



RESEARCH PAPER

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Research Paper

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Editorial

The following Research Paper differs from those previously published by the Research Branch. It is an exceptional work in that it stands outside the traditional framework of the research activities of the NATO Defense College.

It merits the reader's attention for three important reasons:

– The first is that, unlike the work published in previous Research Papers, the following article presents the perspectives of one country, Turkey. This key member of the Alliance, because of its geo-strategic location, has a unique vision of Euro-Atlantic security issues.

– The second is that this work discusses regional stability in a pivotal zone at the intersection of Europe and Asia, an area long affected by tensions and crises in the Middle East.

– The third, and perhaps the most important reason, is that this work is not a direct product of the Academic Research Branch, but rather of a NATO Defense College Faculty Adviser, a diplomat, who presents her personal views on her country's perception of the region.

Following the intense debates in late 2004 regarding Turkey's role in Europe, taking into consideration the new security challenges in the Middle East which result largely from the post-election developments in the Palestinian Territories and in Iraq, and bearing in mind Lebanon's key concerns at present, this article serves to enhance our understanding of the main actors in the region.

This contribution was preceded by a study on the Balkans issued in late 2004¹ and by a contribution on the Black Sea Region in February 2005². It provides a basis for the next Partnership for Peace International Research Seminar in Romania entitled "The Role of the Wider Black Sea Area in a Future European Security Space".

Jean DUFOURCQ, Chief, Academic Research Branch

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Les opinions exprimées dans cette publication sont celles de leurs auteurs et ne peuvent être attribuées au Collège de Défense de l'OTAN ou à l'Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord.

¹ "Quelle approche pour l'OTAN dans les Balkans à la lumière des tendances sécuritaires régionales?", by Gheorghe Ciascai, Romanian Fellow at the NATO Defense College, *Research Paper No. 14*, December 2004.

² "Thinking About Geography: Some Competing Geopolitical Models For the 21st Century", by Peter R. Faber; "The New Strategic and Security Landscape Of Southeast Europe: The Case for a Wider Black Sea Area", by Vasile Secăreş, in *Research Paper No. 15*, February 2005.

Turkey's role in NATO in the Post-Cold War Security Environment

Şule NIŞANCI¹

Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, some observers argued that the disappearance of the eventuality of a large-scale war and the imminent Soviet threat would gradually diminish NATO's strategic importance and consequently that of Turkey. However, the debate about Turkey's strategic importance and international role is more vigorous today than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Attention has been focused on Turkey, particularly since the European Union decision of 17 December 2004 to open membership negotiations with Turkey on 3 October 2005.

This paper focuses primarily on Turkey's contribution to Euro-Atlantic security within the context of its role in NATO, and takes into account the changing nature of post-Cold War risks and threats to the Alliance.

Turkey's unique position spans different continents, religions and cultures. It brings the common values of the Alliance from the Atlantic to the Altai Mountains in Central Asia. Turkey is simultaneously a European, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Black Sea country, and this fact places it in a unique position as regards the resolution of future regional and global challenges.

In fact, Turkey, following the Ottoman Empire's legacy, has always been an actor in the European political system. It was in close and constant interaction with other European powers. Its main orientation has always been towards Europe and the West.

In 1952, Turkey decided to join NATO in order to increase its security in relation to the Soviet Union, with which it shared a long common border. NATO membership has subsequently constituted the cornerstone of Turkey's security and defense policy.

The New International Security Environment

In the post-Cold War era, new risks and challenges have emerged, some of which are arguably far more dangerous than the threats the Alliance used to face. Today, NATO's credibility depends upon its determination to maintain capabilities in order to be able to cope effectively with changing threats. In this new security environment, Turkey's political and strategic importance has increased, in view of several factors.

The disappearance of the Soviet threat means that NATO's attention has now shifted southwards. Thus Turkey has found itself at or near the epicenter of several international security issues, including the conflicts in the Balkans and the Middle East, the war in Iraq, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The conflicts and potential flashpoints of concern today and in the foreseeable future include the Balkans, Russia, the Southern Caucasus and Caspian Basin, Iran, Iraq, the Persian Gulf as a whole, Syria, Israel and North Africa. Turkey occupies a unique position near all these countries and regions².

Turkey is a vast country, with a young and dynamic population. It has the second largest

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² The following quotation from *Time Magazine* (19 October 1992) is illustrative: "Help Wanted - Nation to serve as go-between for the Western world and the Middle East and assist in turning suspicion into cooperation. Must be firm U.S.-European ally, desirous of still closer ties yet, Islamic in religion and culture, capable of serving as a role model of secularized Western democracy for other Muslim states. Ethnic links with some of those states, booming free-market economy, permitting some assistance to poorer brethren highly desirable. Benefits: regional superpower within a few years; eventual major influence on wider world affairs possible". It is obvious that Turkey is the only country that fits this description.

armed forces in NATO after the United States. It is a member of, among others, the UN, NATO, the OSCE, the OECD, the OIC (the Organisation of Islamic Conference), and the Council of Europe, as well as a candidate for EU membership. Turkey is a source of stability in its volatile region thanks to certain political, military, financial and economic assets, including a pluralistic democracy, a secular political system, a tradition of modernity, a free enterprise economy, and highly capable armed forces. This is apparent in a survey of some of the key issues of concern.

The Balkans

The Balkans have traditionally played a significant role in European and world history. The Turkish presence in the Balkans dates back to the period of the Ottoman Empire, and this explains why the Balkans now have such a rich Turkish and Muslim heritage. Under Ottoman rule, the peoples of the region, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, lived harmoniously together without fear of persecution for religious or ethnic reasons. The cultural diversity of the region today is a direct consequence of this longstanding coexistence.

As a Balkan country itself, Turkey has a great interest in the fate of the Balkan region. Turkey has therefore contributed to NATO and other international efforts to settle the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo. Turkish troops, police officers and observers continue to serve in various parts of the former Yugoslavia in order to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians.

Turkey has played a leading role in the launching of major initiatives such as the Southeastern European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and the Multinational Peace Force Southeast Europe (MPFSEE)/Southeastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG). It has also supported the efforts of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe and the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI).

In July 2003, Turkey assumed the Chairmanship of the Coordination Committee of the Southeast Europe Defense Ministerial Process (SEDM/CC). Moreover, since 2003, during the Turkish Chairmanship of the Political Military Steering Committee of the Multinational Peace Force Southeast Europe (PMSC-MPFSEE), important steps have been taken regarding the deployment of SEEBRIG in NATO- and EU-led peacekeeping operations. Turkey is currently continuing its activities in this regard. Turkey has from the outset supported NATO's enlargement process and in this context the integration of the Balkan countries in Euro-Atlantic structures.

As a direct consequence of its dedication to the security and stability of this region, Turkey has participated in all NATO-led and (since 2003) all EU-led crisis management operations.³ Turkey's active support is not only a direct product of its national foreign and security policy, but is a natural result of the importance it attaches to the security of the Euro-Atlantic region.

Today, any comprehensive initiative in the Balkans must take Turkey and its numerous historical, cultural, political and economic affinities and experiences in the region into account.

Southern Caucasus and Central Asia

Peace, stability and cooperation in the neighbouring Caucasus are crucial, not only for the countries of the region, but also for the NATO countries, including Turkey.

Turkey has historical, cultural, religious and linguistic ties with the Southern Caucasus. The Turkish language spoken in Azerbaijan, for example, is the closest to that spoken in Turkey of all the Turkish dialects spoken throughout the Caucasus and Central Asia. Moreover, Azerbaijan and Turkey have additional ethnic, historical, cultural and religious links.

Turkey has from the outset been playing a constructive role in solving regional conflicts

³ Turkey's participation includes the civic crisis management operations of the EU in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, as well as the most comprehensive military crisis management operation, EUFOR-ALTHEA in Bosnia-Herzegovina, since 2 December 2004. Currently, Turkish contributions in the Balkans include 1 battalion composed of 380 military personnel in NATO's KFOR mission in Kosovo; 400 personnel in the EU's EUFOR-ALTHEA mission in Bosnia Herzegovina; a team composed of 21 "gendarmes" in the Integrated Police Unit in the context of the EUFOR-ALTHEA mission; 14 policemen in the EU Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia Herzegovina; and 8 personnel, 2 of which are gendarmerie and 6 policemen, in the EUPOL-PROXIMA operation in Macedonia.

affecting the Southern Caucasus, and it has thus been an important actor in efforts to ensure the stability of the region.

Central Asia is important in today's global economy. Its rich energy resources, including oil and gas reserves, attract the world's attention.

For Turkey, however, Central Asia means more than energy resources. This region has a special place in the hearts and minds of the Turkish people, mainly because this is a region from which many of their ancestors migrated. Close cultural ties and linguistic affinities with the peoples of Central Asia are at the root of Turkey's current relations with this part of the world. Turkey intends to expand its trade relations with these countries and to support them in their democratic and economic development. It is also assisting them in their efforts in the NATO Partnership for Peace programme. This helps to bring the countries of Central Asia and NATO closer together.

The European Union, Turkey and NATO

Ideally, the membership configurations of both NATO and the EU should be brought as close to a complete match as possible, taking into account the principle of the *indivisibility of security*. It is essential that NATO and the EU cooperate harmoniously in the security field, without duplication or discrimination. Turkey has from the beginning contributed to the efforts aimed at strengthening strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU. Turkey has repeatedly emphasised the importance of developing a common strategic vision between NATO and the EU in the current security environment.⁴

Keeping the *indivisibility of security* in mind, Turkey has also declared its readiness to contribute to the *Battle Groups Concept* being developed within the EU, as well as to the EU Headline Goal of 2010.

The ongoing EU enlargement process will undoubtedly bring about irreversible changes. As

a result, the EU will not only have a greater share of the world economy but also greater influence in defense and security matters, and thus in world affairs. Turkey's integration into the European Union in the near future would represent the greatest step in the EU's enlargement process. Its population of about 70 million would make Turkey the largest EU member after Germany. The security implications of such a development would be even more significant, given the size of the country and its armed forces, its proximity to world hot spots, its cultural and religious identity, and its experience with the countries in the region.

As Christopher Patten, then the member of the European Commission responsible for external relations, said, "Turkey will make the EU a global actor ... because the EU with Turkey will become a much more important actor in the Middle East and Asia". His words were echoed by Günter Verheugen, then the European Commissioner responsible for enlargement, who said that "Europe will be in need of Turkey even because of the fall of its population alone." Verheugen added that "With Turkey's membership, [the] EU would play a significant role in world politics."⁵

The Mediterranean and the Middle East

Mediterranean and Middle Eastern developments are important for the security of Europe and Turkey. Peace and stability in the broader Middle East, and in particular in Iraq, are highly desirable for Turkey. Unlike other NATO allies, Turkey shares a border with this country. The stability and territorial integrity of Iraq are therefore vitally important for Ankara, especially if one considers the economic damage Turkey has suffered due to the instability in Iraq for over a decade.

Turkey's unique position in this region stems not only from its geographical location, armed forces and population, but also from its unique political, religious, and cultural identity. Turkey's internal structures are also essential elements of its regional identity, a fact which raises the following question: Could the Turkish model of secularism

⁴ Other examples of Turkey's efforts to deepen NATO-EU strategic cooperation include its initiative to organize the NATO-EU Seminar on terrorism held in November 2003, and the exchange of information between NATO and the EU on security and stabilization related activities in the Mediterranean, agreed by the North Atlantic Council in June 2002.

⁵ Patten and Verheugen quoted in the Turkish daily *Hürriyet*, 11 October 2004.

and democracy be pursued by Turkey's neighbours? Turkey has never claimed to be a model or a leader for the Middle East. Turkey is currently seeking EU membership and focusing mainly on that goal, but its European and Western orientation does not exclude improved relations and cooperation with the Middle East in every possible field. Indeed, Ankara has always demonstrated its readiness to act as an intermediary and to contribute to the peace, prosperity and stability of this region.

Turkey's top regional priorities include reviving the floundering peace process surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Lebanese-Syrian conflicts. As the first Muslim country to recognize Israel and with special historical ties with both Israel and the Muslim world, Turkey is in a position to assist the countries involved in these conflicts. Indeed, Turkey is well placed to play the role of "facilitator", thereby complementing other efforts made to this end⁶.

Turkey is currently playing a valuable role with regard to both NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the recent Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), launched at NATO's Istanbul Summit in June 2004. NATO decided at this summit to further strengthen its relations with its Mediterranean Dialogue partners as well as with countries in the broader Middle East region. Practical cooperation among interested countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and members of the Alliance was also envisaged, notably in the fields of defense reform, the fight against terrorism, and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Turkey has expressed its readiness to contribute to all efforts to pursue these initiatives in harmony and in complementarity with other regional initiatives, mainly those of the G-8, the EU and the OSCE.

Energy Corridors

The increased competition over access to major sources of oil and gas has produced a new geography of conflict. Dependence on hydrocarbons increases the vulnerability of

developed countries and adds to the probability of conflicts arising from intensified competition for access to critical materials. With global energy consumption rising, competition for access to large energy reserves will only grow more intense in the years to come. Interrupting the supply of natural resources to the West would have severe economic consequences. Major importing countries therefore consider it of fundamental importance to protect this energy flow.

Turkey is geographically close to 70 percent of the world's proven energy resources, particularly those of the Middle East and the Caspian Sea basin. For the transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea area, the route across eastern Turkey, connecting the energy fields to the Mediterranean, offers the most direct, cost-effective, and safe option that is technologically and environmentally feasible. Pipeline projects linking the Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe will be essential for the region's integration with the West. Secure and commercially profitable pipelines will help to bring stability and prosperity to the region⁷.

Turkey is now part of a complex and highly interdependent system of energy supply routes extending across Eurasia. Its geographical location on and near the crossroads spanning the most important energy corridors in the world has become increasingly important for NATO.

Afghanistan

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been actively engaged in regional conflicts from the Balkans to Afghanistan. Turkey is one of the NATO countries that first volunteered to send forces to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

ISAF I was led by the United Kingdom (December 2001-June 2002) but included forces from 18 countries, 14 of which were NATO members or candidates for near-term NATO membership (Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands,

⁶ On the Turkish-Israeli alliance, see *International Herald Tribune*, 16 April 1997, 20 December 1997; *Time*, 2 June 1997; *Financial Times*, 2 January 1998; *Wall Street Journal*, 12 August 1997; *Defense News*, 2 December 1996, 15 March 1998. Upon the request of both the Palestinian Authority and Israel, Turkey currently participates in the "Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH)."

⁷ At this juncture, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Main Export Crude Oil Pipeline (BTC) project is intended for both Central Asian and Azerbaijani oil.

Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey). The second six-month rotation (ISAF II) was led by Turkey (June 2002-February 2003)⁸.

In accordance with a recent decision by NATO, Turkey's 3rd Army Corps in Istanbul, which is a "High Readiness Force" under NATO command, took the lead in the ISAF VII mission on 11 February 2005 for a 6 months period, and in August 2005 it will pass the lead of ISAF VIII to Italy.

Much remains to be done in Afghanistan. It is NATO's first operation outside the traditional Euro-Atlantic area, and it is proving to be a critical test for the Alliance. A failure to stabilize Afghanistan and set it on the road to economic and political development would be a serious blow to the credibility of the Alliance.

Turkey's current contributions to ISAF include 242 military personnel and 3 helicopters. During ISAF VII, this contribution is to be increased to 1,612 military personnel. Moreover, in November 2003, Hikmet Çetin, a former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, was appointed to serve as NATO's Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan.

Black Sea Region

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Balkan and Caucasian countries have undergone rapid and radical transformation processes. As these regions have generated conflicts throughout history, these countries tend to perceive one another as adversaries rather than partners.

Against this conflictual background, the example of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) initiative is encouraging. The BSEC was created at Turkish initiative in 1992. The BSEC is intended to ensure that the Black Sea region gradually becomes one of peace, stability and prosperity, based upon shared values such as pluralistic democracy, social justice, human rights, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, free markets, and economic prosperity. The initiative brought regional energy producing and consuming countries under the same roof for the first time,

which was quite an achievement in view of the conflicts among some of the BSEC nations. BSEC members include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine.

The objectives of the BSEC are similar to and consistent with those of the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

Within this framework, member countries cooperate in various economic projects. These include the establishment of a Free Trade Zone, the creation and development of small and medium size enterprises, communications and transport projects, agriculture and food processing industries, the protection of the environment, and exploring options for efficient transfer of the region's energy resources to Europe.

Turkey has been actively participating in and contributing to all BSEC efforts. These efforts are intended to promote cooperation in the Black Sea region and thereby foster regional peace and stability. For example, the littoral countries of the Black Sea region created BLACKSEAFOR in 2001. This is a multinational naval on-call peace task force, also known as "The Black Sea Naval Co-operation Task Group," which aims at strengthening regional stability, friendship, and mutual understanding among the Black Sea littoral states.⁹

Russia

Turkey and Russia share a common geography and a long history. Turkish-Russian diplomatic relations date back more than 500 years. Because it is one of Turkey's largest neighbors, Russia has always constituted one of the main themes of Turkish foreign policy. Since the end of the Cold War both sides have tried to overcome their lack of confidence in one another.

Of course, confidence building is never easy and has to be based on a step-by-step approach. The rapprochement between Turkey and Russia has

⁸ ISAF III (February-August 2003) was led by Germany and the Netherlands. Since August 2003 ISAF has been under NATO command. See: <http://www.nato.int>.

⁹ Its tasks include Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, humanitarian assistance, mine counter measures, environmental protection, goodwill visits and any other tasks, like peace support operations agreed by all the parties. Ever since its creation in 2001, it has been a net contributor to the security and stability in the Black Sea region. For more information on the BLACKSEAFOR, see www.blackseafor.org

produced tangible economic results, particularly in the energy sector. The agreement between Ankara and Moscow for the transportation of Russian natural gas to Turkey via an underwater pipeline in the Black Sea, known as the Blue Stream, is a concrete example of this cooperation.

The visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Turkey in December 2004 marks a significant development and a new impetus for bilateral relations, as it was the first Russian visit at this level to Turkey for some 30 years. Turkish-Russian relations are not devoid of problems. However, it is in the interest of both countries to underline areas of convergence rather than divergence in view of their shared concerns. This explains why Turkey has always been a strong supporter of close relations between NATO and Russia.

Terrorism

Unfortunately, terrorism is not a new issue for Turkey, which has been fighting this danger for a long time and has lost as many as 30 thousand people in its fight against the terrorist organisation PKK¹⁰. The country has long maintained that terrorism cannot be considered a purely domestic concern and that the fight against it must include international cooperation.

Currently, terrorism is one of the most important issues on NATO's agenda. The Alliance did not originally have a comprehensive strategy against

terrorism. However, in its ongoing post-Cold War transformation process, and particularly since the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, the Alliance has made substantial contributions to the fight against terrorism.

In view of its capabilities and bitter experiences in this field, Turkey today is well placed to offer assistance in NATO's fight against terrorism. Turkey's efforts as a Muslim country will help to demonstrate and ensure that this is not a struggle among religions and/or civilizations. Turkey's support in this important endeavor is therefore a tremendous asset for the Alliance.

Conclusion

Since Turkey's foundation as a republic in 1923, it has taken a well-deserved place in almost all European institutions. The country has always been, and will continue to be, a genuine contributor to European and Euro-Atlantic security and defense efforts.

Turkey intends to contribute in crucial ways to all future NATO operations and to be active in the full range of NATO missions described in the Strategic Concept, from collective defense to peace support and other crisis response operations. Turkey's strategic importance, including its ability to influence trans-regional risks and opportunities, is likely to increase further in the years to come.

¹⁰ Presently, PKK is proscribed in France, Germany and the UK and is included in the foreign terrorist organizations list in Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Japan, Kazakhstan and the USA. As of 2 April 2004, PKK is also included in the EU Terrorist Organizations and Entities list with its aliases, KADEK and KON.

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