

CONFIDENTIAL

June 28, 2012

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Erdogan, Oezel & Syria; Lebanon/Syria

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. During late June 2012 individuals with access to the security situation in Turkey and Syria stated in strict confidence that General Necdet Oezel, Chief of the Turkish General Staff/Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), advised Prime Minister RecepTayyip Erdogan that Turkey must be prepared for unpredictable circumstances that could bring its force into direct conflict with the Syrian Army. For his part Erdogan, supported by Minister of Defense Ismet Yilmaz and his advisors, warned that it is clear Turkey's NATO allies do not want to see a conflict between Syria and Turkey and that the Turkish government cannot allow the chaotic security situation in Syria to draw them into a war that could rapidly spread throughout the region. Oezel assured Erdogan that the Turkish Army and the rest of the TAF could subdue Syrian forces with a minimum of damage, particularly as the morale in the Syrian Army is extremely low as a result of what Oezel described as the civil war underway in Syria.

2. According to this individual, Oezel added that the General Staff has updated its contingency war plans for Syria, including a review of the 400,000 reserve troops, who can be activated in relatively short order if needed. Oezel pointed out that, although as many as 100,000 troops are involved in operations against the PKK in the eastern mountains of Turkey, and northern Iraq, the bulk of the remaining 600,000 troops are available for operations against Syria, including elite Special Forces and para-military police units. For their part, both Erdogan and Yilmaz cautioned Oezel to avoid building momentum toward war with Syria among the rank and file of the Army, particularly the captains and majors commanding combat units. They added that it was clear from the recent meetings with their NATO counterparts that their allies are opposed to an aggressive response to Syrian military activities against Turkey. In response

Oezel pointed out that during the United States invasion of Iraq there were a number of incidents in which TAF forces deferred to U.S. forces in Kurdistan. These incidents created extreme resentment on the part of mid-level TAF officers. In his opinion, Erdogan has had great success in establishing his nationalist credentials with the Turkish military and Oezel fears that this progress would be lost if Syrian forces continue to carry out operations that are seen as an insult to the TAF.

3. (Source Comment: In the opinion of this very sensitive source, Erdogan believes that he has done enough to intimidate the Syrians and he does not want TAF contingency planning to get out of hand. He has also asked Oezel to depend as much as possible on NATO resources to obtain intelligence on the situation in Syria, avoiding a repeat of the F-4 incident. According to sensitive sources, Erdogan, Yilmaz, and Oezel believe that whatever steps they take must be carried out in secret. Erdogan also believes that the NATO allies do not want a conflict between Turkey and Syria that might complicate relations with Russia. They are convinced that the Russian naval forces and marines at Tartus, Syria are on alert for any development. Finally, Erdogan stated that while the TAF was worried about its honor the majority of the Turkish people do not want a war with Syria, particularly at a time when their economy is doing well. He is also privately concerned that in a time of war the Turkish Constitution allows Oezel, as the representative of President Abdullah Gul, to become Commander – in – Chief of the TAF, putting him outside of the Prime Minister's authority. According to this individual Erdogan does not believe Oezel would take such a step given the current political situation in Turkey; however, he knows Turkish history and must always have this possibility in the back of his mind.)

4. At the same time, an individual with access to the Lebanese security services, stated that the Syrian Military Intelligence Directorate (MID) has stepped operations in the region of Tripoli and throughout Northern Lebanon. Lebanese military commanders believe that these Syrian officers are working, with the help of their allies in Hezbollah, to increase tension between the Lebanese Army and Salafist militias, in an effort to limit the Salafist support for the Free Syrian Army (FSA). In this regard, the Lebanese military expects to see an increase in political bombings and assassination attempts by Syrian agents against local officials. These individuals believe that the MID will disguise these attacks in an effort to attach blame to the Lebanese Salafists, and by extension, the FSA. According to this individual, the MID believes that with growing tension between Syria and Turkey, the FSA is looking to use Northern Lebanon as a base of supply for their operations inside of Syria. The MID is convinced that by stirring up internal conflicts in Lebanon, they can interfere with these FSA plans.

5. (Source Comment: A sensitive source in Beirut stated in private that the government of Saudi Arabia has received information that Syrian troops will pursue rebel forces who seek refuge in Lebanon. Accordingly, the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Lebanon, Ali Awad Asiri, stated in confidence that his country has put in place a contingency plan for the evacuation of its

nationals in Lebanon, should the need for a sudden departure arise. The Ambassador noted that the Kingdom will not be responsible for the safety of its citizens who choose to remain in the country once they are advised to leave. By the same token, the U.A.E., Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait advised their citizens to avoid all travel to Lebanon, and for the citizens of those in the country to depart given the tense security situation.