



BULLETIN

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Editors: Marcin Zaborowski (Editor-in-Chief) ● Katarzyna Staniewska (Managing Editor)

Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz ● Beata Górka-Winter ● Artur Gradziuk ● Roderick Parkes ● Beata Wojna

NATO Solidarity with Turkey Gives a Boost to the Alliance's Territorial Defence Guarantees

Wojciech Lorenz, Pinar Elman

The deployment of NATO Patriot missiles to Turkey increases the credibility of territorial defence guarantees offered by the Alliance to its members. Such a decision may encourage Ankara to embrace NATO again as a major pillar of Turkish security. The missile threat to Turkey, despite its attempts to foster close relations with its neighbours, vindicates Polish plans to develop its own missile defence capabilities as part of an overall NATO system.

At the beginning of January NATO began the deployment of advanced American-made Patriot PAC-3 systems to Turkey, which feels threatened by the escalating civil war in Syria. The launchers are provided by Germany, the Netherlands and the United States, with each country contributing two batteries and around 400 troops. Altogether, 24 to 36 launchers, each armed with 16 missiles, are to be placed near the 900 km Turkish-Syrian border. The missiles fall under the command of the Supreme Allied Command in Europe (SACEUR), and the deployment is allegedly scheduled to last until 31 January 2014.

The civil war in Syria has dramatically decreased the sense of security in neighbouring Turkey. Thousands of refugees have already crossed the Syrian-Turkish border and a number of cross-frontier incidents have occurred. In June, after the downing of a fighter jet close to the Syrian border, Turkish authorities invoked Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, under which consultations can be requested when an ally feels their security is threatened. Ankara called the emergency consultations once again after shelling in October resulted in the deaths of the civilians. On 21 November, Turkey officially requested NATO assistance. Two weeks later, on 4 December, the Alliance formally approved the decision to strengthen Turkey's defence capabilities with Patriot missiles and the Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS).

Strong Signal of Unity. NATO's decision to meet the Turkish request is a strong signal of Alliance solidarity. Although Turkey has the second biggest army in NATO after the United States, it has stressed the importance of collective defence as the primary role of the Alliance.¹ With Iraq, Iran, Syria and Russia as neighbours, there had been worries that after the collapse of the Soviet Union the Alliance would be less committed to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which states that any armed attack against one member of the Alliance is an attack against all of them. Turkey's anxiety was fuelled by the experience of the Iraq wars in 1991 and 2003. In the former case, NATO was slow to deploy Patriot missiles to protect Turkish territory. In the latter case, even though Turkey for the first time in the Alliance's history invoked Article 4, calling for assistance, France and Belgium, enjoying the support of Germany, vetoed NATO from planning protective measures for Turkey. To sidestep this opposition, the Alliance had to take a decision in the Defence Planning Committee, of which France was not a member.

Even though Turkey, with its Muslim majority, has been a staunch NATO ally since 1952, it has the lowest support for the Alliance amongst all member states, and a significant part of the population sees NATO as a means of U.S. foreign policy. Since the moderately Islamist AKP party came to power in 2002, Ankara's foreign policies towards its neighbours such as Iran and Syria, have differed from those of the NATO members. Aspiring to the role of leader in

¹ See: B. Górka-Winter, M. Madej, "NATO Member States and the New Strategic Concept: an Overview," *PISM Reports*, May 2010, http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=3082.

the Muslim world, and using the low support for the Alliance among the Turkish public, the AKP government has often used negative rhetoric towards NATO. Despite that, Ankara has tried to maintain a strong position in NATO, contributing to the Alliance's missions. It also agreed to host early warning X-band radar—a part of the NATO missile defence system. While the crisis in Syria increases the threat to Turkey, the vulnerability of the Turkish air defences has forced Ankara to reposition itself again as a NATO member state. Yet, fearing Turkey will become a frontline state as it was during the Cold war, the Turkish public worry that the deployment of the missiles may pull them into a possible conflict in the Middle East.

Conclusions and Recommendations. As the crisis in Syria intensifies and the threat to Turkey increases, the deployment of the Patriot missiles will help protect the country from ballistic missiles or warplanes that may stray over the border. It could also help to defend Syrian rebels and civilians near the border from missile attacks and discourage the Syrian government from using planes and helicopters for such attacks.

NATO, which in November opened a new headquarters in Izmir, sends yet another signal that the allies recognise the strategic importance of Turkey and encourage it to embrace a more pro-Western stance. On its side, Germany, which helped block the Turkish request in 2003 and abstained from a stance on the NATO mission in Libya in 2011, has tried to strengthen its relations with Turkey and rebuild the undermined cohesion of the Alliance.

The decision to grant help to Turkey increases the credibility of the security guarantees offered by NATO to the member states. However, at the same time, the weak links of the security mechanism have been revealed, both on the political and technical levels. The Patriot launchers and radar are too heavy to be transported by air, and the allies have had to rely on more time consuming land or sea transport. The decision to deploy troops abroad also needed approval from the German Bundestag. Although such approval was not required by law in the Netherlands, the Dutch government decided to seek the support of parliament as well. Even though the whole process went smoothly, it took over a month from the moment Turkey requested NATO's support until the actual deployment of the first set of missiles occurred.

Hence, Turkey can be encouraged to speed up the development of its own national long-range air and missile defences. Although NATO has announced interim capability of its missile defence system, it does not provide security for the entire Turkish territory. Turkish authorities are preparing to purchase equipment worth \$4 billion, and the U.S. Patriot, Italian French SAMP/T Aster 30, Russian S-400 and Chinese FD-2000 systems are the main competitors for the tender. It remains to be seen whether Ankara has enough confidence in the Alliance that it will develop the system as part of the NATO defence system or in cooperation with China or Russia. In the latter case, the systems may be impossible to integrate with the Alliance's defences due to the risk of leaks of classified NATO information. Should Turkey choose the latter option it would demonstrate that while it prefers to enjoy NATO security guarantees it still wants to pursue its own national interests in the region and that those can be at odds with the other NATO members.

Poland is a vocal advocate of Article 5 and territorial defence as a primary task of the Alliance and has pledged full support for Turkey in its standoff with Syria. It is in the Polish interest that NATO displays unity with Turkey at every stage of the unfolding crisis and responds to the security threats with proportional steps. A credible and timely reaction that goes beyond rhetorical manifestation of support, strengthens the credibility of NATO security guarantees. It shapes the strategic culture of the Alliance along the lines desired by Poland in which Article 4 becomes an effective mechanism for consultation and consensus-building, and which enables NATO to address security risks, leaving the much-stronger Article 5 for more serious threats requiring more robust reactions.

The missile threat to Turkey, despite its attempts to foster close relations with its neighbours, vindicates Polish plans to develop national air and missile defences. Having even limited capabilities in place, Poland will not be totally dependent on systems owned by other Allies. As the case of Turkey shows, delivery of these systems needs political approval and takes time. By developing a mobile defence system integrated into the NATO missile defence system, Poland will also be able to support other Allies and NATO operations with its own batteries, thus becoming an even stronger security provider within the Alliance.