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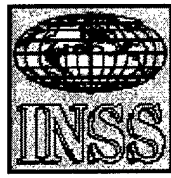
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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

# STRATEGIC FORUM

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## Turkey's International Affairs

### Shaping the U.S.-Turkey Strategic Partnership

by Sean Kay and Judith Yaphe

#### Conclusions

- Turkey remains at a key geostrategic crossroads for U.S. security interests in Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Yet, there is a perceived divergence of strategic interests between the United States and Turkey which was exacerbated by domestic political quarreling between the Islamist-led government of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and the Turkish General Staff. The June change in government, which saw the resignation of Erbakan, is unlikely to resolve these differences.
- Membership in the European Union (EU) and the Western European Union (WEU) are key foreign policy goals for Turkey's secularist Eurocentric generals. Although the prospects for admission are slim for now, Turkish military and civilian officials place a high priority on trade and investment opportunities to be gained from EU membership.
- The Turkish government had backed away from efforts to link support for NATO enlargement to Turkish acceptance as a full member in the EU. Nonetheless, Turkey is not enthusiastic about NATO enlargement and may push for a substantial pause after the first round or make another effort at linkage.

Failure to resolve weapons procurement issues could erode ties with the United States and send Turkey in search of more reliable security partners and weapons suppliers.

#### U.S.-Turkish Relations in a Changing Strategic Environment

Two events have shaped U.S.-Turkish relations in the 1990s. The first came with the end of the Cold War, as Turkey perceived that its importance to the United States as a front-line state in the NATO-Warsaw Pact stand-off was steadily diminishing. The second occurred in mid-1990 when Ankara under the late President Turgut Ozal joined the coalition formed to confront Iraqi President Saddam Hussein following his invasion of Kuwait. For the first-and only-time, NATO's Article V collective defense arrangement was formally invoked in response to Iraqi threats to Turkish territory. Subsequently, Turkey has remained a key strategic crossroads for the United States, bridging the geographic boundaries between Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

The United States and Turkey share a broad range of strategic interests, including promoting solid and

stable governments in the Caucuses and Central Asia, enhancing shared economic and trade relations, cooperating on global issues such as terrorism and anti-narcotics efforts, and monitoring Iraqi and Kurdish activity in Northern Iraq through Operation Northern Watch. Generally, Ankara has sought an "enhanced partnership" with Washington based on its own sense of its geostrategic importance to the United States.

Despite these shared interests, perceptions of diverging interests complicate U.S.-Turkish strategic relations. The greatest source of tension has been what many Turkish military officers and civilian officials view as an "*undeclared U.S. arms embargo*" on Turkey. The United States annually transfers \$700 million in small military equipment to Turkey, and more than 80 percent of the Turkish military inventory is of U.S. origin. Nonetheless, American reluctance to transfer substantial military equipment, including delivery of three frigates that Turkey has already paid for or to sell Cobra helicopters to Ankara, leads Turkey's generals to worry that the United States may not be a reliable partner. From the U.S. perspective, Turkey's insistence on completing a \$23 billion natural gas pipeline project with Iran raises concern in Washington over the direction of Turkish energy policy and directly challenges U.S. efforts to contain Iran through an economic embargo.

A *diminishing U.S. force presence* also fuels a feeling among the Turks that Ankara's strategic importance to the United States is declining. Since the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, the United States has reduced its force presence from more than 20,000 personnel and dependents at 20 installations to less than 8000 personnel at six installations. This number will likely decline further with the planned closing of a U.S. radar site at Pirinlik and the anticipated reduction of personnel at Incirlik. U.S. security assistance to Turkey has declined from \$500 million in grants in 1991 to \$175 million in market rate loans in 1997.

U.S. arms transfer policies and decreasing grant-aid support affects Washington's ability to influence Turkey toward a foreign policy direction more closely aligned to U.S. interests. In Ankara's view, the United States is using what appears to the Turks to be low-level and non-provocative arms export issues as a means to influence Turkish policy. The frigate transfer issue, however, will be difficult for the United States to complete given Congressional opposition and the absence of progress in reducing Greek-Turkish tensions in the Aegean Sea and on Cyprus. Turkey hopes to purchase U.S. Cobra and Seahawk helicopters, have also been put on hold due to human rights issues in Turkey. However, the Turkish generals may believe that their pursuit of security and defense cooperation with Israel will gain them new and sophisticated weapons systems as well as a powerful voice in Washington.

### **Turkey Looks to NATO**

NATO remains the core element of U.S. engagement in Europe and is a central tenet of the U.S.-Turkish strategic partnership. Because of the size of its armed forces and key geostrategic position, Turkey plays a central role in NATO's command structure. The U.S. and Turkey share a high degree of interest in NATO's southern region, particularly in prospects for stability in Bosnia and the Balkans. Turkey readily contributes troops to peacekeeping efforts in the region, sending more than 2,000 troops to IFOR and approximately 1,400 to support SFOR in Bosnia. In addition, Turkey has deployed nearly 800 armed forces personnel to peace operations in Albania and shares responsibility for keeping the Tirana airport open. A June 1997 USIA opinion poll indicated that nearly 70 percent of the Turkish public supports NATO membership.

Nonetheless, Turkish attitudes towards NATO, may be changing. Former Prime Minister Erbakan rose to power on a campaign platform that proposed Turkey shift away from NATO and Europe towards new

economic and security ties with Muslim nations. Turkey has also departed from a tradition of avoiding controversial positions within NATO for fear of being isolated from the rest of the allies to increasingly taking contradictory positions within NATO debates.

Moreover, Turkey is uncomfortable with the principles and the strategic case for NATO enlargement. Ankara apparently views NATO enlargement plans as having too much of a Central European focus while ignoring areas to the south where Turkey believes security challenges are more likely to arise. The United States places a high priority on partnership with Russia, but Turkey has lingering doubts about Moscow's intentions along their common borders. In particular, Turkey worries about adjustments to the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty which would increase the Russian military presence on its southern flank. Additionally, Turkey views Russian involvement in the Caucasus with great suspicion. Not wanting to directly challenge the United States and its strong support for NATO enlargement, however, Turkey stresses general support for the goals of enlargement while it attempts to redirect the process by supporting Romanian membership.

Further complicating its relations within NATO, Turkey in early 1997 threatened to veto NATO enlargement if it was not granted full membership in the EU. In doing this, Ankara directly challenged the United States, which has NATO enlargement as a foreign policy priority, to gain support in its dispute with the EU; unfortunately for Turkey's calculations, the United States has no vote in the EU. Ankara initially bowed to U.S. requests that it withdraw its veto threat, but there is some uncertainty whether Turkey will abide by its promise or if the Turkish parliament will approve ratification protocols for new members joining NATO. Turkey will likely raise questions of costs, burdensharing, and concerns over Russia. The issue of Turkish national pride could also muddle the ratification process. Turkey might fail to ratify NATO enlargement absent a popular consensus in support of the policy. According to the USIA survey, less than half the Turks polled 44 percent favor NATO enlargement in principle and only one-third prefer the most likely candidates (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary).

Turkey places a priority on joining the WEU and seeing that the WEU acts as a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) within NATO. The recent opinion poll indicated that while many of the Turks participating in the poll viewed NATO enlargement to be beneficial for European security, they did not believe their European allies would come to Turkey's defense. Turkey does not want NATO enlargement or the ESDI to result in a dilution of U.S. influence or presence in the region. To this end, Ankara strongly supports U.S. control over the AFSOUTH command in Naples, Italy.

### **Turkey's Hopes for the European Union**

While NATO remains fundamental to Turkey's strategic concerns, foreign economic relations and ties to the EU are of increasing importance to Turkish foreign policy. The United States may be regarded as Turkey's best investment partner, but the EU is Turkey's largest trading partner. Many Turkish officials, including senior General Staff members, appear convinced that the solution to most, if not all, of Turkey's domestic economic instability lies in membership in the EU.

Turkey has a strong private sector economy which should make it attractive for international investment. Nonetheless, public sector institutions are generally unstable, overemployed and underproductive, and corruption is rampant. Indeed, government spending on the public sector has caused a two-fold increase in the budget deficit from 4 percent in 1995 to 8.2 percent in 1996. Despite relatively high and consistent growth rates in the Turkish economy, Turkey has an 80 percent inflation rate, and government reform has been slow, causing general hesitation among international investors.

The EU has made some efforts to move towards fuller cooperation with Turkey, particularly through the creation in 1996 of a customs union which removed most tariff barriers between EU countries and Turkey. Turkey was the first country to establish a customs union with the EU without first joining the EU as a full member. The customs union is viewed by many Turks as the final stage before full membership in the EU, and fosters their belief that this should place Turkey at the top of the list of eligible applicants. The government in Ankara holds this belief despite a lopsided trade imbalance of nearly 2:1 in imports from and exports to the EU. European firms have gained far more than Turkish firms, resulting in growing Turkish public disenchantment with the arrangement.

Turkey's emphasis on EU membership reflects the thinking of Western-oriented, secular Turkish civilians as well as the General Staff. Even the Islamist parties, which profess to favor Muslim states for trade and security ties, concede that Turkey needs the West for trade and investment. They deny that Turkey's heightened interaction with the so-called Developing 8, or D-8 (Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Malaysia) is intended as a substitute for the EU. Nonetheless, the increased role of the EU coming at the same time as decreasing levels of U.S. economic engagement reinforces the Turkish perception of U.S. unreliability; this in spite of the fact that senior U.S. officials have explicitly endorsed Turkey's aspiration to join the EU.

Prospects for an invitation to Turkey to join the EU appear slim for now, despite Turkey's best efforts and U.S. support. Turkey was granted provisional membership status in the EU in 1962 but has been rejected for full membership since it first applied in 1987. While Greece has used its leverage within the EU against Turkey (particularly regarding EU aid that would likely help Turkey qualify for membership), other countries such as the Netherlands (which hosts the Kurdish Parliament in exile) and possibly Germany (where leading politicians have spoken out against Turkish membership) also appear to stand in Turkey's way. Moreover, the European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights have strongly criticized Turkish policies towards its Kurdish population. There is an irony not lost on many Turks that, having stood at the gates of Europe as a front-line state against the Soviet Union, former Warsaw Pact countries are likely to join the EU before Turkey. Many Turkish officials may perceive the EU's slow approach as evidence of a new "cultural and religious iron curtain," or even a new Christian crusade, that will not open to Ankara. Paradoxically, Greek Foreign Minister Pangalos rejected this conclusion this spring, maintaining that the EU must remain open to those who qualify.

### **Turkey in the Aegean**

Ensuring stability in the eastern Mediterranean and promoting peaceful relations between Turkey and Greece is a fundamental post-Cold War U.S. strategic interest. Greece and Turkey nearly came to blows in early 1996 over disputed islands in the Aegean. Ankara has never acknowledged Greek claims to the islands. The dispute was resolved and conflict avoided following high-level U.S. mediation. In early 1997, Turkey threatened to attack Greek-dominated northern Cyprus over its decision to purchase Russian air defense missiles and hinted that it might annex northern Cyprus if the Greek-Cypriot government joined the EU. Since then, relations between Greece and Turkey have shown positive trends. U.S. observers are left with an impression that Turkey has no intention of attacking Greece but would do so if it perceived a military threat or believed Greece intended enosis (union) with Cyprus once again. This impression is seemingly reinforced by the Turkish military's adoption of a new defense concept that focuses primarily on internal threats and a growing willingness by senior Turkish military officials to open a dialogue with Greece. Nonetheless, the prospect remains that the Turkish military might return to its previous hard-line stance on Aegean and Cyprus issues once the internal political situation has stabilized.

In this context, the United States has signaled that it places a high priority on resolution of the Greek-Turkish disputes by appointing Richard Holbrooke, who negotiated the Dayton Peace Accords for Bosnia-Herzegovina, as mediator. Additionally, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana has advanced a five-point plan for confidence building between Athens and Ankara to include regular bilateral meetings of senior officials on the margins of the NATO ministerials; a secure hotline linking the Secretary General with Athens and Ankara; efforts to resolve disputes over command structure reform (particularly air space issues); confidence building measures such as exchanges of observers on naval vessels, a moratorium on military exercises in July and August, and publishing military exercise plans; and a ban on Cyprus overflights.

#### Recommendations

- The United States needs to broaden its consultations with Turkey on elements of changing U.S. strategic regional relationships, particularly on issues reflecting political and economic trends in Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Similarly, the United States must accept the fact that Turkey's changing needs mean it will deal with the Islamic world.
- The United States may need to be more flexible in assigning priorities in its relations with Turkey. In order to retain Ankara's cooperation in monitoring Saddam Hussein and containing Iran, both likely to be U.S. priorities for some time to come, the United States may need to make concessions on arms exports.
- U.S. participation in negotiations and consultations would help create a more stable environment. Washington should move quickly to support confidence building measures among Turks, Greeks, and Cypriots to ease tensions in the Aegean and consolidate any gains in Greek-Turkish relations. Similarly, high level support for an open EU process will help keep Turkey grounded in the West and promote stability in Central and Eastern Europe.

The U.S.-Turkish strategic relationship was the topic of a roundtable of specialists held at National Defense University in May 1997. Dr. Kay is a Visiting Fellow and Dr. Yaphe is a Senior Fellow of INSS. Ms. Joanne Puchalik, a Graduate Research Assistant in INSS, assisted in preparation of this Strategic Forum. This Strategic Forum should be read in conjunction with "Turkey's Domestic Affairs: Shaping the U.S.-Turkey Strategic Partnership" #121, July 1997, by Dr. Judith Yaphe. Comments or questions may be referred to Dr. Kay at 202-685-2216 or Dr. Yaphe at 202-685-2224.

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