape comes in.

The conversation started out with the Turks talking about how they can protect this tomb from ISIL. This is not controversial. I don't believe the Syrian government would care about the Turks intervening to protect the tomb, since this is an area where it has lost control anyways. Plus, I'd bet the Syrian government would be happy to see the Turks bogged down fighting ISIL militants who'd otherwise be fighting them.

However, that was not the end of the conversation. The really sinister part comes when the high-ranking Turks talk about how easy it would be to create a false flag incident involving the tomb, and how they could use that to justify a much wider military intervention inside Syria.

Such an incident would be a sort of foot in the door to further military activities inside Syria and would allow the Turks to help their favored rebel groups, which have seen serious setbacks lately.

That step would clearly cause them to go to war with the Syrian government and drastically expand the conflict. And once Turkey is involved inside Syria, that opens the door for NATO to be involved.

The Erdogan government has staked a huge amount of domestic political capital by supporting the Syrian rebels. They gambled that their favored rebel groups would quickly win and as a result, Turkey would have more geopolitical influence in a post-Assad Syria. It was a losing bet. Turkey's favored rebels have seriously faltered, and a growing number of Turkish voters have become skeptical of their government's intervention and the blowback it's causing.

A false flag incident with the tomb would be a way for Erdogan to double down in a desperate attempt to turn things around in Syria. Whoever leaked this conversation clearly timed it to take the wind out the sails of such a strategy.

There are only a few people with the capability and motivation to do this. As an ally of the Syrian government, Russian intelligence is at the top of that list. They have leaked similarly shocking private conversations in Ukraine recently. Members of the Turkish military opposed to Erdogan could have also done it.

Instead of coming up with a classy way of saying "touché," the Turkish government responded by throwing a childish fit, futilely trying to block YouTube and Twitter.

In this digital age, restricting Internet access, seizing and spying on digital data, and otherwise tampering with an individual's digital presence have become new tools in the traditional toolbox of desperate governments.