

# Contributions of the Turkish Armed Forces to Middle East Peace Operations

by [Selahattin Ibas \(/experts/selahattin-ibas\)](/experts/selahattin-ibas)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Selahattin Ibas \(/experts/selahattin-ibas\)](/experts/selahattin-ibas)

Selahattin Ibas is a colonel in the Turkish Air Force and a visiting Turkish military fellow at The Washington Institute.

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## Brief Analysis

**T**he general view held by Middle Eastern nations is that political sensitivities make it impossible for regional or neighboring countries to perform peacekeeping in the area. However, the example set by the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in the past twelve years points to the fallacy of this view.

While fulfilling its responsibilities within the NATO alliance, the TAF continues to improve in both quality and quantity. As the world's eighth-largest military power -- as well as Europe's largest and NATO's second largest -- the TAF is the most powerful and effective military in the region. Since the end of the Cold War, the peacekeeping operations it has been actively involved in have helped it emerge as an effective force, not only in Turkey's neighborhood but also in areas as distant as East Timor and Sudan.

## The TAF and Peace-Support Operations

The TAF believes that the most effective way of preventing and controlling emerging crises is through international peacekeeping operations. Hence, it supports peacekeeping and humanitarian missions led by the UN, NATO, the European Union, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), regardless of where such missions take place. The TAF focuses on effective participation in areas that are important to national interests and minimal representative participation in other areas.

The rising threats in the new global security environment, as well as in Turkey's immediate vicinity, require the development and maintenance of small but agile, self-sufficient, and mobile units. For this reason Turkey has prepared a brigade-level unit as well as a logistical support and humanitarian assistance brigade with the purpose of effectively contributing to potential peace missions.

Paralleling the world's changes since the end of the Cold War, the number of international peacekeeping operations has increased, as has TAF's involvement. Its peacekeeping-related activities fall under two main categories: unit-based peacekeeping operations and personnel-based international monitoring missions.

## Unit-Based Peacekeeping Operations

The TAF's first contribution to protecting world peace took place in 1950, when it sent a brigade-level unit of 15,000 soldiers to the Korean War. Since the early 1990s, the TAF has participated in many other operations. In the Balkans, it participated in Bosnia by sending airplanes, ships, and up to a 1,450-person regiment unit and a brigade-level

force; in Kosovo, with F-16s, tanker aircraft, and a mechanized unit; in Macedonia, with gendarme and police forces; and in Albania, with an infantry battalion. The TAF contributed to the humanitarian aid efforts following Hurricane Katrina in the United States and the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. In the broader Middle East, its role has included involvement in:

Somalia. A 300-personnel mechanized unit was sent to help the humanitarian aid and peacekeeping operation between January 1993 and February 1994. Also, its command was for a certain period undertaken by a Turkish lieutenant general.

Afghanistan. The operation that Turkey has contributed to most since the September 11 attacks is the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), established in Kabul in January 2002 to secure Afghanistan's administration. The TAF contributed to the first phase of this operation, ISAF-I, with a force of 267 personnel as well as vehicles and weapons. In addition, the TAF donated uniforms to the newly formed Afghan military. In June 2002, the leadership of ISAF-II and the administration of the Kabul airport were undertaken by the TAF, with 1,400 personnel. After leading ISAF-II, Turkey contributed personnel to ISAF-III and ISAF-IV. A Turkish civilian administrator, former Turkish foreign minister Hikmet Cetin, was assigned to head the NATO operation in 2003. The TAF supported ISAF-V and ISAF-VI with 254 personnel and, during ISAF-V, with three helicopters. The TAF has since led ISAF-VII with 1,450 personnel, becoming the only military to lead ISAF twice. The TAF continues to support NATO's operations, which since October 2006 have expanded to cover all of Afghanistan.

Lebanon. The TAF's participation in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is its second-biggest commitment to Middle East peacekeeping after ISAF. During summer 2006, the UN Security Council increased UNIFIL forces to support and escort the Lebanese Armed Forces to Southern Lebanon, secure aid to civilians, and ensure the return of refugees to their homes. The TAF supports UNIFIL with 525 personnel made up of both army and naval elements. The assigned units are still working toward the rebuilding of Lebanon and the security of its populace.

#### Personnel-Based International Monitoring Missions

Turkey sent military inspectors to the UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group in 1988-1991, following the Iran-Iraq war; the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission in 1991-2003, following the Gulf Operation; the OSCE Kosovo Inspection Mission in 1999; the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor in 2000-2004; and the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2001-2002.

Turkey has assigned military monitoring personnel to the UN Observer Mission in Georgia since 1994, the OSCE Mission to Georgia on the Georgia-Russia (Chechnya) border since 2000, the International Police Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina since 2001, and the UN Mission in Sudan since 2005.

In the Middle East, Turkey has sent inspectors to the Temporary International Presence in the City of Hebron (TIPH) since 1997. TIPH was established in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 904 to inspect and report on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the city of Hebron in the West Bank and the handing over of the area to the Palestinian Authority in 1994. In 1997, the TAF started sending inspectors to Hebron on the request of both sides. Five officers and a foreign ministry representative currently serve in the area.

#### Turkey's Role in Other International Initiatives

Turkey also contributes to resolving crises and reducing tensions by leading or taking part in international formations in its region. In this scope, Turkey helped initiate the creation of the Southeastern Europe Multinational Peace Force in 1998 to maintain peace and stability in the Balkans, as well as the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group, founded in 2001 to support the peace and security of countries in the Black Sea region.

To this day, Turkey has supported initiatives -- both on an individual and regional basis -- toward disarmament,

weapons control, and increased security measures. Despite limited resources, Turkey continues to support peace and stability under the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP). Turkey makes an effort to share its experiences with the countries of the Balkans, Caucasus, Eurasia, and Central Asia. The TAF continues to support centers of excellence that have come forward as a part of the new NATO concept. In this scope, the PfP Training Center and the Center of Excellence-Defence Against Terrorism were opened in 2005 in Ankara, and the Center of Excellence-Tactical Air Training was activated in 2006 in Konya.

## Conclusion

Ataturk's phrase, "Peace in the nation, peace in the world," uttered seventy years ago, summarizes the TAF's point of view on peace-support operations. The TAF will continue to support world peace with increased focus on the Middle East, where its interests have intensified.

The peace initiatives Turkey has contributed to and led, especially since the end of the Cold War, should be seen both as instruments of diplomacy and a source of inspiration for Middle Eastern countries that might consider contributing to future peace force operations.

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