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## Islamic defense consultancy takes on West

### SADAT gains growing scrutiny over US allegations

ISTANBUL: Turkish businessman Melih Tanriverdi seethes at the suggestion that his private defense consultancy has become Ankara's secret weapon in wars across North Africa and the Middle East. SADAT International Defense Consultancy has gained growing scrutiny over US allegations that it trains Syrians who then get dispatched to support pro-Turkish forces in war zones such as Libya. The company's manifesto says SADAT "aims to assist the Islamic world to take the role among the super global powers as a self-sufficient global power".

But Tanriverdi tells AFP those accusations are part of a Western disinformation campaign designed to tarnish the image of Turkey and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Our company has nothing to do with being a mercenary organization," he said in a written interview. "SADAT's entry into the field of action as an unexpected actor against the global powers... explains the reason for this disinformation," he said in English.

The firm was established in 2012 by Tanriverdi's father Adnan—a brigadier general whose service ended during a purge of Islamic influence from the traditionally secular military in 1996. Its stealth role in promoting Turkey's interests across the Muslim world has gained renewed attention as Erdogan seeks to secure a foothold in Afghanistan following the US troop withdrawal. Turkey proposed using private contractors to protect Kabul's airport so that it can fully reopen to international flights—a role theoretically tailor-made for SADAT.

Tanriverdi says only that SADAT "can provide consultancy and training services to security and military units that will ensure the security of the air-

port". Its span of proposed operations—colored green on a company logo showing a world map—stretches from North Africa to the Middle East and parts of central and southeast Asia. In 2020, the US Department of Defense said SADAT sent teams to Libya to train Syrian fighters on behalf of Turkish-backed forces of the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli.

SADAT "maintains supervision and payment of the estimated 5,000 pro-GNA Syrian fighters in Libya," a Pentagon report said at the time. Tanriverdi dismissed this and claims that SADAT funneled fighters to Azerbaijan in last year's war with Armenia over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh as a "conspiracy theory".

"SADAT has never been in Syria, Libya or Azerbaijan," he said. "Do you really think we are professional enough to fool the global powers?" Some analysts think they are.



SADAT 'aims to assist' the Islamic world

#### 'Facilitator'

"There are credible sources that suggest SADAT plays a key role in training and mobilizing proxies in Syria and using them as mercenaries," American University and Orion Policy Institute terrorism expert Suat Cubukcu told AFP. The elder Tanriverdi initially became Erdogan's senior security adviser after the Turkish leader survived a coup attempt in 2016. Some believe SADAT offers the Turkish government plausible deniability about its role abroad.

A report by US Joint Chiefs of Staff Army officer Matt Powers called SADAT a "facilitator between Ankara and Syrian proxy fighters" that Turkey then sends to other war zones. "There is a lot of speculation that Turkish intelligence uses cut outs to pay for proxies, giving a veneer of legitimacy to the use of Syrians in operations abroad," the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Middle East program director Aaron Stein told AFP. "However,



ISTANBUL: This handout photograph released by SADAT International shows Melih Tanriverdi, CEO of SADAT International Defense Consultancy as he poses in Istanbul. SADAT boss Melih Tanriverdi seethes at the suggestion that his private defense consultancy has become Turkey's secret weapon in wars across North Africa and the Middle East. — AFP

we have no idea how this actually works." Tanriverdi refused to name any clients. "We operate on every continent, including Africa," he said.

#### Ideological drive

Cubukcu said SADAT's overtly political view of the world and lack of its own armed units distinguished it from Wagner—a Russian firm associated closely with the Kremlin that is also pushing into resource-rich Africa—or its US counterparts. "SADAT has ideology-oriented and much more intertwined relations with its home government," Cubukcu said.

But Tanriverdi rejected speculation that his firm has grown into an informal part of the Turkish state. He said SADAT needed state approval to "export services or defense industry products" but did not take instructions from ministries or Turkey's MIT intelligence agency. Although the elder Tanriverdi no longer serves as Erdogan's security adviser—the company's anger at the West lives on. "Countries that come from thousands of kilometers away... spread fake news to accuse our president and his former chief adviser, Adnan Tanriverdi," the younger Tanriverdi said.— AFP

## Confusion reigns over British Queen's health

LONDON: Questions mounted on Friday about the health of 95-year-old Queen Elizabeth II after she had tests and spent a night in hospital, despite royal officials saying she was resting at home. Buckingham Palace said on Wednesday morning that she pulled out of a planned engagement in Northern Ireland and had been advised to rest on medical advice. But royal officials conceded late on Thursday that she had in fact had "some preliminary investigations" in hospital on Wednesday, and stayed overnight, after The Sun newspaper broke the news. She returned from King Edward VII's Hospital in central London to her Windsor Castle home west of the capital and was said to be "in good spirits".

Prime Minister Boris Johnson sent his best wishes, his spokesman said, while members of the public near her Buckingham Palace home in central London said they were unperturbed. Kirsty Duffield, an operations manager, told AFP health checks were "quite normal" at the Queen's age and it was "really positive" that she was released so quickly. Housewife Katie Lavin pointed out the monarch was still riding horses and appeared strong and independent, even though it was clear she was "getting a little bit fragile". Visiting US theatre director Charles Fee said she would be described as "a tough broad" across the Atlantic.

#### 'Rumors and misinformation'

Britain's Press Association news agency said the hospital visit and stay was not initially disclosed because it was expected to be short, and to protect her privacy. She stayed overnight for "practical reasons", said to be because it was too late to make the 26-mile trip back to Windsor. The Queen has previously been treated at the exclusive private clinic, which is known for treating the royal family, including in 2013 for gastroenteritis, when she also stayed for one night. The development follows several busy weeks during which the monarch undertook more than a dozen public engagements, including

hosting a reception on Tuesday for global business leaders at Windsor Castle.

Royals author Robert Hardman told the BBC there would be "a mild degree of irritation at the palace this morning" that news of the queen's hospital stay had become public. "There's a concern to maintain the dignity of the office," Hardman said, adding officials had likely feared "huge banks of cameras and 24-hour news setting up outside the hospital". However, veteran BBC royal correspondent Nicholas Witchell said royal officials "have not been giving us a complete, reasonable picture of what has been occurring".

"Rumors and misinformation proliferate (and) thrive when there is an absence of good, proportionate, trustworthy information. "We must hope that we can rely on what the palace is now telling us," he added, calling assurances that the queen was in good spirits "a handy phrase that the palace dusts off at moments such as this". Richard Palmer, royal correspondent at the Daily Express, also called the phrase a "palace cliché". "Royal sources had been keen to encourage the impression that she had just overdone it but may struggle to convince the public now," he said.

#### No fuss

The queen is head of state in the UK and 15 other realms around the world, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Preparations are already under way to celebrate her Platinum Jubilee next year, marking her 70 years on the throne. The palace said she was back at her desk on Thursday afternoon undertaking "light duties". The disclosure, however, will inevitably raise fears for her health and the toll of her public duties given her advanced age. Her late husband, Prince Philip, died in April just a few weeks before his 100th birthday, months after spending four weeks in hospital. The monarch, who still rides and drives on her private estates, has been especially active since returning from her Balmoral estate in northeast Scotland at the start of October.

Last week, she was seen for the first time at a major public event using a walking stick, but royal officials said it was not linked to any specific health condition. She is still expected to attend a series of events linked to the upcoming UN climate summit in Glasgow next month. — AFP



LONDON: Police officers stand on duty outside King Edward VII's Hospital in central London. Queen Elizabeth II spent a night in the private King Edward VII's Hospital after being advised to rest. — AFP

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